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QUEERING THE YUPPIE :
IDENTITY AND PERFORMATIVITY IN *ALLY McBEAL*

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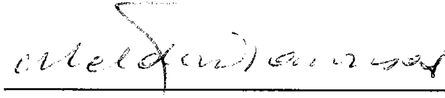

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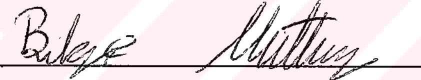

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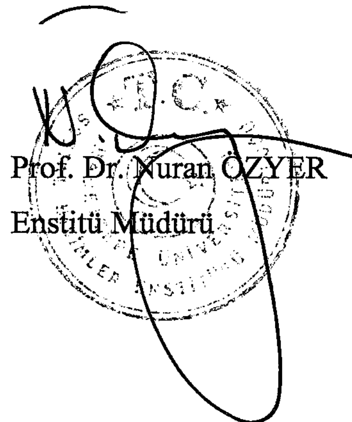

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ÖZET

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Postfeminizm, 1990'ların akademik söylemindeki en önemli terimlerden biridir. Postfeminizmin tanımında herkesçe kabul gören tek görüş "tanımlanamaz" oluşu olsa da, bu terimin, cinsiyet, toplumsal cinsiyet, cinsellik, kimlik, ırk, sınıf ve teknoloji gibi konularda feminizmin kendine bakışını belirttiği söylenebilir. Postfeminizm, akademik çalışmaların dışındaki anlamıyla da, medyada 1980'lerde görülmeye başlanan ve 1990'larda hız kazanan bir eğilimi belirtmektedir. Bu iki eğilim aynı başlık altında toplanmış ve yaklaşık aynı zamanlarda ortaya çıkmış olsalar da, çok farklı iki varlık gibi görünmektedir. Akademik postfeminizm postyapısalcı çalışmalardan beslenirken, popüler postfeminizmde daha çok postmodernizm belirleyicidir. Akademik postfeminizm eşcinsel ve lezbiyen çalışmalarına kadar uzanır ve bazı belli kuramsal noktalarda onunla bütünleşirken, popüler postfeminizm daha ziyade tüketime yöneliktir. Dolayısıyla, henüz bu iki alan bir araya getirilmemiştir. Bu çalışma bu iki postfeminizmi bir araya getirme çabasındadır. Bu noktadan yola çıkılarak akademik postfeminizmin kuramsal çalışmaları çerçevesinde popüler postfeminizmin çoğulcu doğası irdelenmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler

feminizm, postfeminizm, toplumsal cinsiyet, cinsellik, eşcinsellik, kimlik

ABSTRACT

ÖZEN, Emrecan. "Queering the Yuppie: Identity and Performativity in *Ally McBeal*", Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2005.

Postfeminism has arguably been the most stimulating term within the academic discourse in the 1990s. Although the only consensus around this term's definition is its indefinability, it might be said to refer to a wide array of feminist self-inquiries, concerned with issues such as sex, gender, sexuality, identity, race, class and technology. Postfeminism as a term also has a more widely accepted usage outside the academia, one that refers to a certain trend in the media that is said to have started in the 1980s and gained momentum in the '90s. Although both of these trends share the same rubric and fall, more or less, under the same time frame, it seems that they are very different entities. While scholarly postfeminism is informed by poststructuralist works, popular postfeminism might be better defined by postmodernism. The former extends to and merges with gay and lesbian studies on certain theoretical points, where the latter is more of a consumerist discourse. Hence, it is not yet a custom to study them together. This study explores the possibilities of bringing these two postfeminisms together. With this starting point, it makes use of the theoretical formulations of scholarly postfeminism to inquire into the pluralistic nature of popular postfeminism.

Key Words

feminism, postfeminism, gender, sexuality, gay and lesbian criticism, queer, identity

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PREFACE:
DEALING WITH POSTFEMINISMS

Postfeminism is a challenging field that cannot be unmistakably defined because in its broadest sense, it does not refer to a clearly organised politics or a certain academic trend. Every scholarly text that tries to deal with it starts with a multitude of explanations and disclaimers to avoid fatal misunderstandings although not many is successful in presenting an exhaustive definition of the term. However, it would be a mistake to see this as a shortcoming and dismiss postfeminism as a problematic term. Instead, we should consider it as a fluid rubric and allow for shifting and changing definitions of postfeminisms. On the other hand, boundaries (however tentative) must be drawn to be able to evade wrong turns and twists.

Such a pluralistic term, accordingly, has many histories and accounts, most of which actually contradict each other. It is generally accepted that postfeminism started appearing in the early 1980s in the USA as a response to the preceding decade of feminist activism. Its acceptance as a valid term was facilitated by the New Right's advent, because the popularised understanding of postfeminism contained attributes that are sometimes characterised as "neo-conservative," and essentialist even. However, Susan Faludi observes that "[p]ostfeminist sentiments first surfaced, not in the 1980s media, but in the 1920s press" as a counterattack on the first wave of feminism whose primary focus was the right to vote (1991:50). On the other hand, Sophia Phoca traces the origins of postfeminism to the French poststructuralist feminists of the second wave, like Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig (1999:5), thus, placing it in a more theoretical and critical context. Faludi goes so far back as the 1920s and first wave feminism because she sees postfeminism of the 1980s and the 90s as a backlash against the achievements of feminism. What Faludi calls backlash is a ploy that recurs in a similar pattern every time the women's movement gains momentum. Therefore postfeminism in Faludi's usage is a term that is made up to conceal the attempts to drown the victories of women. Alternatively, Phoca's usage of postfeminism is more narrowed down (since she clearly positions it with second wave feminism) and she deploys it as a critique of feminist thinking.

These two primary lines of thought draw attention to the main divide in what constitutes postfeminism. Faludi's conception of "postfeminism= backlash" employs the popular notions of postfeminism (as might be seen in the many representations of postfeminism in the US media) whereas Phoca provides a more scholarly take on the subject. This division also points to the different understandings of the always-tricky prefix "post-". In Faludi's sense, this "post-" indeed refers to "what comes after," therefore this "postfeminism" mainly means "after feminism." It basically signifies the alleged irrelevance of feminist tasks to a younger generation of women who were brought up in a world where feminist achievements provided them with many opportunities their mothers fought for. Thus, the second wave feminist causes are supposedly accomplished and second wave feminism is deemed to be over. Feminism as we know it is considered to be long gone. The TV show *Ally McBeal* is considered to be the most important example of this phenomenon. It is recognised without dispute that the show represents the postfeminist woman of the '90s and has given voice to the unspoken sentiments of this "new woman."

Phoca's usage, however, indicates a *modification* of second wave feminism. Here the prefix "post-" denotes a critique of what it follows – feminism, in this instant. Hence, this postfeminism still works *within* feminism, unlike the popularised version of postfeminism that is mentioned above. Ann Brooks, whose formulations are quite in line with Phoca's, gives the most useful definition of the term in her important book *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*:

> "Postfeminism. . . . is about the conceptual shift within feminism from debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference. It is fundamentally about, not a depoliticisation of feminism, but a political shift in feminism's conceptual and theoretical agenda. Postfeminism is about a critical engagement with earlier feminist political and theoretical concepts and strategies as a result of its engagement with other social movements for change. Postfeminism expresses the intersection of feminism with postmodernism, poststructuralism and post-colonialism, and as such represents a dynamic movement capable of challenging modernist, patriarchal and imperialist frameworks. In the process postfeminism facilitates a broad-based, pluralistic conception of the application of

> feminism, and addresses the demands of marginalised, diasporic and colonised cultures for a non-hegemonic feminism capable of giving voice to local, indigenous and post-colonial feminism." (1997:4).

The definition of this second type of postfeminism gets somewhat more complicated when we consider the many lines of differing critiques and modifications feminism receives. As the above quotation from Brooks clarifies, this type of postfeminism branches off into even more postfeminisms: "poststructuralist feminism" (as seen in the works of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and later Judith Butler), which is sometimes used interchangeably with "postmodern feminism;" "cyberfeminism" which is concerned with how feminist issues should be treated in the high-tech era of cyberspace; "post-colonial feminism" which rethinks feminism in the light of ethnicity in the globalised world and seeks to pluralise it out of its Anglo-Saxon or strictly Western bias.

Queer theory is a body of thought that has grown within this line of postfeminism and it marks a drastic shift in feminist thinking concerned with sex and gender. It emerged in the early 1990s, owing much of its foundational ideas to the publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* in 1990 and, subsequently in the same year, of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* to extensive critical review. What queer theory (baptised so by Teresa de Lauretis in an essay published in the journal *Differences* [de Lauretis 1991]) purported to do was to introduce considerations of sexuality into feminism's existent preoccupation with sex and gender. By addressing sexual behaviour and theorising it, queer was aimed at liberating sexual minorities that are pathologised or that generally go unnoticed. The basic premise of this poststructuralist and postfeminist theory also involves a rather novel consideration of gender, especially epitomised in Judith Butler's work that almost single-handedly gave rise to queer theory in the 1990s.

Another analytical axis (along with gender and sexuality) that queer theory purports to incorporate in feminist studies is an investigative approach to identity politics. Considerations of (both gender and sexual) identity politics, how these identities are shaped and their functions in feminist thinking and gay/lesbian studies were central

themes in Butler's *Gender Trouble* and Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*. The foundational assumption is the Foucaultian idea that identity categories serve regulatory regimes. With this starting point, queer theory tries to deconstruct not only the binary divisions of man/woman and male/female, but also the binary division of homo/heterosexuality.

Thus, queer theory might be defined as a consolidation of gender studies (feminism), studies of sexuality (gay/lesbian studies) and identity politics (cultural studies). Accordingly, "queer" is an identity that denies identity categories –a non-identity– and includes not only atypical sexual behaviour but also atypical gender identifications. On the larger scale, queer theory is characterised by an attempt to think about these notions outside the simplistic binarist frameworks. Why is it that sexual identities are divided into homo- and heterosexuality, where human sexuality contains many other combinations and possibilities? (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick deals with this question in *Epistemology of the Closet*.) If many other sexualities are possible, why is it that only the procreative organs are considered to be sexual? (Judith Butler's question.) Does this explain why living things are divided into male and female? Where does the social construction we call gender stands among these?

In this dissertation I will concentrate on queer theory's anti-binarist reformulations of identity, sexuality, gender and sex, with special emphasis on Butler's theory of performativity, and will apply these theoretical formulations to the hit TV series *Ally McBeal*, importance of which lies in its being the earliest and most definitive example of the popular '90s postfeminism. In the first chapter, queer issues of gender, sex, sexuality and identity will be clarified. In the second chapter, popular postfeminism, its interpretations in academic works and how it is represented in the US media will be pursued.

The third and last chapter consists of a queer reading of *Ally McBeal* and is concerned with explicating how gender identities are performatively constructed within the postfeminist era. This will be done by examining the characters of the show within the binary opposition of man/woman, and by giving prominence to Ally McBeal and John

Cage. With this analysis, I will assert that the show is not merely *representative* of this new postfeminist woman, but works as a *performative* construction of her. While doing this analysis, I will also employ queer performativity via the queer characters in the series. By doing this, I will explore the queer possibilities of the performative power of *Ally McBeal*, and utilisation of anti-binarist queer theorisations will provide us with an interrogation of the pluralism that popular postfeminism is said to rely on. And in the conclusion, I will illuminate how the binary opposition of gender identities are reaffirmed within a postfeminist context, although there still is room for queer contestation of such binarisms.

CHAPTER I

1. THE EMERGENCE OF QUEER THEORY

In the last two decades the word "queer," once a derogatory word, has come to be used as an umbrella term for sexual minorities. In everyday language it is a shorthand for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (sometimes abbreviated as GLBT) people. This usage of "queer" became widespread, more or less, after the founding of Queer Nation[1] in 1990. As an academic expression, "queer" might still be considered as an umbrella term but it also contains a particularly different connotation, because it promotes a departure from fixed identity categories. Therefore, the scholarly usage of the word "queer" implies more than just a superset. "Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. It is an identity without an essence." (Halperin 1995:62, original emphasis).

It might be said that one of the most important foundational texts that shaped queer theory is Gayle S. Rubin's "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" (1984). In this influential essay, Rubin puts forth the idea that if we are to understand sexuality better, we must separate studies of sexuality from studies of gender. She points out to the fact that the latter is almost solely dominated by feminist thinking which has a somewhat problematic relationship with sexuality. According to Rubin, feminist view of sexuality (because it "treats sexuality as a derivation of gender" [Rubin 1993:33]) overlooks or stigmatises many sexual "groups and behaviors: prostitution, transsexuality, sadomasochism, and cross-generational activities. Most gay male conduct, all casual sex, promiscuity, and lesbian behavior that does involve roles or kink or non-monogamy are also censured. Even sexual fantasy during masturbation is denounced as a phallocentric holdover." (28). Rubin claims that these "groups and behaviors" she lists are healthy aspects of sexuality. This marks a defining facet of queer theory: An inclination to view sexuality out of the clear-cut dichotomy of homosexuality vs. heterosexuality and to create a more holistic map of sexual behaviour.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, an author who, with Butler, is considered to be a pioneer of queer theory, shares Rubin's approach to sexuality and gender as two separate fields. In the introduction to her groundbreaking book *Epistemology of the Closet,* Sedgwick writes:

> "This book will hypothesize, with Rubin, that the question of gender and the question of sexuality, inextricable from one another though they are in that each can be expressed only in the terms of the other, are nonetheless not the same question, that in twentieth-century Western culture gender and sexuality represent two analytic axes that may productively be imagined as being as distinct from one another as, say, gender and class, or class and race. *Distinct, that is to say, no more than minimally, but nonetheless usefully.*" (1990:30, my emphasis).

Sedgwick's formulation is important with its refusal to make a thoroughly straightforward distinction between the categories of gender and sexuality albeit the distinction is made. Moreover, in an article in her book *Tendencies*, Sedgwick indeed criticises attempts at drawing *too* fine a distinction between gender and sexuality (1994:158-159). I will later get into this point that Sedgwick makes; for now it is enough to point out to the quality of her work which marks a step forward from Rubin's raw and basic categorisation of these two concepts as plainly separate.

Although Rubin's and Sedgwick's attempts at differentiating gender and sexuality is still a useful tool in queer theory's understanding of these two fields, queer theory as a legitimate academic field originally stemmed from an inquiry into the identity politics of feminist thought, primarily led by Judith Butler who has always resisted a division among sexuality and gender even in her earliest work. In an interview dated 1993, she says:

> "[I]nsofar as some people in queer theory want to claim that the analysis of sexuality can be radically separated from the analysis of gender, I'm very much opposed to them. . . . I think that separation is a big mistake. Catherine MacKinnon's work[2] set up such a reductive causal relationship between sexuality and gender that she came to stand for an extreme version of feminism that had to be combated. But it seems to me that to combat it through a queer theory that dissociates itself from feminism altogether is a massive mistake." (1996a:119).

The opinion Butler states here seems drastically different than Rubin's and Sedgwick's. However, Butler's view on this matter has grown visibly milder over time. In *Bodies That Matter*, her follow-up to *Gender Trouble*, Butler acknowledges the immediate uses of Rubin's and Sedgwick's position, in that "[separation of sexuality and gender has] constituted important theoretical opposition to MacKinnon's deterministic form of structuralism." (1993:239). However, she goes on to state that:

> "My sense is that now this very opposition needs to be rethought in order to muddle the lines between queer theory and feminism. For surely it is as unacceptable to insist that relations of sexual subordination determine gender position as it is to separate radically forms of sexuality from the workings of gender norms. The relation between sexual practice and gender is surely not a structurally determined one, but the destabilizing of the heterosexual presumption of that very structuralism still requires a way to rethink the two in a dynamic relation to one another." (1993:239).

Butler's insistence on not separating sexuality and gender (even though acknowledging that they are not the same thing) is clearly the result of a cautionary angst against the possibility of anti-feminism. Another reason why Butler keeps returning to this subject to rethink this analytical distinction is the fact that the popular interpretations of Rubin's much read and quoted essay usually misconstrue her attempt at making space for studies of sexual oppression outside feminism as an equation of feminism with studies of gender oppression. Indeed, it is generally assumed that Rubin is accepting feminism as a site of studying gender subordination and offering gay/lesbian studies as a privileged field to study the oppression of sexual minorities[3] even though she concludes her essay by stating that:

> "In the long run, feminism's critique of gender hierarchy must be incorporated into a radical theory of sex, and the critique of sexual oppression should enrich feminism. But an autonomous theory and politics specific to sexuality must be developed." (1993:34).

In "Against Proper Objects," (1994) Butler analyses how this misinterpretation has come to be widely accepted even though Rubin clearly does not stand against feminist inquiries into sexuality, and rightly asks the question "Where would the feminist traditions in favor of enhancing sexual freedom fit in such a scheme, much less those

that analyze the interrelation of gender and sexuality?" (1994:3). She also makes a comprehensive list of why feminist studies of sexuality mustn't be discontinued and why feminism mustn't be seen only as a study of gender subordination:

> "A characterization of feminism as an exclusive focus on gender . . . misrepresents the recent history of feminism in several significant ways: 1) the history of sexual politics is erased from the proper characterization of feminism; 2) the various anti-racist positions developed within feminist frameworks for which gender is no more central than race . . . are no longer part of the central or proper focus of feminism; 3) the MacKinnon account of gender and sexuality is taken as paradigmatic of feminism, and the strong opposition to her work is excluded from the parameters of feminism; 4) gender is reduced to sex . . . and the contested history of sex/gender distinction is displaced from view; 5) the normative operation of gender in the regulation of sexuality is denied." (1994:15-16).

Sedgwick provides a clearer account of why sexuality and gender should be studied together while they are analytically distinguished from each other. Returning to her ideas on this matter, we can see that she too warns against the strictly distinct isolation of sexuality from gender. In her essay "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay," she takes on the decision (dated 1973) of American Psychiatric Association not to include homosexuality as a pathological diagnosis in its next publication of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III). As Sedgwick relates, when DSM-III was published in 1980, homosexuality was indeed omitted but a new diagnosis called "Gender Identity Disorder of Childhood" was added. It was characterised by "failure to develop a Core Gender Identity consistent with one's biological sex." (Sedgwick 1994:158). Sedgwick draws attention to the fact that this newly added diagnosis (which obviously pathologised "the effeminate boy") did not cause a stir in the gay community, probably because of "the conceptual need of the gay movement to interrupt the long tradition of viewing gender and sexuality as continuous and collapsible categories." (157). Thus, according to Sedgwick, the reason behind the fact that the gay movement did not act up to depathologise "the effeminate boy" who is diagnosed with a "Gender Identity Disorder" was to assert that "one woman, *as a woman*, might desire another; [and] one man, *as a man*, might desire another" (157, original emphasis). Here, Sedgwick skilfully demonstrates that the gay movement indeed acquired certain civil rights by drawing that line between the domains of sexuality and gender. However, she also

points out to the fact that the new psychoanalytic developments also separate sexuality from gender, but with obviously harmful results: Although American Psychiatric Association depathologises homosexuality, it also pathologises atypical gender identification (most notably seen in the example of "the effeminate boy"). Sedgwick writes, "One serious problem with this way of distinguishing between gender and sexuality is that, while denaturalizing sexual object-choice, it radically *re*naturalizes gender." (159, original emphasis).

To this point I have tried to clarify that the endeavour of studying gender alongside sexuality is an important aspect of queer theory, even though distinguishing them is the starting point. With respect to these two fields of study, the most crucial concern in queer theory is identity politics, which is the central idea in Butler's *Gender Trouble*. Butler's interrogation of identity categories in this book is predominantly a critique of second wave feminist thinking that takes "women" (which is considered a stable and universal gender identity category) as its subject.

Feminism has always assumed "women" (and sometimes "woman" – an even more simplistic category in its representation of a group of millions with a singular noun) as its main subject. What Butler problematises is the fact that feminism situates this gender identity in its centre and works around it. According to her, talking about a general, natural and unquestionable group called "women" is very debatable. She states that "the internal paradox of [feminist] foundationalism is that it presumes, fixes and constrains the very 'subject' that it hopes to represent and liberate" (1999:189), and she explains why this category is so restrictive by stating that:

> "[T]he presumed universality and unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions. Indeed, the premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category. These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes. Indeed, the fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism from 'women' whom feminism claims to represent suggest the necessary limits of identity politics." (1999:7-8).

To sum it up, Butler's contestation of gender identity categories is fuelled by her opinion that these categories are regulatory by definition. Thus, it might be said that deconstruction of these categories is emancipatory. Butler indeed does deconstruct feminist identity politics by proclaiming gender as "performative" and it is this deconstruction that has paved the way for queer theory.

2. THE THEORY OF PERFORMATIVITY: GENDER IDENTITY, SEX AND SEXUALITY

It is in the last chapter of her book *Gender Trouble* that Butler puts forth her influential theories on the performativity of gender, and to do this, she draws from J. L. Austin's speech act theories.

In what Austin calls a performative utterance, the act of uttering constitutes the act itself. The best known and the most explanatory example of performative utterances is a marriage ceremony where the act of getting married consists merely of saying "I do" before a properly ordained official. According to Austin's description, performative sentences "do not 'describe' or 'report' or constate anything at all, are not 'true' or 'false'; and the uttering of the sentence is, or is part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as 'just', saying something" (Austin 1990:5, original emphasis).

Austin's observation that performative utterances cannot be described as "true" or "false" even though "to be 'true' or 'false' is traditionally the characteristic mark of a statement" (Austin 1990:12) is also of significance. A performative utterance that as a given lacks the capacity to be either true or false, might, on the other hand, be "happy" or "smooth" in Austin's words, or "successful" as Butler puts it. Austin gives a brief but very explanatory list of the conditions that are required for a "happy performative," or a performative utterance to succeed:

> "(A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain circumstances, and further,

> (A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.
> (B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and
> (B.2) completely.
> (*Γ*.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further
> (*Γ*.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently." (Austin 1990: 14-15).

Regarding the classic examples of performative utterances (like a marriage ceremony, naming a ship, making a promise, etc.) with these conditions that Austin lists indeed proves fruitful when considering linguistic uses of performatives. However, when considering performativity in terms of gender, sexuality and identity, we must look to Butler's emphasis on "citationality," which, in fact, is in line with article (A.1) in Austin's list. According to Butler's assertion, a successful performative "accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices." (1993:227). In other words, the fact that you are repeating, reiterating or citing a prior performative provides the current speech act with a broader chance of success. Under this light, "woman" as a gender identity, for instance, is performatively constituted by citation of preceding understandings of "womanhood" and "femininity" – "I, as a woman..."

What Butler claims is that gender identity is similarly constituted through "stylized repetition of acts" that are said to be the result of gender. These constantly repeated and cited speech acts, this "set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame . . . congeal[s] over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being (Butler 1999:44)." Thus, gender attributes do not express our gender, but constitute it (1999:179-180). We do not do certain things because we are men and women, but we do them *to become* men and women. "[T]here need not be a 'doer behind the deed' but . . . the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (181). Ultimately gender is nothing but fiction. Here, it is important to note that in Butler's theory of performativity, a performative need not be speech *per se*; simple acts like clothing oneself or adorning the body with an image that underlines a gender are considered as

"acts that speak." On a related note on sexuality, Sedgwick makes the interesting claim that staying in the closet, *not* speaking out is a "performative silence" in a gay/lesbian context. (Sedgwick 1990:3).

The significance of gender identities lies in the fact that they create social legibility (like any other identity). If one's sex/gender/sexuality/desire are not subsumed under an identity, one cannot claim one's existence in the society; one who lacks a socially classifiable identity is illegible. This is the reason that Butler and, to some extent, Sedgwick have problematised feminist and gay/lesbian "identity politics;" because the performative construction of gender identities is done through a strictly heterosexist and binary system that denies legibility to those who do not conform to norms of gender, sex and sexuality. Butler also asserts that the price of social legibility comes with the regulatory nature of categorisation of identities. The binary demarcation of gender identities not only provides legibility but also makes it possible to regulate, since a system cannot regulate what is illegible. Accordingly, sex and desire are regulated through this illusion of gender, and this system altogether effectively upholds a heterosexist understanding.

The novel notion in this formulation is the regulation of biological sex through gender, for desire might be unproblematically instructed by gender but we have come to accept gender as a socially constructed attribute that is inscribed on the biologically fixed sex. So how does gender inform what it apparently follows?

With the immediately widespread acceptance of the term "gender" in the 1970s, second wave feminists worked with this useful terminology to outline the oppression of women and created a body of work in this particular area. The most influential piece in this body was Gayle S. Rubin's "The Traffic in Women" in which the feminist anthropologist author introduced the notion of a "sex/gender system." According to Rubin's formulation, "a 'sex/gender system' is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (Rubin 1975:159). Second wave feminists' preoccupation with this system brought about an enterprise to define the space between the two terms. The main question was: When we are talking about

"woman," just how much of this identity was biologically determined and how much was socially constructed?

According to Butler, on the other hand, the presupposition that the binarism of sex is biologically fixed is in itself problematic. Although gender is seemingly constructed on sex, sex itself is not intelligible without the discourse it is actually produced in. In other words, ostensibly fixed and unproblematic categories of "male" and "female" are not natural as claimed but they too are constructed within a heterosexist system that depends on promotion of reproductive sexuality.

In her essay "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough" (1993), biologist Dr. Anne Fausto-Sterling infamously proclaimed that there are actually five legitimate sexes: Male, female, hermaphrodite (herms), male pseudo-hermaphrodite (merms) and female pseudo-hermaphrodite (ferms)... Fausto-Sterling puts forth a multitude of biological examinations in her re-evaluation of "birth defects" as "additional sexes each in its own right," that need not be repeated here. Suffice it to provide her insight into why intersex people are not accepted as they are:

> "Why should we care if there are people whose biological equipment enables them to have sex 'naturally' with both men and women? The answers seem to lie in a cultural need to maintain clear distinctions between the sexes. Society mandates the control of intersexual bodies because they blur and bridge the great divide. Inasmuch as hermaphrodites literally embody both sexes, they challenge traditional beliefs about sexual difference: they possess the irritating ability to live sometimes as one sex and sometimes as the other, and they raise the specter of homosexuality." (1993:24).

The categorization Fausto-Sterling lays out is probably a very coarse one and is subject to revision. Also, this classification of the sexes under five categories might itself be contested on the basis that it assumes "male" and "female" as two preliminary categories, or as two leading points of a direct line, while the other three are variations on them. However, the line of thought Fausto-Sterling advocates is essentially a queer one given that it attempts to denaturalise the fixed and binary understanding of biological sex[4].

On the same note, Butler gives an account of how the body of an infant is sexed/gendered by solely looking at an organ that is deemed "sexual." As soon as the doctor delivers the baby and says "It's a girl," what Butler calls "girling" begins. The doctor's "hailing" might be considered as a form of Althusserian interpellation[5]. This "medical interpellation . . . shifts the infant from an 'it' to a 'she' or a 'he,' and in that naming the girl is 'girled,' brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender" (1993:7).

What Butler objects here is the notion of sex as a prediscursive given. If we fail to examine biological sex as a free-floating concept just like gender, we are definitely missing out on a great deal of information on how the heterosexist system we are trying to challenge is constituted. To sum it up, in queer theory the biological binary opposition of "male" and "female" is considered to be a social construct as much as gender is.

The immediate consequence of this line of thought is the negation of the second wave feminist preoccupation with the space between sex and gender. This is so, because the acceptance of sex as a social construct puts it right next to gender itself and defies the distinction between them. In fact, Butler goes so far as to reduce the miniscule differentiation between these two concepts to nothing, and says "perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all." (1999:11).

Thus, in Butler's view, sex does not precede gender and gender cannot be accepted as a cultural interpretation of sex. It is important to note that this new formulation brings sex and gender together in view of their regulatory nature; a regulation that serves the constant re-creation of, as Butler puts it, "heterosexual matrix," or as Adrienne Rich put in 1980, "compulsory heterosexuality."

In "Sexual Inversions," Butler reads Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1* and Luce Irigaray's "This Sex which is not One" to clarify the complex interrelation between sex and sexuality. In *History*, Foucault challenges the causal relationship between sex and sexuality by overturning the idea that we have sexualities because we

are sexed beings. He writes; "It is apparent that the deployment of sexuality, with its different strategies, was what established this notion of 'sex' " (1990:154). Thus, for Foucault, sexuality does not follow sex, but vice versa. What Foucault asserts here is that the regulation of sexuality solely serves the promotion of heterosexuality. Thus people are divided into two and appropriately sexed with respect to their reproductive capabilities. Butler agrees with Foucault's idea that sexuality is not a result of sex and adds:

> "As such a network or regime, sexuality does not emerge from bodies as their prior cause; sexuality takes bodies as its instrument and its object, the site at which it consolidates, networks, and extends its power. As a regulatory regime, sexuality operates primarily by investing bodies with the category of sex, that is, making bodies into the bearers of a principle of identity." (1996b:66).

Thus the category of sex, its apparent dichotomy (male and female) and its phallocentricism are immediate results of an operative notion of sexuality. Because this notion of sexuality serves nothing other than the normalisation of heterosexuality and pathologisation of non-reproductive sexualities, the category of sex, with its dubious but seemingly unproblematic division as male and female, is installed with a "natural" meaning. This construction of male and female sexes, Butler writes, "establishes a principle of intelligibility for human beings. . . . [T]o qualify as legitimately human, one must be coherently sexed [either as male or female]" (1996b:67).

Although Butler concurs with this teleological account of sexuality and the categorisation of bodies into two sexes, she corrects Foucault's text by asserting the Irigarayan point of the phallocentricism of this "biological sex". She remarks that "Foucault appears to think that any sanctioned sex will do, whereas Irigaray would argue that the only sanctioned sex is the masculine one." (1996:68). According to Irigaray, "[f]emale sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters" where the feminine genitals are considered "a non-sex or a masculine organ turned back upon itself" (1991:204) that "represents *the horror of nothing to see*", that is "simply absent" (206). Because of the fact that woman is considered a "not man" (since her anatomy is characterised by a *lack* [of penis] rather than what it already is), Irigaray deems the basic categorisation of bodies into sexes phallocentric.

To sum it up, the medicalised organisation of sexuality (which Foucault elucidates in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*) and its acceptance into discourse, also introduced the category of biological sex to justify its own reproductive bias. This classification of people into two sexes attributes sexuality with a meaning (that of procreation), and is therefore inherently heterosexist. Moreover, because of the fact that this categorisation occurs around the existence or lack of a penis in a body, it is inevitably phallocentric and misogynistic.

In her work on gender identity, Butler also makes use of Sigmund Freud's theories, putting special emphasis on his theorisation of melancholia and ego formation. In *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud compares and contrasts these two conditions, both of which are caused by the loss of an object-cathexis (an object of desire). He explains that "melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious" (1986:245). According to Freud's formulation, melancholia occurs when the libido refuses to let go of the lost object-cathexis and is withdrawn into the ego where it "serve[s] to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object" (1986:249, original emphasis). In other words, one's lost love, lost for whatever reason, is not given up but is dissolved into one's own self and mounted onto the ego; and this is an unconscious process. The loss is not dealt with, hence the pathological condition of the person. However, in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud corrects his own essay on melancholia and contends that it is not necessarily a pathological condition, but actually a "common" and "typical" aspect of ego formation, that "[melancholic substitution] makes an essential contribution towards building up what is called [the ego's] 'character' " (1974:18). Butler observes that Freud does not merely describe the acquisition of character but the acquisition of gender identity as well (Butler 1999:74). Hence the lost object becomes a defining part of one's identity.

Butler points out to certain logical loopholes in Freud's formulation when we consider this kind of identity formation through melancholic identification in terms of the Oedipal development of the child. Freud gives the example of a male child who develops an Oedipus complex towards his mother. "Along with the demolition of the

Oedipus complex, the boy's object-cathexis must be given up. Its place may be filled by one of the two things: either an identification with his mother [the lost object-cathexis] or an intensification of his identification with his father" (1974:22). To justify how one of these possibilities triumphs over the other one, Freud postulates the existence of natural dispositions: "It would appear . . . that in both sexes the relative strength of the masculine and feminine sexual dispositions is what determines whether the outcome of the Oedipus situation shall be an identification with the father or with the mother" (1974:23). In addition, Freud puts forth the idea of primary bisexuality as a complicating factor, presenting the probability that this primary bisexuality (rather than the Oedipus complex) might be the element that determines the sex of the parent with whom the child identifies.

Here, Butler draws attention to the uncertain assumption Freud makes about the dispositions that every person is said to have and claims that these supposedly natural "feminine and masculine dispositions are the result of the effective internalization of the [taboo against homosexuality]" (1999:81). With this constructivist rethinking of "natural dispositions" that define a child's identification process, Butler challenges Freud's presumption. Likewise, she calls attention to the fact that Freud's note on primary bisexuality casts a shadow on the credibility of "the primary heterosexuality of the boy's object cathexis" (1999:76), for the idea of primary bisexuality suggests that a male child's desire might as well be directed towards the father. Freud's account of primary bisexuality, as Butler observes, "is the coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche" (1999:77, emphasis omitted). Butler (rightly) makes this observation because according to Freud a male child with a masculine disposition tends to choose the mother as his/her object-cathexis, and a male child with a feminine disposition chooses the father. Thus it is implied that the choosing of the *father* by a male child with a *masculine* disposition is out of the question.

After modifying Freud's theory by challenging these postulations, Butler concludes that "in the case of same-sexed gender identification, the unresolved object relations are invariably homosexual. Indeed, the stricter and more stable the gender affinity, the less resolved the original loss, so that rigid gender boundaries inevitably work to conceal the loss of an original love that, unacknowledged, fails to be resolved." (1999:81). By

turning Freud's assumptions around, Butler renders heterosexuality a melancholic formation because the female child who adopts feminine attributes after the Oedipal stage, according to Butler, has lost her *mother*, the feminine object-cathexis and incorporated her femininity into her own self.

This depiction of melancholic heterosexual identity is best taken as a subversive reading of Freud's text because according to Butler all fixed identities, not merely heterosexual identity, are melancholic: "I think that crafting a sexual position, or reciting a sexual position, always involves becoming haunted by what's excluded. And the more rigid the position, the greater the ghost, and the more threatening it is in some way." (1996a:115). Of course, a fixed homosexual identity is no less melancholic than a fixed heterosexual identity. This holistic approach is also another distinctive queer characteristic; one that recognizes its own "other"s.

3. CHALLENGING THE HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX

Butler uses the term "heterosexual matrix" to refer to the complex social structure that upholds heterosexuality as the norm, and regulates desire and sexuality to endorse reproductive sexuality. The distinction between the terms "heterosexual matrix" and "heterosexuality" is crucial at this point. Heterosexuality refers to a certain kind of sexuality whereas heterosexual matrix refers to a group of heterosexist discourses. Heteronormativity, i.e. endorsement of heterosexuality as the norm, is inherent in the heterosexual matrix by definition, whereas it need not be so in heterosexuality. In other words, it is possible to be a "queer heterosexual." In the introduction to the *Queer with a Twist*, editor Calvin Thomas writes:

> "[T]he desire behind the essays collected here is not to assimilate ourselves into queer theory . . . , it is not to arrogate, confiscate, or seize queer theory's varied conceptual tools and put them to straight use. . . . We do not want a queer theory that 'no longer troubles' us . . . [We] want not to appropriate queer theory but to proliferate its findings and insights." (Thomas 2000:3).

He also states that "[t]he terror of being mistaken for a queer [meaning homosexual in this context] dominates the straight mind because this terror *constitutes* the straight mind (2000:27). . . . [S]traightness *with a twist* would . . . work to mitigate, or militate against, those institutional, compulsory ideals, those compulsory performances [of heteronormativity]." (31, original emphases). "One possible goal . . . of a straight negotiation with queer theory is to let this acknowledgement proceed." (30).

As narrated above, categories of gender, stringently binary in their construction, serve the heterosexual matrix. However, Butler has made clear that these regulatory categories are performatively constructed and do not posses any ontological status. On the other hand, this lack of ontological status does not imply that we can easily do away with these categories.

Butler acknowledges that it is almost impossible to eradicate the gender categories quickly. What she proposes is to subvert them. In the last chapter of *Gender Trouble*, called "Subversive Bodily Acts", she considers the subversive power that gender parody holds. For Butler, if gender is created through a process of repetitive ritual of performative acts that eventually congeal to create the illusion of a seemingly prediscursive identity, it is possible to shake up gender binarisms by using the same performative means that create them. By parodying gender identities' alleged naturalness, we can achieve what queer theorists call "gender fucking" or "queer moment of transgression," and through its subversive power, put a dent in the structure of the heterosexual matrix.

Probable sites of such queer subversions will be discussed below, however, it is important to elaborate on the nature of these subversions first. Queer transgression is not an easily accessible achievement. The most obvious reason is the fact that it makes use of performativity that…:

> "…describes [the] relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, [the] turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a 'pure' opposition, a 'transcendence' of contemporary relations of power, but a

> difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure." (Butler 1993:241).

Butler especially emphasises the "impurity" of the resources by which we oppose what we oppose, because according to her formulation, the agency of a subject is created through "being implicated in the very relations of power that it seeks to rival." (241).

To clarify this point: For my opposition to achieve its goal, I have to have agency. To have agency, I have to be acknowledged as a subject. Thus, even if my opposition is against the heterosexist gender binarism, even if I am trying to resist the reductionist binary opposition of man/woman, I first have to be recognised as a man or a woman. Because if I am neither man nor woman, I am unclassifiable within this binarism and therefore unintelligible, and this unintelligibility keeps me outside discourse. As a result, I am not a subject and I don't have agency. Queer transgression is situated in the ambivalent middle of this cycle. It occurs when we let ourselves be included in the discourse that we rival *just enough* to have agency, but at the same time hold back to avoid being completely subsumed under it. The resulting point is that one cannot even begin to oppose the heterosexual matrix without first being defined by it.

This usage of "inevitably impure resources" (for example, the gender binarisms, or performativity) makes queer subversion open to reclamation, and transgression fails when an intended queer moment is reclaimed by heteronormative powers. Another reason why a queer subversion might fail is the fact that it is almost impossible to plan one: The fact that such subversion requires evading traps of the very means one uses calls for an almost intuitively dexterous handling of performativity. This subversive power of queer is not only hard to achieve, but also hard to sustain. It is almost by definition that a queer moment of transgression lasts literally a moment, before it is reclaimed and subsumed under the self-preserving power of the heterosexual matrix. The power of queer transgression is, by all means, contingent.

Thus, what we are trying to do is to create gender parody, whose subversive quality depends on the efficacy with which we are able to turn heteronormative means (which are originally agents of the creation and preservation of a heterosexual matrix) against

their original purpose. Below, drag and homosexuality are examined as possible sites of subversion for important incongruities they hold: Drag for the incongruity it creates between sex and gender and homosexuality for the incongruity it holds between gender and sexual desire.

3.1. Considering Drag as a Site of Subversion:

Butler's famous example for gender parody is drag, which she put forward in *Gender Trouble* and elaborated on in *Bodies That Matter*. She writes, "I would suggest . . . that drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity." (1999:174).

According to Butler, a drag performance, with its palpably artificial re-production of a gender identity, reveals the performative nature of gender (1999:174-180). However, she also states that not all drag performances are necessarily subversive (1993:125-126). She writes, "drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality" (1993:125) and drag does not always produce such results. There are moments that a drag performance fails to challenge heteronormativity and is reclaimed by heterosexist discourses.

Moreover, in *Bodies That Matter* Butler also talks about the melancholia of drag, similar to the melancholia of gender: "Where there is an ungrieved loss in drag performance . . . perhaps it is a loss that is refused and incorporated in the performed identification" (1993:235). Therefore, a gay man's drag performance might be expressive of his repudiated desire for women and his inability to love a woman within the confines of his accepted identity. However, Butler introduces this idea with caution, underlining that although not all drag performers are gay (and most maybe heterosexual), this notion assumes that a man in drag is gay. On the other hand, she explicates that a drag performance might allegorise "some set of melancholic incorporative fantasies that stabilize *gender*" and thus drag might point out to...:

> "...*heterosexual melancholy*, the melancholy by which . . . a feminine gender is formed (taken on, assumed) through the incorporative fantasy by which the feminine is excluded as a possible object of love, an exclusion never grieved, but 'preserved' through the heightening of feminist identification itself" (1993:235, original emphases).

To emphasise the nuanced distinction here is quite impossible and Butler herself gives no formula (because none can be given) to distinguish between subversive and affirmative drag performances. She does give examples of "forms of drag that heterosexual culture produces for itself [her examples are *Some Like It Hot*, *Tootsie* and *Victor, Victoria*] where the anxiety over a possible homosexual consequence is both produced and deflected" (1993:126). On the other hand, this distinction is vital to achieve a queer transgression and I will return to this issue to discuss it extensively while doing the queer reading of *Ally McBeal* in the third chapter.

3.2. Considering Homosexuality as a Site of Subversion:

Another possible site to subvert rigid heterosexual binarisms is homosexuality, because at its core it entertains an incongruity between gender and desire. However, I would argue that in a queer context homosexuality as a concept becomes quite problematically attached to the heterosexual matrix. In fact, it might even be said that homosexuality does not challenge heterosexuality at all but upholds it, because, with the assertion of a gay identity, it has been irredeemably incorporated into the heterosexual matrix by creating yet another simplistic binary opposition: heterosexuality vs. homosexuality...

The queer suspicion of homosexual identity is largely dependent on Foucault's historicising of modern day sexuality in *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1.* In this book Foucault clearly marked how modern homosexuality was "invented" in the 19th century by "an incorporation of perversions and a new specification of individuals" (1990:42-43, emphases omitted), when the term entered medical discourse.

> "As defined by the ancient civil or canonical code, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a

> past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. . . . The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species." (1990:43).

Not that homosexuality was non-existent before the 19th century, for it wasn't, but according to Foucault, the homosexual *identity* as we know it today did not exist until certain acts and desires were gathered under the rubric of homosexuality. When "homosexuality" as a term entered medical discourse, it was at once named, interpellated, or performatively constituted and pathologised at the same time.

This invention of the modern homosexual provides us with a great deal of significant information about the heterosexual matrix, and authoritative discourse in general. First of all, it is a fine example of the double-edged interrelation between the regulator and the regulated, in that, the regulator can regulate insofar as it invents, names, identifies and therefore creates its subject. This is a point that can be exploited for Butler's notion of subversion. Another interesting piece of information we see in this example lies in the fact that although homosexuality was named and pathologised as the "other" of heterosexuality, the term "heterosexuality" was brought into discourse *after* the term "homosexuality." This, of course, is the result of the naturalised state of heterosexuality as the normative standard, but as far as discourse is concerned, it is possible to overturn the dependent nature of homosexuality's definition (as the "other" of heterosexuality), or at least to point to the interrelation amongst the two terms (they both depend on each other to be clearly legible).

So, why is homosexuality not considered an active concept that might effectively serve as a site to subvert the heterosexual matrix? The answer to this question is somewhat complicated.

First of all, the problem of the current homosexual identity's dependency on a heterosexual identity is far greater than the abovementioned subversions can easily dismiss. The modern gay identity is defined in a clear-cut manner as a choice, a lifestyle, a subculture that seemingly challenges its "predecessor" (heterosexuality), but nevertheless re-creates it through itself. In other words, the modern gay identity affirms

and nourishes the heterosexual matrix by still serving as its much needed "other." Moreover, hanging on to an identity makes homosexuality too legible a choice, one that is *infinitely* open to regulation. Remembering that Butler insisted on problematising "women" as the subject of feminism because, when accepted as an unproblematic identity category, it fell short of subverting the regulatory discourse it was trying to challenge, a similar line of thought can be traced here: Just how effective is homosexual identity in subverting the signs and interpellations of the heterosexual matrix, when it essentially depends on this system for its own existence?

Secondly, following this previous thought, we should look at how the gay identity is situated within the heterosexual matrix. Above, I explained its dependency on the naturalised state of heterosexuality. What about its relationship to other (almost always pathologised) sexualities, ones that queer theory seeks to liberate? I will answer this question by giving examples from two important cultural artefacts that have their roots in the Western gay culture.

It is interesting to note how homosexuality and incest are represented in Antonia Bird's film *Priest* (1994). *Priest* is about a gay man (Greg) who conceals his homosexuality to be able to carry out his work as a priest. He is in a constant process of trying to reconcile his sexuality with his spiritual responsibilities and beliefs, and while he works at the Church by day, he frequents gay bars at night for quick one-night stands. In a subplot, a teenage girl confesses to Greg (within the sacred secrecy of the confessional) that her father is sexually abusing her. Greg is devastated by the heaviness of this sin and starts questioning his faith and his own sexuality. Greg is never depicted as a self-hating homophobic gay man but his internal tension caused by the clash of his carnal pleasures and his religious beliefs are always palpable. The incest subplot works as a catalyser for this unresolved dilemma, prompting Greg to question both his own atypical sexuality and his God. There is a scene in the film where the father of the abused girl visits Greg and defends himself. When Greg tries to convince him to stop ("Incest is evil. . . . [It is] most unnatural"), the father of the girl responds, "Incest is the most natural thing in the world." Although this scene is devised as a debate between Greg and the girl's father, it is easy to see that there is no actual discussion going on. Incest is invariably presented as a form of abuse, so much so that no explanation is

given for Greg trying to convince the girl's father that "incest is most unnatural" instead of talking him out of sexually abusing other people. By conflating "sexual abuse" and "incest," the film efficiently upholds the incest taboo (along with all its heterosexist assumptions) for the audience's viewing pleasure. The significance of this assertion (that incest is indeed a sin) is that it makes room for the naturalisation of homosexuality (in the character of Greg). As long as the foreseeable audience reaction to the incestuous father is verified and reaffirmed, homosexuality takes the stage as the "actually non-pathological" sexual possibility. In the end homosexuality's "natural" state is confirmed via the stigmatisation of another sexuality: As far as the film's message is concerned, incest is the symbol of pathological sexualities the Church rightfully condemns, as opposed to Greg's homosexuality, the naturalness of which the Church should accept.

Although *Priest* is a good enough example of how homosexuality finds its way into the heterosexual matrix by upholding certain heterosexist taboos, I will continue with a short reading of Armistead Maupin's book *Tales of the City* (1977) to better exemplify the problematic relationship between homosexuality and the other sexualities that are stigmatised that naturalise the former.

Tales of the City is actually a series of six books but I will focus only on the first one for the purpose at hand. The story commences with Mary Ann Singleton's decision to stay in San Francisco where she has come for a few days of vacation from Cleveland. She finds a small place to stay in Barbary Lane, which is tended by Anna Madrigal, the somewhat elderly landlady who is later revealed to be a transsexual. The many plot threads in the book revolve around those two and the other lodgers: Michael "Mouse" Tolliver, a gay man; Mona Ramsey, a pessimistic bisexual new-ager; Brian Hawkins, a sweet but womanising man; and Norman Neal Williams; the nerdy guy who stays upstairs and socialises with no one. The final pages of the book reveal in a plot twist that Norman is actually a paedophile. When Mary Ann finds out about this, she confronts Norman. She tries to convince him that "he needs help" but Norman accidentally falls off a cliff and dies.

Again, the issue is the same: Putting forward the stigma of a "pathological" sexuality (paedophilia, in this instant) to prove the "natural" state of homosexuality. However, the

choice of paedophilia as the pathologised sexuality makes the matter much more problematic because it obviously is a response to the (then- and still-) strong myth of the older gay men "recruiting" young boys into homosexuality; a myth that gained considerable strength with Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children" campaign. Bryant once remarked, "Since homosexuals cannot reproduce, they must recruit and freshen their ranks." Thus, the starting point of Bryant's campaign was a juxtaposition of paedophilia and homosexuality. Maupin, an openly gay man, seems to be bluntly addressing this heterosexist preoccupation, by adding a heterosexual paedophile in his book and proclaiming him as "sick." Maupin's gay fantasia welcomes transsexuals, bisexuals, gay men and women, heterosexual Middle Americans, and people from different social classes. Nevertheless, he merges paedophilia with exploitation, in an attempt to eradicate its stigma off the gay identity.

These short reviews are intended to reveal how the gay identity situates itself within the "normalcy" of the heterosexual matrix by upholding heterosexist taboos and by stigmatising, pathologising and condemning certain other sexualities. The traces of the same problem might be found in Sedgwick's abovementioned account of the problematic relationship between homosexuality and "the effeminate boy," where atypical gender identifications are foregone to assert a certain definition of the gay identity.

Doing a queer reading is a laborious task. Is the arduous effort put in a queer reading worthwhile? Does queer have any power at all? Use and power of "queering" was interrogated by many scholars. In her famous essay "The Professor of Parody," Martha Nussbaum criticises Butler and the theory of performativity. Nussbaum's criticism involves two main points. Firstly, she expresses dissatisfaction with Butler's complicated use of esoteric language and dismisses this choice as a manoeuvre to conceal the unoriginality of the work. Secondly, she undermines the subversive power of the theory of performativity and claims that it is passive, pessimistic, Eurocentric and ultimately useless in terms of political activism: "Hungry women are not fed by this, battered women are not sheltered by it, raped women do not find justice in it, gays and lesbians do not achieve legal protections through it." (http://www.md.ucl.ac.be/ebim/scientif/Recherche/BioethFem/ Nussbaum_NRO.htm). Nussbaum's contestation

of the theory of performativity as a passive and useless notion is only an example of a widely expressed frustration with queer theory. Although queer performativity might hold power, it is said that any possibility of subversion is bound to get lost in the unending wordplays.

Criticism of the renowned scholar Slavoj Žižek voices another common frustration. He says that Butler is:

> ". . . simultaneously too optimistic and too pessimistic. On the one hand she overestimates the subversive potential of disturbing the functioning of the big Other through the practices of performative reconfiguration/ displacement. . . . On the other hand, Butler does not allow for the radical gesture of the thorough restructuring of the hegemonic symbolic order in its totality." (Žižek 1999:264).

Although criticisms of queer theory, exemplified here with Nussbaum and Žižek, do a good job of pointing out the possible strong and weak parts of queer projects, it is Biddy Martin's words that powerfully ring true:

> "Unmasking gender performativity, on however deep a level, does not do away with gender or even gender identity. It has potential, however, of making 'gender' less controlling, but only if we abandon the simplistic assumption that it has a completely imperial grasp on the psyche in the first place. Queer deconstructions of gender, in other words, cannot do all the earth-shattering work they seem to promise, because gender identity is not the whole of psychic life. Still, that is not to say those deconstructions are therefore insignificant." (1994:102-103).

Before moving on to *Ally McBeal*'s queer reading under the light of this anti-binarist theoretical background regarding sex, gender, sexuality and identity, I will try to explain a very different version of postfeminism. The next chapter will provide us with an understanding of the popular versions of postfeminism both in the media and the academia.

Notes:

[1] From glbtq.com: Queer Nation erupted into being in the summer of 1990, when militant AIDS activists at New York's Gay Pride parade passed out to the assembled crowd an inflammatory manifesto, printed on both sides of a single newspaper-sized piece of newsprint, bearing the titles *I Hate Straights!* and *Queers Read This!* Within days, in response to the brash, "in-your-face" tone of the broadside, Queer Nation chapters had sprung up in San Francisco and other major cities.
Described by activist scholars Allan Bérubé and Jeffrey Escoffier as the first "retro-future/postmodern" activist group to address gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender concerns, the short-lived organization (lasting only two years) made a lasting impact on sexual identity politics in the United States. To a significant degree, the relative frequency and acceptability of glbtq representation in mass culture in the 1990s and early twenty-first century can be dated to the emergence of Queer Nation.
. . . A signal accomplishment of the group was to reclaim a set of positive associations for an old epithet, "queer," and to assert that queer people had a right to take up cultural space--right here, right now--with no apologies and no arguments.
. . . Use of the term "queer" was never universally embraced by all segments of the constituencies that the concept of "queerness" could potentially represent; indeed, the term often evoked intense hostility. Queer Nation chapters were rife with dissension over issues of race, gender, and class, and they ultimately collapsed under the weight of their own internal contradictions—"queer," after all, means "diversity," whereas "nation" implies "sameness." (Stryker 2004).
[2] Catherine MacKinnon is a feminist lawyer, author and activist who, since the early 1980s, worked with Andrea Dworkin on having pornography prohibited on grounds that it is a violation of civil rights and a form of sexual discrimination. See MacKinnon 1989. Judith Butler criticises MacKinnon's work because in her theories "sexual relations are understood to establish differential gender categories . . . [MacKinnon's] highly deterministic account leaves no room for relations of sexuality to be theorized apart from the rigid framework of gender difference or for kinds of sexual regulation that do not take gender as their primary objects." (Butler 1993:238-239).
[3] For an example of how this misunderstanding has proliferated, see Abelove, Barale and Halperin 1993:xv-xvii.
[4] See also Fausto-Sterling 2000.
[5] The term interpellation is used loosely here, for Althusser's notion of formation of the subject through interpellation depends on the subject's reponse to the hail: When the authority hails "Hey you," interpellation is not complete (the subject is not formed) until the one that is hailed acknowledges the hailing and turns to recognise the hail.

CHAPTER II

1. ISSUES OF POPULAR POSTFEMINISM: POSTFEMINISM AS BACKLASH?

The version of postfeminism that might be seen in the media differs from scholarly postfeminist works in almost every way. Actually, it might be said that the only thing that brings them together is the heading of "postfeminism," which in itself is not a reliable proof of correlation between these two trends because it is used in different ways to denote different meanings in different contexts. However, these two postfeminist trends are brought together in this dissertation by the fact that the origin of popular postfeminism, just like that of scholarly postfeminism, lies in its pluralistic opposition to feminist meta-narratives. They both are results of attempts at intervening with feminism. Butler's work, as related in the previous chapter, is characterised by an effort to curtail the universalising approach of feminism; she decentralised the subject of feminism, "woman," to draw attention to the fact that the notion of "being a woman" might convey many diverse meanings, that there might be more than one way of being a woman. In a nutshell, scholarly postfeminism is an attempt to redefine the feminist narratives concerning sex, gender, sexuality and identity. Popular postfeminism, as we will see in this chapter, is instigated by a similar objective, but with somewhat different issues. I would argue that the issues of popular postfeminism might be grouped under the headings of femininity, sexuality and domesticity. Considering that the desire to problematise the prevailing attitudes in feminism is the defining principle of, not only these two, but all kinds postfeminisms, it actually is not fallacious to gather these two seemingly different trends under the same rubric, however disparate they might be.

The attempts at defining the popularised version of postfeminism might be dated back to the early 90s. Andrea Press, writing in 1991, gives a clear explanation of the popular version of postfeminism:

> "Postfeminism has been used to describe the mindset of a generation of women who have come of age after the heyday of the women's liberation and reaped the benefits of the social reforms and changed attitudes that the

> movement gained –often at the cost of upset and humiliation to the women who fought for them– but who categorically refuse to call themselves feminists." (1991:38-39).

On the same note, Ouellette comments that "*Ally McBeal* speaks to women who are said by the media to live by the credo 'I'm not a feminist but . . .' " (2002:333). These reflections rightly observe that the title "postfeminism" was taken on by younger women who reject being defined as feminists, while at the same time making use of feminist achievements. Many authors have speculated on why younger women reject being defined as feminists, and the most popular understanding is that young women do not want to be associated with the very widespread media stereotype of the "ugly, man-hating feminist with hairy legs." (See MacDonald 2003, Gamble 2004, Ouellette 2002)

Perhaps the defining moment of the 1990s postfeminism was when the 27-year-old Katie Roiphe's book *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus* was published in 1993. This book was more of an outspoken account of Roiphe's observations of feminist activism when she was a student in Harvard and Princeton, than a theoretical approach to feminism. It also contained the basics of what has since come to be known as (popular) postfeminism. Besides Roiphe, authors such as Naomi Wolf, Rene Denfeld and Natasha Walter are the most visible defenders of ideas that are associated with popular postfeminism. The most important characteristic that brings all these writers under the same title is the way they promote the idea that women now have access to a wide variety of choices. Highlighting "choice" with respect to issues of sexuality, domesticity and femininity, their aim is to shift mainstream feminism to a "post-victimisation" period.

The premise of Roiphe's book was the frustration she felt with the prescriptiveness of second wave feminism. In the introduction to the book, she says:

> "At Harvard, and later at graduate school in English literature in Princeton, I was surprised at how many things there were not to say, at the arguments and assertions that could not be made, lines that could not be crossed, taboos that could not be broken. The feminists around me had created their own rigid orthodoxy." (1993:5).

From here, she goes on to attack the famous protest rallies that were carried out by feminists in campuses, called "Take Back the Night," and the oversensitive approach to date rape and sexual harassment. According to Roiphe's aggressive criticism, second wave feminism has dipped too much into personal lives of women and by demonising male sexuality, caused a "rape-crisis" and terror, origins of which she finds somewhat dubious. Roiphe likens the atmosphere of Take Back the Night marches to mass hysteria and relates a series of events to make her point, such as the male student who was victimised by the false accusations of a female student who later admitted she was lying (1993:39-41). The problem she sees with these movements is the fact that they thrive on the image of women as victims. When she says "[f]emale authority is not (and should not be seen as) so fragile that it shatters at the first sign of male sexuality" (1993:90), she criticises the ideas of mainstream feminism concerning sexual politics. Roiphe sees an inherent violence in sexuality. To her, this violence is the essence of sexuality, without which sexuality ceases to exist. However, second wave feminists, according to Roiphe, equate this with violence of rape and by politicising it, confine women to a very conservative sexual life, where diversity and choice is cancelled out. Roiphe's argument, at the end of the day, is a challenge to the "personal is political" motto of second wave feminism. This endeavour to banish feminism from the bedroom and put an end to feminism's tyranny over sexuality, is indeed a fundamental approach that characterises popular postfeminism. From this point of view, issues raised by Roiphe are inquiries into the nature of sexuality, rather than inquiries into rape or date rape. Doesn't sexuality most of the time, if not always, involve violence? If so, when does the inherent violence of sex end and the inflicted violence that victimises begin? Roiphe does not claim to know the answers to these questions. However, her point is that mainstream feminism claims to know, and regulates women's lives accordingly. Her criticism of Catherine MacKinnon is a good example of this:

> "The role MacKinnon assigns to women is as rigid as the role she assigns to men. As far as she is concerned, women don't like pornography, and if they do it is because they are scared or brainwashed. . . . In our culture, women are not supposed to like pornography. Lots of women are in fact curious, interested, or even aroused by pornography. But this is not acceptable, either to many feminists or to society at large." (1993:147).

Natasha Walter, an English counterpart to the American postfeminist authors of the '90s, also puts forth a reconsideration of the "personal is political" motto. In her book *The New Feminism*, she writes:

> "Although the link between the personal and the political has been vital in the past, a certain separation of the two realms is now essential. Now that the rigid shell of traditional femininity has been broken, there must be areas of our lives that are free from political interference. . . . [W]e need spaces to explore our dreams and desires without fearing that the thought police will come knocking on the window." (1999:77).

Walter pays special attention not to antagonise second wave feminism (which is probably why she removes the prefix "post-" and replaces it with "new" feminism) but does not flinch from frankly criticising its dogma. Her disenchantment with feminism, quite along the lines of Roiphe's, comes from the authoritarian attitude feminism has taken towards sexuality and femininity. Like Roiphe, Walter criticises the works of anti-pornography advocates like Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. While doing this, she states that "[i]f feminism is to honour the revolution that it has created, it has to admit that it has no place in the bedroom any more." (1999:121). Walter, also takes up the issue of domesticity in her book and emphasises the importance of the link between the women's experience and domestic life. She looks at the works of female artists from Virginia Woolf to Judy Chicago and highlights the celebrations of domesticity (232-233). She writes: "Much feminist writing has been devoted to breaking the hold that the domestic realm has exercised on women, and that was the right channel for feminism in previous years, when women were still reluctant to break out of the home for fear of poverty and ridicule." (234). And her contention is that:

> "[I]n this generation, feminism can afford a rather different emphasis. . . . Rather than requiring men and women to turn their backs on the home in order to reshape themselves as the perfect worker, feminists should remind us of the joy that domestic life can bring to men as well as women." (234).

Camille Paglia, who came to prominence with her book *Sexual Personae* (1990), is usually accepted as a postfeminist writer, although she is clearly in defiance of any such label. With her violent approach to feminist issues, Paglia ruthlessly criticises "yuppie feminism, white bourgeois feminism" (1994:281) while making a note of the

"incredible alliance between the feminists, the Catholic schools, and the far right." (1994:123).

What brings Paglia in disagreement with mainstream feminism (she has called feminists, on more than one occasion, "Stalinists" and "manipulative") is her advocacy of the "pagan" nature of humankind, which she sees as neglected while the Judeo-Christian tradition has been nurtured for too long. Looking at the big picture, she is fiercely contemptuous of feminists' refusal of the animalistic –"pagan"– nature of human sexuality, specifically male and gay male sexuality. According to her, male lust is a necessary part of nature, "for the good of the species" (1994:251): Women have "something" men want and instead of trying to change men's behaviour, women must just accept it, and "*[d]eal* with it! *Not* cut it off" (1994:252, original emphasis).

As a supporter of the view that violence is inherent in male sexuality, Paglia shares Katie Roiphe's ideas on the date-rape crisis and hails her aforementioned book as "an eloquent, thoughtful, finely argued book that was savaged from coast to coast by shallow, dishonest feminist book reviewers." (1994:xvi). She deals with the issue of rape many times and says that:

> "The feminist obsession with rape as a symbol of male-female relations is irrational and delusional. From the perspective of the future, this period in America will look like a reign of mass psychosis, like that of the Salem witch trials. . . . The fantastic fetishism of rape by mainstream and anti-porn feminists has in the end trivialized rape, impugned women's credibility, and reduced the sympathy we should feel for legitimate victims of violent sexual assault." (1994:24-25).

As almost every other writer who takes on the rape issue, Paglia goes back to the Anita Hill[1] case, which according to her was "a put-up job by the feminist establishment." (1994:189). This brings her up against Naomi Wolf's arguments that take this very case as the basis of a new feminism. Paglia dismisses Wolf's work as "boring crap" and too "white bread and mayonnaise, that's all it is." (1994:281).

Like other postfeminist writers, Paglia is very much concerned with sexuality. She is waging a war against political correctness "with its fascist speech codes and puritanical

sexual regulations." (1994:118). As an offshoot of her views on the pagan nature of human sexuality, Paglia promotes a radical approach to sex, including sadomasochism (because "all abuse of the body has pagan roots" [1994:295]), prostitution, pornography and, to a certain extent, paedophilia. She also speaks in defence of men against feminists:

> "One of the many lies of women's studies is that European art history was written by white males and that feminism has conclusively rewritten that history by discovering and restoring major female artists excluded from the pantheon by patriarchal conspiracy. But European art history was not just written but created by white males." (1994:114).

In her book *Fire with Fire*, Naomi Wolf puts forth another postfeminist attribute when she sets out to substitute the second wave's "victim feminism" with a "power feminism." According to Wolf, the sexual harassment case that involved Anita Hill was a "fault line" that killed "something critical to the sustenance of patriarchy" (1993:5), and "set in motion a train of events that led American women into becoming the political ruling class" (1993:xv); and it is time that feminism made use of this opportunity.

Like Roiphe, Wolf critiques the victimology of feminism and demands that this must change (using the aftermath of the Anita Hill case as a springboard). However, she boldly underlines the fact that "there is nothing wrong with identifying one's victimization. That act is critical. There is a lot wrong with molding it into an identity." (1993:136). This demarcation puts Wolf in conflict with the likes of Roiphe and Paglia, whom she disapproves on many points. According to Wolf, Roiphe's approach to rape is very simplistic, and Paglia trivialises the points she makes with her arrogant manner. In this respect, Wolf works as a middleman for second wave feminism and postfeminism. She is not interested in criticising feminism but very interested in an assessment of it and she attempts to shift certain points in feminist discourse to empower women. For this, she uses a very concise methodology, by making lists of certain attributes of "victim feminism" and "power feminism" (1993:136-138), and proposes new strategies that will help women endorse their strength and do away with the victim status that is ascribed to them (see 1993, chapter 5).

Although Naomi Wolf is usually given much more credit than other postfeminist writers, Sarah Gamble draws attention to an important question when she says "[Wolf's] entire argument rests on the assumption that power is there for the taking – but is it, can it ever be, as easy as that?" (2004:49). Indeed, the new strategies Wolf puts forth are somewhat underdeveloped and simple, albeit consistent in themselves. Her list of women's means to endorse their rights (like "women have the power as consumers of products," or "women have the power to make scenes") starts off on a middle-class bias and omits the possibility that a crucial amount of women might not be able to do those things. However, this should not be taken as a limitation or rejected as elitism, because, by definition, postfeminism's pluralistic approaches involve individual feministic approaches for individual groups of women. Thus, Wolf's (or any other author's, for that matter) proposals or ideas need not be thought of in universal terms.

The refusal of universality is a very important factor in understanding postfeminisms. For example, "third wave feminism," another postfeminist trend that was formed in the early '90s, "is defined by the challenge that women-of-color feminists pose to white second wave feminism." (Heywood and Drake 1997:1). Although the self-proclaimed third wave feminists clearly deny being classified as postfeminists with an effort to detach themselves from the antifeminist connotations of the popular understandings of postfeminism, I take their motivations to be explicitly postfeminist. In that, the reason behind detaching third wave feminism (as an attempt to modify the white bias of the second wave) from the larger rubric of postfeminism might be construed as a ratification of antifeminist sentiments.

As can be seen, popular postfeminism, too, has its issues buried in a dissatisfaction with the tenets of mainstream feminism. This dissatisfaction would seem to be concerned with the totalising outlook of feminism on issues of sexuality, femininity and domesticity. Postfeminist writers put good effort into providing themselves with some space outside image of the victimised woman. According to them, feminism set out to free this victimised woman, but by failing to recognise its own achievements, has turned victimhood into an identity. Being a victim has come to define feminism. Postfeminists refuse to own up to an identity that is defined by being a victim.

In this respect, Roiphe's critique of date rape movement is actually a critique of feminist sexual puritanism. This, of course, is a distinctive principle of scholarly postfeminism and, in particular, queer theory. When Roiphe's challenge to the feminist understanding of sexuality as an arena that pronounces women's subordination is considered with Walter's insistent promotion of a culture of traditional femininity and domesticity, the postfeminist issue of "victimology" becomes clearer. Postfeminists oppose the feminist territorialisation of these areas, namely sexuality, femininity and domesticity, as means of subordinating women. Here, the emphasis is on choice; after all the things feminism has provided, the postfeminist woman feels she can choose being sexual and feminine, or opt for a family life, without being victimised. This freedom to choose comes with the idea that the postfeminist woman has transcended the initial concerns of second wave feminism. On the whole, popular postfeminism is an endorsement of the right to choose. In the next section, I will try to illuminate how these opinions and debates have been represented in the media by the so-called postfeminist popular culture.

2. POSTFEMINIST MEDIA

Although TV shows with female protagonists have been prominently featured in prime time TV since the early 1980s to widespread scholarly criticism[2], shows with similar attributes that appeared in the mid-90s have received clearly different reactions. These shows were said to be different in the way they presented feminist issues and generally classified as postfeminist. The best-known examples of these are *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and the City*, while Amanda D. Lotz writes that shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Charmed* (1998-), *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001), *Judging Amy* (1999-) and *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) (among many others) need postfeminist explanations (2001:105-106). *Desperate Housewives* (2004-), *The L Word* (2004-) and *Veronica Mars* (2004-) might be considered among the more recent examples of the same phenomenon. Other than these TV shows, the two *Bridget Jones's Diary* books (including the film adaptations of these books: Figures 1 & 2), films like *Legally Blonde* (2001 and 2003: Figure 2), *Kill Bill* (2003 and 2004) and *Charlie's Angels* (2000 and

2003), and *Cathy* comics (Figure 3) are usually perceived as examples of postfeminist artefacts in other mediums.

There are many attributes that bring these cultural artefacts together under the rubric of postfeminism. Even though most of these films, books and TV shows are not explicitly about feminism, their protagonists are clearly "post-feminist" in the sense that they live in a world "after feminism." This "after feminism" should not necessarily imply feminism's end –though, at times, it does– but its feats. These women are defined first and foremost by feminism, given that they have careers, unconcealed sexual lives and choices, all of which were made possible by the efforts of the second wave feminists. On the other hand, they cannot be called feminists in the strictest sense, not *mainstream* feminists anyway. Like the abovementioned authors, these artefacts problematise certain feminist concerns, especially issues of femininity, sexuality and domesticity, with an emphasis on choice. In the case of an artefact that does not make direct connection with feminism (*Kill Bill* films, for instance), the "shadow" of feminism still can be felt. Although conventional notions of femininity and sexuality (heterosexuality in particular) were highly scrutinised by feminists of the 1970s, and were proclaimed highly problematic, the postfeminist woman of the 1990s obviously felt she could be conventionally feminine without being a victim of patriarchy.

Almost all of these postfeminist characters are portrayed by actresses who are extraordinarily beautiful with particularly shapely physiques. They are always dressed up in smart designer wear that accentuates their femininity. Even when such a perfect presentation of the female body is not present (as in *Bridget Jones*), questions of ideal femininity are always ongoing. Thus, critics of postfeminism claim that a very feminist issue concerned with how women's bodies are forced into unattainably idealised shapes is overlooked in this postfeminist era. This point might not be completely erroneous, however, it should also be noted that in these postfeminist artefacts, the prescribed standards of this classically feminine beauty are always presented in a very self-conscious way: the characters of *Sex and the City* (who might be said to represent the most exaggerated version of this postfeminist femininity) are dolled up in over-the-top haute couture in every episode of the series, just to have their glamour tarnished by the vulgarity of city life. This aspect of the show is clearly epitomised in the opening

credits, with the image of Carrie's (Sarah Jessica Parker) Gaultier tutu getting splashed by a bus passing by (Figure 4). Similarly, Bridget Jones, one of the most popular postfeminist icons, is almost solely characterised by her attempts at achieving a classically defined beauty ideal, attempts that always fail chiefly due to her plump figure. In fact, the much publicised scene where Bridget tries to decide whether to wear large underpants to hide her large buttocks or small knickers to look sexy when she gets closer to her date is the perfect example of the quintessentially postfeminist problematic of femininity (Figures 5, 6 & 7). The satirical approach in this scene to the effort the modern woman puts into achieving femininity is a defining postfeminist attribute. Many scenes that emphasise the problem of the unattainable feminine ideal can be found in other artefacts, like the comical image of Gabrielle (Eva Longoria – *Desperate Housewives*) mowing the lawn in high heels and a sexy outfit, or the more sombre contemplations of Buffy (Sarah Michelle Gellar – *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) who feels she is an outcast because she will never be able to reach this ideal due to her predestined task as a vampire slayer.

Bonnie J. Dow posits the problematical nature of this type of representation when she writes "television programs –and popular reactions to those programs– understand feminism as a matter of identity or lifestyle, not politics." (2002:259). As can be seen in the abovementioned examples, even though the question of how women's bodies are forcefully shaped by a bombardment of idealised media images is not posed within this postfeminist sensibility as a *political* issue, it is nevertheless represented as a *personal* (lifestyle-related, if you will) problem. Just how right is it to dismiss these representations as depoliticised consumer products?

Perhaps related to this "problematised but ideal" femininity is the question of the traditional gender roles ascribed to women. Many of these postfeminist characters are in search of perfect heterosexual romance (i.e. Carrie in *Sex and the City*) or they try to land a husband (Ally McBeal). These notions have been criticised by second wave feminists as typically patriarchal means of subordinating women, because of the passive image of women in both romances and wedlock. Also, since these notions imply a dependency on men, traditionally feminist rejection of them stands for a rejection of the view of woman as the lesser gender. On the other hand, in postfeminist cultural

artefacts, these pursuits are portrayed as independent choices; in a postfeminist context, trying to create a family of one's own might be an informed decision and need not mean that one is anti-feminist. In the case of *Desperate Housewives*, the characters have already chosen domestic sphere over a career-oriented life. This is also worth noting because it points out to the fact that postfeminism is not necessarily about a "single girl" in an urban setting. However, *Desperate Housewives*, with its emphasis on postfeminist issues in a domesticated space is indeed a first. Just as *Sex and the City* reclaimed and valued the experience of being single in an urban environment, *Desperate Housewives* reclaims the experience of being married in a suburban setting. Another similarity between these shows is that each feature four female leads who are differentiated from each other: In *Desperate Housewives*, Lynette is a former careerist who chose to leave work to bring up her children while Bree has been a housewife all her life and Gabrielle worked as a model before marrying her rich husband whom she doesn't love. In *Sex and the City*, Charlotte is a traditional and romantic woman while Miranda is a born-cynic and Samantha is licentious to the extreme. The differences among these characters in both shows are emphasised by their hair colour (Figures 8 & 9), once again underlining the significance of femininity.

Going back to the "single girl," it should be noted that the valued pursuit of a classically defined romance, marriage or family does not stop her from an active sexual life. This brings us to the typical postfeminist issue of sexuality. Definitely, *Sex and the City* is the one artefact of the postfeminist era that deals with sexuality most overtly, with its speculations on specific questions and differing sexualities and practices. While depictions and interrogations of sexuality on a big scale are yet to be seen in other postfeminist works, frankness about sexuality is indeed a typical postfeminist attribute. *Bridget Jones*, *Ally McBeal*, *Buffy* and *Charmed* among many others have made room for very sexual portrayals of their female characters. This straightforward depiction of women's sexuality, although not always inquisitive, is a celebration of second wave feminism's efforts aimed at liberating female sexuality. It also underlines the fact that these characters are obviously enjoying the advantages of a world changed by feminism (the same can be said about their careerism).

However, none of these salient postfeminist attributes are usually perceived as positive shifts in feminism. The general recognition is that postfeminism is backlash in disguise, with a goal of pushing women back into domestic life, confining them to idealised femininity and representing them as sexual objects. Press writes, "because of the mass media's commercial packaging, whatever thin slices of feminism might survive in the finished media product are sandwiched between thicker slices of commercial femininity." (1991:39). Similarly, in *Representing Women* (1995), MacDonald gives examples from magazine advertisements to point to the hollowness of postfeminist politics. She claims that "the playfulness [of these representations] encourages us to laugh at traditional versions of femininity, but stops well short of openly challenging them." (2003:93). Although she "accept[s] that for many women feminism is now thought of as a historical rather than a current ideology, and their primary contact with its objectives may often be through the discourses of consumerism" (92), she finally contends that the outcome of "postfeminist utopias" is much more related to consumerist discourses, rather than feminist ones (See MacDonald 2003:90-102).

In the case of other works I've mentioned above that are generally described as postfeminist, like *Kill Bill*, *Charlie's Angels*, *Xena* and *Buffy*, the issue of a very feminine woman fighting with muscle power is brought to attention. This is a rather different aspect of the debates about postfeminism, involving approvals of these portrayals as depictions of strong women, of "girl power," as well as discussions of masculinised and at the same time extremely feminised women, "bimbos kicking ass" and "catfights." The concern with "the male gaze" as posed by Laura Mulvey is a central point in these debates[3]. When this issue is expanded to the greater understanding of postfeminism, all these representations are said to serve the male gaze. This is thought to be so because, even if the postfeminist heroine is out to reclaim her femininity and sexuality as independent choices without relinquishing her feminist gains, the final outcome is seen by many as a problematically sexualised representation of women. This sexualised woman invariably ends up being an object of the male gaze that "possesses" them. So how do we create a woman who enjoys the choice of being feminine and is entitled to her sexuality, without being a victim of this possessive male gaze? The difficulty here lies in the fact that postfeminism does not find this question even relevant. The postfeminist idea here is that these women are so liberated that the

male gaze fails to possess them. These conflicting ideas more or less sum up the debate around postfeminism. In a nutshell:

Postfeminists say that women can be feminine without being objectified, but mainstream feminists say that not much has changed. Postfeminists say that women can be sexually diverse without being victimised, but mainstream feminists say that women still have work to do to reclaim their sexualities. Postfeminists say that women can choose domestic life over a career oriented one, mainstream feminists say that this is backlash and postfeminism is a ruse to cover it.

As this brief list shows, discussions of popular postfeminism quickly turn into chaotic blabber without much theoretical support on either side. There is strong opposition to postfeminism as well as dedicated support for it. Writing it off as disguised antifeminism is much too simplistic, although, at the same time, it is impossible to accept it unproblematically. My stance is that postfeminism should be taken in with all its contradictory accounts and its own internal paradoxes, without an angst to clearly define it or to arrive at a final decision about whether it is "good" or "bad." When taken holistically as a concept, rather than a situation, it will be much easier not only to critique its probable alliances with consumerism and far right, but also to make use of its contributions to feminist thinking. The preoccupation with pinpointing if a certain cultural artefact is "feministic enough" would, in the end, be misleading.

Another important point of caution while regarding postfeminist works is to come to terms with the inherently esoteric nature of this type of postfeminism. Almost all issues that are put forth in the abovementioned examples are relevant solely to white, heterosexual and professional women. The issues that are tackled by, say *Ally McBeal*, does not pertain to women of colour, gay women, women who are not professionals, victims of domestic violence, etc. This seems like an elitist and singular viewpoint. However, from an inverse perspective, it might be said that this singularity leads to a propagation of plurality within feminism. By limiting the group of women it speaks to, *Ally McBeal* and the like make no claim to resolve all the issues of all women. *Ally McBeal* does and indeed *should* talk about and speak to a very distinct group of women. From this point of view, the criticism of postfeminism's assertion of the irrelevance of

feminist goals to a younger generation of women become pointless. White, heterosexual, urban esotericism of popular postfeminism is not a *bias*, but a *frame*. And women within this frame assert that they are enjoying the goals of the feminist project. On the other hand, cautions have to be taken to hold this type of postfeminism back from becoming a hegemonic discourse, *within or outside feminism*. This esotericism should not become a form of favouritism, or feminism should not be defined simply by it. For this, we need a proliferation of postfeminisms.

The debate around the issues of popular postfeminism as presented in this chapter is the backdrop for the analysis of *Ally McBeal* in the next chapter. However, this analysis is an endeavour to question the pluralistic discourse that popular postfeminism seems to advocate. This defining postfeminist text is studied by utilising the theoretical frameworks of a body of thought from a different postfeminist angle; namely queer theory. I would like to emphasise that this study will not interrogate the pluralism of the general category of postfeminism(s), but this particular postfeminism, one that I refer to as popular postfeminism, which is epitomised in *Ally McBeal*.

Notes:

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[1] Anita Hill is a law professor who has testified in 1991 against Clarence Thomas, a then-nominee of the Supreme Court, alleging that she was sexually harassed by him while working with him in Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Although Thomas was later appointed to the Supreme Court, the case put a spotlight on the sexual harassment issue thanks to the extensive media coverage it got. For details of the case and its consequences, see: *An Outline of the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas Debate*, http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/122/hill/hillframe.htm or *The Thomas Hearings*, http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~ybf2u/Thomas-Hill/

[2] *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977), *Cagney & Lacey* (1982-1988), *Designing Women* (1986-1993), *Roseanne* (1988-1997) and *Murphy Brown* (1988-1998) are among the TV shows that are examined by feminist scholars.

[3] In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), Mulvey argued that cinematic representation is inherently male-oriented. The audience is invited to identify with the "active" male protagonist while the woman on screen is presented as a "passive" object to be looked at. This article was a foundational text that initiated a feminist approach to the interpretation of visual arts and it is still considered to be a significant piece because of the explanations it offers on the power relations in "looking" and "being looked at."

CHAPTER III

1. *ALLY McBEAL*

The weekly one-hour TV show *Ally McBeal*, which was created, written and executive produced by David E. Kelley, ran on Fox Network from September 1997 to May 2002. Throughout its 5-season run and 112 episodes, not only did the show enjoy great success, but it was also a source of extensive debate and controversy. As Laurie Ouellette reports, *Ally McBeal* was created when Fox hired Kelley "to develop a television program with a strong female character that would follow the network's primetime soap opera *Melrose Place* and hopefully capture its under-35 female audience." (2002:316). Kelley, who is a former lawyer, based the show around its titular character Ally McBeal, a female lawyer, and the Boston law firm she works for. The show was an immediate hit.

In the pilot episode Ally is hired on the spot by a former schoolmate, Richard Fish, and the fictional law firm Cage & Fish provides the setting for the show. Besides Ally and Richard, the firm's ensemble consists of Ally's ex-boyfriend Billy Thomas, his wife Georgia, the second senior partner John Cage and Ally's assistant Elaine Vassal. Latecomers Nelle Porter, a vicious lawyer, and Ling Woo, an outrageously litigious client, join the company in the second season of the series. The most important setting in this office space is the unisex bathroom. Ouellette rightly observes that the bathroom, which is presented with an obvious emphasis on the fact that people of both sexes meet there, "represents the arrival of a professional arena in which men and women are treated theoretically the same." (2002:321). It is also the most intimate and private environment where characters visit alone or in groups of two to contemplate in front of the mirror or resolve problems. The fact that there is usually someone else eavesdropping on these private moments blurs the lines of private and public, to comic or dramatic results. The significance attributed to the seclusion the unisex offers is so great that the bathroom is the unusual setting of Ally's romantic fantasies: She and Billy dance in formal attire among the toilet stalls.

The piano bar right downstairs from the Cage & Fish offices is usually where the episodes come to a close. It is where the colleagues gather together, where the victories are celebrated and losses are lamented. Vonda Shepard plays herself as the bar singer. Although she has only one line of dialogue throughout the series, her songs provide the episodes with the appropriate emotional weight. Considering that Vonda's songs underline characters' emotional states (especially Ally's), emphasise plotlines and sometimes give meaning to what the audience sees on screen, it might be said that Vonda more or less serves as a master of ceremonies for the show. The regulars of the bar also include the characters simply referred to as "the Twins," who are Ally and Renee's favourite dance partners. Their symmetrical, non-talking parts add a touch of surrealist flavour to the bar's festive atmosphere.

Ally's home life with her flatmate Renee Raddick provides a counter to the predominant office setting and the courtroom scenes. It is a space of "girl-talk," where the audience gets to see Ally and Renee dissect and comment on their personal lives. The private life of the single girl is put out for observation in these scenes and Renee proves to be the more grounded one.

The show is many things at once: It is "women's TV," a romantic comedy, a courtroom drama, an ensemble piece, a serious take on feminist issues and a satirical take on the battle of the sexes. By and large, *Ally McBeal* is an old-fashioned melodrama with a postmodernist twist, with its romantic look and dimly lit interior sets, its decidedly eclectic overall aesthetic, flashes of surreal fantasy sequences, songs that intervene and sometimes cease the action, and a fictional space that is filled with zany characters. All this gives the impression that everything in the series is designed to reflect Ally's inner psyche: Ally is not merely the protagonist of this TV show; she *is* the TV show. Everything in the show is Ally McBeal; the postfeminist icon.

This isn't the first time Ally McBeal is proclaimed the pin-up girl of postfeminism. Since its first season, the show received extensive media attention regarding the gender issues it puts forth and how they relate to feminism. Especially with the publication of the notorious June 29, 1998 issue of *Time* magazine whose cover carried photographs of Susan B. Anthony, Betty Freidan and Gloria Steinem alongside Ally McBeal (as

portrayed by Calista Flockhart) with the headline "Is Feminism Dead?", the dubious phenomenon called postfeminism became a stomping ground of public debate (Figure 10). The commencement of this never-ending debate owed much to the immediate hit status of *Ally McBeal*. It was obvious that the show had hit a nerve, both with its fan base and its critics. Young women were identifying with Ally like they had never identified with another TV character before. Clearly, unmarried young women watching TV totalled up to a rich demographic population that was in need of representation. On the other hand, it might be said that *Ally McBeal* did not only represent this group but also constituted it. In other words, the show itself was performative of a very modern gender identity, the postfeminist woman of the '90s, which I will label "The Career Gal." Other than being representative and performative of this new woman, *Ally McBeal* was also representative of "The New Man," who might or might not be the "correct" match for "The Career Gal." Although it is almost impossible to isolate when the show stops observing and representing, and starts performatively constructing these identities, the next section will trace how these identities are structured.

2. PERFORMATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IDENTITIES IN *ALLY McBEAL*

Looking for characters that are illustrative of these newly defined gender identities in this particular show, the likeliest candidates seem Ally herself, the namesake of the series, and Billy Thomas (Gil Bellows), her primary love interest. Although Ally is obviously the definitive choice for "The Career Gal," Billy is not the best example to scrutinise "The New Man." First of all, Billy is not present in the series throughout its 5-year run because his character is killed off in the third season. Also, he is more of a "Mr. Right" rather than "The New Man," and these two roles are not really identical. Instead of Billy, who initially seems to be the logical choice to analyse, this thesis will examine John Cage, a senior partner at the firm where Ally works. John Cage is indeed the epitome of "The New Man" with his feminised qualities and his threatened masculinity.

2.1. Ally McBeal as "The Career Gal"

> Giles: "Buffy, maintaining a normal social life as a slayer is problematic at best."
> Buffy: "This is the '90s –the 1990s, in point of fact– and I can do both. Clark Kent has a job, I just wanna go on a date."
>
> *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*
> Season 1, Episode 5 – "Never Kill a Boy on the First Date"

In the first shot of the pilot episode, Ally is forlornly looking out the window of her office, telling the audience how she ended up here in a voiceover. In a series of flashbacks we learn that she followed her childhood sweetheart Billy to law school –Harvard, no less– but Billy later transferred to Michigan. When Ally remarks "So you're basically putting your law career between us?" Billy remains silent. "I choose the law, too," Ally says. "But I choose Boston." This choice gains Ally a career in law, but she loses Billy. So here she is, "a victim of my own choices… And I'm just starting."

The postfeminist woman as characterised by Ally might not actually be a victim but she is no superwoman of the '80s. On the contrary, she is a barrel of flaws, full of contradictions, paradoxes and insecurities. The first case she takes as a litigator at Cage & Fish is a very simple one about a sex magazine, where she only has to play the First Amendment card, but the judge rules against her defence. Leaving the courtroom with great shock, Ally muses to herself: "I had the founding fathers on my side! I mean, the constitution, public policy, and the case couldn't be lost! And I lost it…" Thus, 15 minutes into the pilot, Ally is established as a woman who loses cases that are almost impossible to lose.

Ally's flaws are not always light and comical, though. She is not simply the pure, angelic creature Mary Tyler Moore was. This is most obvious in her extramarital affairs with married men. As early as the third episode[1] of the show ("The Affair"), Ally is presented as an adulteress. This affair is only the first of the three times she has been "the other woman." Similarly, Carrie in *Sex and the City* not only has an affair with a married man, but she cheats on her own boyfriend with this married man. Ally's flawed

nature is emphasised by the fact that she cannot even walk without tripping and falling (usually at the most inappropriate moment), and her speech is full of stutters, squeals and Freudian slips. The postfeminist woman of the '90s is certainly a mess, but a lovable one. The film adaptation of the first *Bridget Jones* book makes a lucid point of this when Bridget's friends and her love interest gather around the table at the birthday party she throws for herself (which, of course, goes terrible) and propose a toast "To Bridget, who cannot cook, but who we love just as she is."

In the fourth episode ("One Hundred Tears"), Ally faces the threat of getting her licence suspended when she is checked out by The Board of Bar Overseers to see if she is mentally fit. Ally's erratic behaviour we have witnessed in the previous episodes is put forth against her and she is asked to defend herself. She has a hard time trying to defend her acts because she finds there is nothing to defend. When she learns that Whipper Cone, a judge and a friend, was the one who reported her to the bar, she confronts her:

Ally: "Do you think I'm nuts?"
Whipper: "No. But I'm not sure you have two feet on the ground, either."
Ally: (with sincere surprise) "You mean some people do?"

Evidently, Ally knows she isn't the way she should be, but she has just accepted herself this way. With the courtroom drama that ensues, every little detail about how she behaves, dresses and talks is dissected by the Board, and it becomes clear that the postfeminist woman is put on trial in front of us. When the hearings come to a close, Billy, in defence of Ally, says "I don't care what kind of club this is, but we're a lot better off with her in it." At this point, if we take "this club" (the Board) to be the feminist establishment, Billy's assertion that Ally "sees greys" as opposed to the "black and white" of the Board, is clearly the expression of a most important postfeminist sentiment. Here postfeminism is offered as the legitimate grey area of feminism and that "we're a lot better off" with it. Then, Billy's claim that Ally is "doomed" because she is able to see the grey areas, thus just cannot conform to the formulations of the Board, is in fact an articulation of the idea that feminist work has unwittingly confined women.

When Whipper stands before the Board to defend Ally (going against her own initial action), she makes a point of her femininity: "Why don't we just admit it? She stands

most guilty of being female, young and attractive." By raising the issue of femininity, Whipper emphasises the subtext. The whole episode is a challenge to the feminist "policing of femininity." In the end, the Board acquits Ally without suspending her licence. With one of the judges expressing his apprehension over this verdict by saying "God help us all," the postfeminist woman is set free from a strict feminist judgement regarding her femininity.

However, the issue of femininity is never resolved throughout the series. In the fourth episode of the second season ("It's My Party"), Ally is taken into custody in contempt of court when a judge asks her to wear a longer skirt and she doesn't comply (Figure 11). She is asked to make an apology to the court to be released but she fervently makes it clear that "[she] won't apologize." The whole team of Cage & Fish gathers together to defend Ally in the contempt hearing. When Ally is brought to the court, she is dressed in bright orange, unflattering prison clothes; a striking image with contrast to her mini skirt, that underlines her lost femininity. These unappealing clothes, with their uniformity, bagginess and unsightliness appear again in the first *Legally Blonde* film as a sign of punished femininity (Figure 12).

It is Nelle who defends Ally in the trial, making a strong point about a woman's right to her femininity:

> "[Y]ou're penalizing her because her attire is too sexually risqué. And that isn't right. . . . Why should it [undermine the credibility of the courtroom]? That very assumption endorses the myth that a sexually attractive woman can't have credibility. . . . Every billboard and magazine cover tells us we should look like models. All the while, we have to fight to mindset 'If she's beautiful, she must be stupid.' I fight it, too. And I bend to the prejudice. I don't have [Ally's] courage. If I did, I might come in here and let my hair down once. [Lets her hair loose]. If I didn't care about people automatically thinking I'm a bimbo, I might not always wear jackets. [Takes off jacket]. But people, men and women, draw unfair conclusions. We've come to expect the bias. But not from judges. What's most disappointing here, you saw this woman perform in court. You heard her argue. She won her case. And you're still judging her on hemlines. What do we have to do?"

After Nelle's speech, Ally is released. However, when the group gathers at Ally's place for a party and Richard makes a toast "to Ally, getting to keep those nasty, little skirts

as a signature of progress for womankind," the question "Was it worth it?" appears. Billy asks, "This thing about your skirt… Who cares, really? But our whole office basically had to shut down to address it today." Here, the show evades giving a straight answer, but it is implied that even though the fuss about femininity might have gone too far, its ardent defence, at least on principle, is justifiable. In the end, we might conclude that it is not the unproblematic reclamation of femininity that defines the postfeminist woman, but the ambiguous state of mind that is caused by the tense relationship between femininity and feminism.

This ideal postfeminist woman might be having a hard time trying to reconcile her desire to be feminine with the endeavours of second wave feminism, but she obviously owes her liberated sexuality to those very endeavours. Ally never holds back from sexual experimentation. Although she is always depicted as a woman with a very active sexual life, most of the time her sexuality is cloaked with a gentle veil of romance. In an earlier episode when Elaine points out to her that she is "a little on the active side," Ally protests that she actually doesn't have sex that often, even though she kisses a lot. The third season, however, opens with an episode ("Car Wash") where Ally has sex with a stranger in a car wash and that romantic cover that masks Ally's sexuality is lifted. So much so that, when she's relating the event to John, she warns that her using the phrase "make love" should not mislead him; because what she and the car wash guy did was "that vulgar verb we use to describe what two people…"

In the next episode of this season ("Buried Pleasures"), Ally accepts, albeit apprehensively, to go out on a date with Ling, who hits on Ally after having an erotic dream about her. They not only go out on a date, but also dance at the bar and later, almost ritualistically, kiss (Figure 13). The final conversation Ally and Ling have about their little affair proceeds as follows:

Ally:	"There was that one missing ingredient you need for the tingle."
Ling:	"And we both know what that is, don't we?"
[in unison]	"Penis."
Ling:	"I like a man."
Ally:	"So do I."
Ling:	"But I'm glad we did it."

Ally:	"So am I."
Ling:	"Promise me you'll never tell anyone?"
Ally:	"I already told Renee. But I will promise you this, Ling: I will never kiss another woman."
Ling:	"Deal."

The most important aspect of this plotline is that its emphasis is undoubtedly on a bi-curious affair, rather than a homosexual one. It is always emphasised that Ally's and Ling's sexual interests *actually* lie elsewhere, and that they do what they do together out of mere curiosity. This plotline is a very clear example of an important postfeminist attribute: homosexuality is not abject to the heterosexual postfeminist woman. Therefore, the (hetero)sexual identity of the postfeminist woman seems to be free from a melancholic definition, since it is not fixed or constrained. The fluidity of sexual identity is very much promoted in many postfeminist works, and actually seems like the height of a very queer concept. However, a closer look reveals that the playful approach to homosexuality as an "every woman's fantasy," in fact keeps homosexuality at a closer but probably less dangerous place. With this approach, homosexuality becomes a "been there, done that" and the gay adventure of a "sexually liberated" woman ultimately becomes the immaculate means to secure her heterosexual identity.

For instance: Ally's final promise to stay chaste concerning her homosexuality is delivered as a romantic vow, as a tribute to Ling for giving her the great secret that has enriched her life. The homosexual affair Ally had was great while it lasted, a little overwrought maybe, but still great. Nonetheless, only when it is guaranteed that it won't happen again, the "deal" is sealed. Thus, the seemingly romantic promise not to kiss another woman, at once becomes an obvious disavowal. It is not the overt rejection of a lesbian identity that is problematic in this episode, but the operative reaffirmation of a heterosexual identity as the "original" identity, through a play with lesbianism. To make it clearer, although Ally has a lesbian affair, every measure is taken to safeguard her heterosexual identity, and with her promise not to kiss another woman, it is fortified. The popular postfeminist attitude towards a heterosexual identity diluted with lesbianism seemingly offers queer possibilities, however, potential transgressions fail in the face of the strength of the underlying heteronormativity.

When the idea of playing with homosexuality to protect heterosexuality is taken out of the terms of a homo vs. hetero binarism, and is thought in terms of identity politics, it might concluded that the melancholia of the final fixity of identity is no less profound. Homosexuality is still "the other" (though, apparently, not abject), and the binarism prevails. However, if Ally's final promise is read as a sardonic remark, it might be said that the Ally-Ling plotline, in a very circuitous manner, reveals the underlying melancholia of heterosexuality. The previous 40 minutes of homosexual eroticism Ally has engaged in, indeed makes a mockery of the seemingly adamant nature of her final speech act of promising. From this (queer) point of view, Ally's self-reassurance that her heterosexuality is fixed, original and final is ridiculed because her promise discloses the operation of performativity within her "secure" identity, hence its fictive nature. In other words, the authenticity of Ally's heterosexuality rests on the performative act of promising, which at the same time exposes its falsity.

To clarify; heterosexual identity is defined by its exclusion of homosexuality, as exemplified by Ally's promise to Ling. This exclusion is usually a subtle one; exclusion of homosexuality is not boldly underlined. However, in this case, Ally and Ling face what they exclude. They play a lengthy and nicely choreographed game, and actually *show us* what they are excluding. Thus, interestingly enough, what is excluded is at the same time included. Melancholia of a fixed identity has never been more obvious.

On the other hand, it is never that easy to undermine the performative power of Ally's promise. Remembering Butler's formulation of "citationality," it is clear that the mock-romanticism of Ally's promise "cites" the "real" romanticism of heroines of many films and books. The humourous success of the scene depends on this "citation;" the scene cites the "realness" of the romanticism of an original. If Ally's promise was made, say, to Billy, as "I promise never to kiss another man," it would have been presented with "real" emotional weight. It is the fact that Ally makes the promise to a *woman* is what gives the scene its humourous outcome, because it belies the "real" and "original" emotionality of what this performative act of promising cites. Therefore, it might be said that the assumption of the "originality" of the heterosexual identity pervades throughout Ally's dialogue with Ling, and thus makes it harder to overturn the performative power of her promise.

Although Ally flirts with and kisses another woman, ultimately, this only reinforces her heterosexual identity. In fact, another instance of Ally's sexuality might even point out to her homophobia. In the first episode of the fifth season ("Friends and Lovers"), Ally's therapist advises her to "go to herself" to "extinguish the [sexual] urge" she has developed towards Glenn Foy, "the boy" who is the ex-lover of Ally's new friend. Ally is practically horrified to hear that her therapist is advising her to masturbate and calls him "a lewd person," but decides to give it a try. When she gets into her bedroom to masturbate, the setting underlines the fact that she is alone. There are candles by the bedside, sexy music playing, and the male dummy Ally sometimes goes to bed with is "staring" at her from the corner. Before long, Ally is disgusted with the idea and does not go through with it. Ally's contempt for autoerotic activity is certainly surprising and raises the question who in the audience this scene speaks to.

Calvin Thomas, a self-proclaimed queer heterosexual, writes "anyone who has ever masturbated . . . is 'queer' in the sense of having participated in what is necessarily a form of same-sex activity, whatever the heteroerotics of one's reveries or visual aids." (2000:43). Considering Ally's inexplicably firm disdain is caused by the idea of touching her genitals, it is clear that the gross factor in this idea is touching *female* genitals. While Ally's fling with Ling was acceptable to the point that it reaffirmed her own heterosexuality (it was merely a date and a kiss, after all), autoeroticism seems too much of a transgression for her, probably because there is no one around to receive the final performative reclamation of her heterosexuality[2].

Ling's side of this affair should be considered, too. Ling Woo is an Asian-American who enters the show as a client. Later she is hired by Richard as an associate. Her character is a dream come true for a sit-com: She is litigious, bitchy, irritated, irritating, vicious and simply perfect. Among these, her perfection is what defines her. She is the manager of a factory, she runs an escort service, she also has a mud-wrestling club and a products line. She is also a lawyer and a champion twister. She later becomes a judge and a TV personality. She has given up saying the word "sex" because both men and women get extremely aroused when they hear her say it. She "has a way of making things happen." Indeed, she is nothing short of perfect.

In the nineteenth episode of the second season ("Let's Dance"), Ling overhears that Elaine's dance partner was injured right before a twist contest and she volunteers to be her partner: "Don't you people know by now? I can do anything." Elaine says they actually might enter the contest as two women because "a transvestite danced last year." After a day's practice, they enter the contest, with Ling in drag (Figure 14) and qualify for the finals. It seems Ling can do everything, including being a man, despite her feminine figure. On the other hand, for the audience, she actually doesn't make a convincing man. With her small hands, petite body and loose-fitting shirt, she is definitely nothing but a woman in drag. However, Ling's ethnicity, if anything, helps her pass as a man. Even though her miniscule body gives her trick away, her Asian face takes some of it back. The success of a drag performance relies on how able the performer is in convincing that s/he is of the opposite gender, that the performance is "unreadable" as a fake. If Ling's femininity is telltale of her "actual" gender, her ethnicity belies the reality of her gender. To the Western eyes, an Asian is "unreadable" in every sense. The fact that it is sometimes impossible to tell one Asian from the other is a widely stated Western cliché. Not only that, but it is harder to read an Asian's gender; at times, a Western person might find it hard to tell if an Asian person male of female. Thus, with the right clothes, Ling does pass as a little Asian man (Of course, the idea that Asian men are physically smaller than Western men helps). Not perfectly, though: Another couple at the dance contest looks at her/him with inquisitive eyes. Still, she makes a good enough man to take caution against gender confusion.

In "Television/Feminism: *HeartBeat* and Prime Time Lesbianism," Sasha Torres observes that TV shows like *The Golden Girls* and *Kate and Allie*, both of which feature female protagonists living together, at one time or another present lesbian guest characters "whose difference from the regular characters has been sufficient to ease the homophobic anxieties that might be generated by representations of unmarried women together." (1993:179). A similar dynamic can be seen in the presentation of Margaret Camaro in *Ally McBeal*, who appears in four episodes of the show (Figure 15). A sociologist, she is first seen in another plotline of the abovementioned "Let's Dance" episode, where she is called in as an expert witness. Richard attacks her on the witness stand, displaying his blatant bigotry and shallowness by saying that she looks like a

man, asking her if she is a lesbian and pointing out that her last name Camaro is a "muscle car." Here, Richard assumes Margaret's homosexuality (for, she has not come out) by looking at her "manly" appearance and attire, and by the performative act of attributing her last name with "manly" connotations. It is obvious that he conflates gender and sexuality to the satisfaction of his own homophobia: If Margaret looks like a man, where in fact she *should* look like a woman, she *must* be a lesbian. If she is a lesbian, she must be a man, for she simply *cannot* be a woman. Thus, Margaret Camaro is presented as the "real" lesbian, and with her obvious dissimilarity to Ally and Ling, she negates the validity of their homosexual affair. Ally and Ling are "too feminine and beautiful" to be "real" lesbians, so to speak. Moreover, by way of Richard's association of lesbianism with manhood in Margaret, Ally's womanhood is renaturalised, too. Since Ally is not a lesbian (because she is too feminine), she is a "real" woman. Thus, it is not only heterosexuality that is reclaimed as "natural" and "original" here, but also the female gender identity, "woman." To sum it up, Margaret functions to renaturalise femininity, heterosexuality and womanhood. It is no coincidence that she first appears in the same episode as Ling's drag performance. Margaret's inclusion in this particular episode is a cautionary reality check to diminish the homosexual overtones of Ling's drag performance and her woman-to-woman dance with Elaine.

Margaret's reappearance later in three more episodes provides room for a different kind of reassurance of the heterosexual matrix. When having a discussion with Ally, Margaret says that when she went to see *The Wizard of Oz*, she "came out with a crush on Dorothy." *The Wizard of Oz*, its protagonist Dorothy and the actress who played her (Judy Garland) are probably the most important icons of the gay male culture. Thus, Margaret's reference to this particular film makes a connection between lesbianism and male homosexuality. These two identities are brought together here with their "homosexualness." Parallels and differences of the gay male experience and the lesbian experience have been widely debated topics in the academia for a long time. However, I will not discuss these points here, because the fact that Margaret's lesbianism is universalised to a complete understanding of homosexuality does not provide an opportunity to discuss them. In other words, the conflation of gay male culture and lesbianism in *Ally McBeal* does not serve to make a point about either of these identities. However, it does serve to situate homosexuality as a counterpart to

heterosexuality, thus, to reaffirm the binary opposition of homo vs. hetero, by eradicating the specificities of singular homosexualities. Here, Margaret does not speak as a lesbian; she speaks as a homosexual, in that, what defines her is her status as a "not heterosexual." This definition of a homosexual person as a "not heterosexual" explicates that heterosexuality is the privileged and definitive identity in this binarism.

In episode thirteen of the third season ("Pursuit of Loneliness"), Ally defends a client who wants to annul his marriage because his wife is gay. She is confident that they have a strong case but the judge gives her hard a time by stipulating that people have the right not to disclose their sexual orientations even if they are getting married. Ally protests that this is the equivalent of fraud but the judge dismisses the case without even hearing from the opposing counsel. After the trial, Ally goes out on a date with this judge (Hammond), who at the end of their great date asks her if she believed what she said at the court. When Ally says "Yes," he discloses "in the spirit of honesty" that he is bisexual. The next day when Hammond confronts Ally about this matter. He asks if his disclosure makes a difference, and a dialogue ensues between them, which is more like two monologues that follow each other:

> Ally: "I suppose I associate a lifestyle of promiscuity with bisexuality. It may not be fair, but I do. I suppose I'm concerned that a bisexual man has sexual needs that I can't fulfil. I suppose I'd like to think of my husband taking my son to a ballgame and not having to worry whether daddy is checking out the pitcher's glutes. I suppose I'm nervous about my kids being teased because of their father's sexual [orientation]. I suppose I'm worried about diseases. I suppose, in the end… I'm far more homophobic than I ever imagined."
>
> . . .
>
> Hammond: "As for your concern over promiscuity, when any person gets married, he or she pledges fidelity. For you to assume a bisexual person is less able to be monogamous… That is a prejudice. As for taking my son to a ballgame, if your straight husband took your daughter to a women's basketball game and you were concerned about daddy checking out the point guard's glutes, you'd have issues to work on with your husband, straight or not. As for your fears for your kids being teased? Cowardice. Your fears of disease? Ignorance, bias… Take your pick. As for your all too comfortable resignation to being homophobic, without the will to root out the why, or the compulsion to address it, that's as sad as it is inexcusable."

After this exchange, Ally is ashamed of her bigotry, but still rejects Hammond. However, she regrets her decision later. She goes to Hammond to tell him that she would want to give him a try, only to change her mind once again. When she sees him, she fantasises about him with another man, and says that "I just can't get by it. . . . Sometimes prejudice just wins out." The final shot of the episode has Ally sitting on a bench with her hands cupping her face, quietly lamenting the deepness of her own bigotry.

The plotline of this episode is remarkable in its depiction of how bigoted a person who passes herself as progressive and liberal can be. There is not one bit of irony or sarcasm in the depiction of Ally's disenchantment with herself. It is indeed true that this episode puts bisexuality on the map as a legitimate identity. However, on another level, it also legitimises homophobia, too. Ally's performative self-declarations of her homophobia and her sincere distress over it, makes homophobia an apparently unwelcome, but nevertheless defining aspect of her identity. Just as her date with Ling brought her closer to homosexuality but banished lesbianism out of her identity, her unenthusiastic refusal of Hammond brings her closer to being a homophobe but banishes the stigma of it off her identity. When she sits on the bench in the final shot, unable to understand why she couldn't bring herself to go out with a bisexual man, the audience is so busy with the earnestness of her regret that the most important question goes unanswered: "What is stopping her?" *Ally McBeal*'s answer to that question seems to be "Something just is." By steering clear of providing a satisfactory answer to this question, a certain degree of homophobia is normalised and accepted into the identity of the postfeminist woman[3].

Although Ally dismisses a relationship with Hammond because she equates his bisexuality with promiscuity, considering the frequency of her sexual shenanigans, she herself might easily be characterised as a promiscuous woman. This is where Elaine, Ally's secretary, comes to her rescue. Elaine is a self-proclaimed office slut, always underlining her sexuality and making passes at lawyers, visiting clients and Ally's dates at the office. Her promiscuity works as an equaliser for Ally's sexuality. While Ally is promiscuous, it is always highlighted that Elaine is "more" promiscuous. However, it is

obvious that Elaine's promiscuity is just performative. She is deemed promiscuous because she tells everyone that she is. In fact, she is seen with a man in a sexual situation just once throughout the whole series.

On the other hand, the fact that Elaine's overt sexuality is only a performance is underscored many times in the show, especially when she is given serious weight as a character and the audience is offered an insight into her quirky behaviour. Underneath all the weird and overtly sexual behaviour she performs, she is presented as a lonely woman who is desperate for attention. This aspect of Elaine's character is repeated several times from the first episodes on, rendering her a double-layered character: Sexual, outgoing and weird on the outside (performance); lonely, human and normal on the inside (reality). However, I would argue that even her performance is performative. The fact that there is an unconcealed "performance" going on conceals the fact that her "reality" is a performance, too. Actually it is always Elaine herself who expresses that she is "merely performing:" When trying to explain that she hits on other people's boyfriends only as a joke, she laments, "What you have to realize with me is that my whole life is pretty much just an act" (Season 5, Episode 7 – "Nine One One"). Besides this, there are many episodes in the show where Elaine emphasises that her acts are mere performance, a performance that is devised either to conceal her loneliness or to attract attention. Elaine performatively constitutes herself as a "performer," and through these speech acts, she creates a "reality" of her identity. Her double-layered character does not come as a one-time revelation, but is constructed as such from the very beginning. She is always saying, "I am doing all these things but deep down I am a different person." Thus, on closer inspection, Elaine's identity is *not* double-layered as she claims it to be (a lonely woman who conceals the "reality" of her desperation with a sexual "performance"), but it is given this double-layered appearance through a meticulous juggling of "performance" and "reality," both of which work to normalise Elaine's "real" identity. The fact that Elaine performatively asserts her actions are just performance ("My whole life is an act") while again performatively declaring her underlying "reality" ("I'm lonely") is an unmistakable sign that both her identities are fictive on Butlerian terms.

Elaine presents herself as an inventor of sorts, who invents a "face bra" (a "bra" that is worn around the head to diminish gravity-related aging), customised condoms with little sayings on them, a "husband CD" (a CD recording that is filled with husbandly voices which works as a substitute for a husband) and goggles for mothers with wipers attached to them (to wipe the glasses clean when a baby pees on them while changing diapers). She also dances and sings quite often at the downstairs bar. These inventions and barroom performances, too, underline her as the double-layered character that she claims she is: The inventions are seen as desperate attempts at getting attention, and her dancing and singing emphasises that she is a "performer." Her onstage performances which are always sexually titillating, from the songs she chooses to the choreography, unites with Elaine's own assertions that her sexuality is merely a performance. The resulting portrait is a "normal" woman who has a "normal" sexuality – promiscuity is a performance that hides her loneliness.

In the tenth episode of the third season ("Just Friends"), Elaine goes out on a blind date with the friend of a friend, a handsome man named Bob. Although they click instantly and the date goes great, by the end of it she learns that Bob only wanted to go out with her because someone told him that Elaine is "easy" and has sex with men on the first date. Elaine is so hurt by this that the next day, as an attempt to get out of character, she shows up at the office in typically conservative clothes, with her hair in a neat bun (Figure 16). When she tells Ally what happened the other day, the following exchange occurs between them:

Ally: "Do you regularly sleep with men on the first day?"
Elaine: "No."
Ally: "Then the guy got it wrong. Think about what that car wash guy thinks of me!"
Elaine: "That was out of character with you, Ally. With me… whether or not I actually sleep around or not, the reputation that I have… Maybe it's in my character."
Ally: "Elaine, you enjoy putting yourself out there as a sexual person. And if some people misconstrue that and think you're a slut… Well, they just get it wrong. That's all."

Elaine's date with Bob threatens Elaine's double-layered identity. In the eyes of Bob, Elaine ceases to be "the normal woman who only performs the slut" and indeed

becomes a slut, which is why she puts on another performance as "the demure lady with a hair bun" to separate her performance of the slut from the normality of her reality. The final dialogue between Ally and Elaine normalises Elaine's double-layered identity, with an emphasised privilege on her "reality" as a normal woman over her "performance" as the slut. By saying "Maybe it's in my character," Elaine underlines her double-layered identity: She never intended to be a slut in actuality, she was just performing. Also in this dialogue, Ally's sexuality is normalised, too, by Elaine's remark that the car wash guy was "out of character" with Ally, a one-time fantasy. Although it is always highlighted that Elaine's promiscuity is a performance, it nevertheless serves to taper Ally's promiscuous behaviour. It is not just Elaine's performance of the slut that is a foil for Ally's promiscuity, but the fact that it is a *layer of "performance" over a layer of "reality."* Thus, it might be concluded that the tension between the "performance" and the "reality" of Elaine's double-layered identity is vital for the normalisation of Ally's promiscuous sexuality. It is through this tension that Ally finds room to exorcise the demons of her own "abnormal" sexual behaviour. By performatively suspending the underlying dichotomy of performance vs. reality in Elaine's identity, the normalisation of Ally's identity comes off much more firmly.

The parameters of Ally's sexuality are defined by many things. As I have tried to illustrate, her heterosexuality is fixed and "original" even though it is presented as ambiguous and prone to change. We know that after her date with Ling, her sexual desire is fixed on the "opposite" sex. Her sexuality is not only homophobic (as can be seen in her disgust with her own genitals), but also strictly alloerotic (as can be seen in her inability to masturbate). Other than these, Ally flirts with the idea of intergenerational sex. In the first episode in the second season ("The Real World"), Ally is tempted to date an 18-year-old boy called Jason (who "could be 15 as well as 18," she complains to her therapist) but is embarrassed about having thoughts about such a young boy. Just like she does with Ling, Ally does go on a date with Jason. Right about the time they are getting ready to leave, she learns that Jason's uncle is the groundkeeper of Fenway Park[4]. Ally gets very excited and they go there to end their date by playing an imaginary baseball game. The lengthy montage that shows Ally and Jason throwing make-believe balls at each other in the empty field underlines that they are "playing a game," and an "imaginary" one at that, just a fantasy. When Ally walks

Jason home, Vonda sings a rendition of Roy Orbinson's "In the Real World" on the soundtrack:

> In dreams we do so many things
> We set aside the rules we know.
> . . .
> In the real world, there are things that we can't change
> And endings come to us in ways that we can't rearrange
> I love you and you love me, but sometimes we must let it be
> In the real world, in the real world.

Just like lesbianism, intergenerational sexuality is a fantasy for Ally; a fantasy that is flirted with, and a disorderly thirst that is quickly quenched. To sum it up, Ally lives in a world where her heterosexuality is seemingly ambiguous but nevertheless fixed, homosexuality is still "the other," autoeroticism is abject, and intergenerational sex is an innocent fantasy. Ally's sexuality is not merely hetero- but definitely heterosexist. At best, she is an unruly child who is bound to come around. One of the other characters actually makes a point of this, that to Ally "sex is ultimately a means of procreation." This can also be seen in Ally's yearning for a family. In the twenty-second episode of the fourth season, the following exchange occurs between Ally and her mother (Jeannie McBeal):

Ally:	"I feel so embarrassed."
Jeannie:	"Why? For loving somebody?"
Ally:	"I don't know. I saw myself pushing a baby carriage down the street today. And I thought, well, okay, I sometimes crave what... Do you remember when I used to stand in front of the mirror and recite Gloria Steinem?"
Jeannie:	"Yeah."
Ally:	"I used to do that to distract myself from being so miserable because Billy didn't call me. And, uh... 'Sex and race, because they are easy, visible differences, have been the primary way of organizing human beings into...' "
(in unison)	" 'superior...' "
Ally:	" '...and inferior groups.' Well, I have believed in these words all of my life. So now, I just, I feel really embarrassed that I'm so incomplete."
Jeannie:	"You think wanting a family makes you a lesser person? Not that you've made a habit of accepting any wisdom from me Ally but... Family's everything. It's where the strong live and it's where they love."

What we have here is a very barefaced consecration of family. With Ally's recitation of Steinem, it is implied that a woman's right to choose to have a family has been restricted by feminism, and with Jeannie's advocacy of the family, a postfeminist answer to this dilemma is given. Here, the older woman sanctifying the younger woman's choices is typical postfeminist imagery[5]. The older woman's experience and age place her in line with second wave feminism, and through her blessing, postfeminist choices which might not be parallel to feminist ideals are "cleansed" and exalted. However, when Ally's desire to have a family is thought alongside the rigidity of her heterosexuality, the issue becomes more problematic. What is advocated here is not merely the choice to have a family, but a re-institutionalisation of heterosexuality.

Halfway through the fifth season, Ally does end up having a family, albeit not exactly the way she had planned. When Maddie, a 10-year old girl, shows up at Ally's door claiming she is her genetic daughter, the audience is informed that ten years ago Ally has had her eggs harvested as part of an infertility study (Season 5, Episode 11 – "A Kick in the Head"). The eggs were then given to a man by mistake, who fertilised them and brought up Maddie by himself in New York. Now that the man is dead, Maddie decided to track down her genetic mother instead of living with her aunt. Ally is convinced that Maddie should live with her because Aunt Bonnie is a bar singer who is out every night. In the end, Ally ends up becoming a mother, without getting married, conceiving, carrying a child for nine months, and most importantly, without a man. Moreover, the child comes into Ally's life conveniently grown up, so Ally never goes through the ordeals of sleepless nights, changing diapers, or infant diseases. This is postfeminist fantasy at its wildest.

In the twelfth episode of the fifth season ("The New Day"), we see Ally and Maddie trying to warm up to their newfound family. Ally is joyful; just as she is waking up, the main theme from "Leave it to Beaver" plays on the soundtrack. She goes through the motions of what her notion of motherhood is with perfection. Revelling in her new role as "the mother," Ally makes pancakes, juices oranges and, in one perfectly satirical shot, milks a cow in her kitchen (Figure 17). However, when she tries to wake Maddie up to send her to school, she says she doesn't want to go. Ally says that school is not an

optional thing and insists that she must get up. Maddie replies: "Fine! You're a responsible mother! Have a cookie!" This harrows Ally so much that her daughter turns into a monster before her eyes (Figure 18). Apparently, what Ally would prefer is motherhood not only without a man, but also without a child.

Elaine is the only other major character in the show who faces issues of motherhood. In the ninth episode of the third season ("Blue Christmas" – a Christmas season episode), she finds an abandoned baby ditched in a nativity scene in a manger on the street. She instantly bonds with him, whom she names Elliot, and decides to go to court to keep him. Because she is given temporary custody of the child for the duration of the court proceedings, she and the other office workers get to spend time with Elliot.

Just like Ally, Elaine gets to be a mother without a man in the picture. The significance of this idea is emphasised in Elaine's words: "When I was a little girl, I dreamed about being a grown up. In the dream there was always a child. But not a husband. I used to think 'But that doesn't make sense.' . . . Now it does." Also, her relationship with the baby is presented obviously with Biblical references. The fact that Elaine finds Elliot while he is lying in place of a Baby Jesus doll in a nativity scene is a striking metaphor for an Immaculate Conception. At the beginning of the episode, even a *tableau vivant* with a visual composition that resembles the classical iconography of Madonna with the Baby Jesus is presented (Figure 19). These overtones of divinity in this plot may be construed as a blessing of this postfeminist fantasy – having a child without a man. On the other hand, considering Elaine is the "office slut," the plot is also a Madonna/Whore story.

At court, Elaine's past is aired out by the DA, which makes it very hard to make a case of Elaine as a fit parent. All the same, the judge decides that Elaine will indeed make a good mother and grants her custody. However, just as she is getting used to her new life with Elliot, his biological mother shows up and by claiming she was suffering from postpartum depression, takes the baby back.

This episode starts of as an outright challenge to the dichotomy of the Madonna/Whore story, by viewing the double-layered character of Elaine as a "Madonna." Again, the

point that Elaine's "so-called" promiscuity is just a performance is made several times at the court (Elaine as the Biblical "Whore"). This point is pitted against the "reality" of her identity (Elaine as the Biblical "Madonna"). This is what gets her the custody of Elliot. However, this is achieved only to take the baby back from her, and ultimately Elaine is not given the chance to fully enjoy this particular postfeminist fantasy.

The difference between the presentations of Ally's and Elaine's "Immaculate Conceptions" raises the question of the class distinction between them, which, again is made issue of several times throughout the show. The life Elaine leads with her pink-collar job is always presented as "less than" Ally's white-collar yuppie life. This obvious class distinction is a definitive aspect of their relationship. In the plotlines that concern them achieving (Ally) or failing at (Elaine) the fantasy of becoming postfeminist mothers, the class distinction is obvious: It is never made an issue that Ally is just as carefree in her sexual life as Elaine is. I have argued above that the inherent tension in the double-layered sexuality of Elaine is what normalises Ally's promiscuity. That argument was founded on the binary opposition of performance vs. reality in Elaine's identity. On a related note, upholding the binary opposition of Madonna vs. Whore in this particular plot works similarly. The ambiguity created around Elaine (Madonna or Whore?) all the while asserting that she is "really" a "Madonna," justifies the final scene where Elliot is taken away. On the other hand, when Ally suddenly becomes a mother, no doubt is raised about her potential for motherhood. Ally the Yuppie gets to have a child without a man, Elaine the Secretary is not allowed this.

Looking at the big picture, Ally "flirts" with sexualities, but every time, her heterosexuality is reaffirmed as the original sexuality. Not only that, but her heterosexuality is constrained within traditional and unchanging boundaries. And a re-consecration of the family institutionalises her sexuality. Thus, the pluralism *Ally McBeal* seems to be promoting has its pivot on a very heterosexist and regulatory traditionalism. Although many points are problematised and explored along the way, the construction of the new postfeminist woman does not exceed the boundaries of its predecessors in any striking way.

Laurie Ouellette successfully points out to Ally's role as a (postfeminist) negotiator (2002). She exemplifies this by pointing out that "Ally negotiates a postfeminist compromise that is meant to be taken more seriously" as opposed to Nelle's assertive feminist voice and Elaine's "humorous, antifeminist dismissal." (324). The rift between femininity and feminism has reached such an extreme point that the modern woman is torn between these two possibilities. *Ally McBeal*, on the other hand, is based on the idea that no such choice has to be made, and that the modern woman can indeed be both. This is most apparent in the penultimate episode of the show ("All of Me"), where Cage, Fish & McBeal takes the case of a woman with a split personality disorder. One of the personalities, Helena, is a tough career woman who manages her own designer line, while the other personality, Helen, is a sensitive, quiet housewife who writes poetry and paints. Helena retains the services of Richard and Liza to divorce her husband, but Ally decides to represent Helen, who loves her husband dearly and says that Helena is trying to separate them.

In the courtroom, with Richard and Liza representing Helena, and Ally and John representing Helen, the case boils down to proving which personality constitutes the core identity. Helen did come first and devised Helena to compensate for her own weaknesses, but now it is Helena who occupies the body %95 of the time. In the end, the judge rules in favour of Helen and appoints her husband as the guardian, who then gives her medication to extinguish the personality of Helena. However, the medication eliminates Helen and it is Helena who prevails.

Preceding the series finale, the character of Helen/a emerges as a concise phrasing of the central themes of *Ally McBeal*, embodying all the binarisms the show seeks to problematise. Within Helen vs. Helena, there is the housewife vs. the career woman, traditionalism vs. feminist progression, marriage vs. singlehood, soul vs. body, art vs. materialism, weak vs. strong, etc. The point that these dichotomies are "unhealthy" is made several times throughout the episode along with the assertion that these elements belong together as long as they are organically integrated.

On the other hand, Helen is obviously valued over Helena by everyone at the firm, so the fact that Ally and John, who are the two major identification points for the audience,

are the ones to represent Helen is no surprise. Helen is deemed to be the original identity, who is entitled to be enriched by Helena, who, in turn, has to admit to her own secondary place. Helen says that they could unproblematically occupy the same body up until Helena completely took over. It is never explicitly revealed what caused this violent split between Helen and Helena, but John says that the fact that Helena is privileged as the more successful one "speaks more to our world than anything else." Thus, Helena, who should have stayed as the inferior personality, overbore the "original" identity of Helen, because of her (Helena's) qualities that are undeservedly privileged in our society. The underlying assertion here is that it is okay to be merely Helen, but never merely Helena. A woman can be assertive, tough, careerist, and successful as long as she does not forget her "real" role as a domestic creature whose "real" joy should lie in her traditional role as a gentle housewife and a loving mother.

When in the presence of Ally, Helen is able to overcome Helena "for some reason." Ally even takes her in as an overnight houseguest to prevent Helena's intrusion before Helen's testimony. Ally is also presented an example of a successful amalgamation of Helen and Helena. She is quietly watched by John when she is kindly explaining to her daughter that she has to change their plans to go to court, which is presented as an idyllic tableau of everyday life. The answer seems to be a compromise here and a compromise there, but a professional life is allowed providing it does not interfere with domestic life, which is highlighted as an essential actuality. Just before the series' farewell, the postfeminist woman epitomised by Ally herself is depicted as an exemplary ideal. The primary conflict in Helen/a's dilemma is the impossibility of the choice to be either Helen or Helena. It is a problem of choosing the sort of woman one has to be. Ally as a woman with a successful career who nonetheless does not overlook her "natural" femininity and domestic impulses, is presented as the unproblematic synthesis of this problem.

Ally started off as a liberated and enlightened young woman; an epitome of pluralism. By the end of the fifth season, no more questions are asked about her identity. She is defined in a clear-cut way as a heterosexual woman. Accordingly, the woman Ally ends up being is very different to the woman that she was. As I have stated at the beginning, Ally starts her TV life as a stuttering, blundering anti-hero. However, by the end of the

fifth season, she has turned out to be an exceptionally "complete" woman. Todd, an attorney Ally interviews while considering hiring new people for the firm, observes this[6]:

> Todd: "Ally, you're senior partner at a very young age. You have your own house. I'm told you have a child. You have this whole, complete life, without a male partner. This makes you an 'alpha female Type A.' "

Yes, Ally ends up having it all, thus, achieving the ultimate postfeminist goal. With Ally's achievement, the audience, who has been invited to identify with this incomplete and ambiguous woman, is appeased, moulded and brought into being as a very fixed identity, which leaves no room for queer to thrive.

2.2. John Cage as "The New Man"

> Carrie: "As women's roles evolve and change we assume that men's do as well. There are hundreds upon hundreds of articles written about the new man. But does this new man really exist? Perhaps he's just the old man renamed and repackaged by some clever PR woman. Are the men of today less threatened by a woman's power or are they just acting?"
>
> *Sex and the City*
> Season 6, Episode 5 – "Lights, Camera, Relationship"

Probably the most important aspect of *Ally McBeal* is that it is the only postfeminist work to make room for the depiction of the male gender outside the female gaze. Men in, for instance *Sex and the City* hardly ever transcend their cartoonish portrayals, whereas in *Ally McBeal*, the audience sees men not only through the eyes of Ally, but also in their homosocial and solitary environments. This quality of the show provides us with an opportunity to analyse how men are viewed within the postfeminist era.

The preliminary factor that defines this "new man" is the fact that he is facing a threat to his masculinity. Therefore, he is not very different from "the career gal" who, as related above, is in the troublesome process of reclaiming her femininity. Indeed, "the new man" possesses qualities that may have been construed as feminine in an earlier

time. He certainly is not the virile man he used to be. The best example of "the new man" in *Ally McBeal*, as I have argued before, proves to be John Cage.

John Cage, a senior partner at Cage & Fish, is seen for the first time in the first episode of the show. He is absent from the pilot episode because, Richard tells us, "he's out today getting his frown lines botoxed." When he finally gets to meet Ally (and the audience), he has been busted with a hooker and is facing soliciting charges. He is deeply embarrassed and he addresses the people at the office to apologise. However, in his speech he makes a point of his own honesty; instead of going to a bar and "under the pretext of, perhaps, a budding relationship, seduce [a woman] into satisfying my sexual needs," he has chosen the moral higher ground of soliciting a prostitute. "And for that I could never be ashamed."

The fact that John pronounces soliciting a prostitute as the moral thing to do (because it is honest) carries the implication that his shame lies elsewhere. He says that he is ashamed to have brought on embarrassment to the firm but clearly his humiliation is caused by his inability to carry out the male deed of "screwing a whore" without blundering. It is situations like these that make it hard for him to position his masculinity in an unproblematically stable place. His masculinity is in constant need of emphasis, and John is continuously trying to reproduce and underline his masculinity, and usually fails. Given that Ally, the postfeminist woman, goes to great lengths to regain her femininity and John, the new man, is trying to come to terms with his lessened masculinity, it seems that gender in the postfeminist era is understood as a fluid matter. Identities are in crisis.

Aside from his insecurities, John is a quirky character. He stutters; to fix his stutter, he sings midway through his speech; when singing doesn't work, he exclaims "Poughkeepsie," a word, he claims, that works as a corrective with its phonetic distinctiveness; when "Poughkeepsie" doesn't work, word association causes him to blurt out words and phrases like "New York," "Frank Sinatra" (Poughkeepsie is a town in New York), or "poop." His nose whistles. He prepares his closings barefooted "to get a better feel." He has a remote control for his toilet flush, because he "likes a fresh bowl." He can make all these quirks work for him while trying a case, but outside the

courtroom he is simply a weird guy and he is completely unable to fill the male gender role he thinks he should be effortlessly occupying.

It is John himself who problematises his own feminisation; to the others, his quirks are mostly endearing. Actually, he gets to be with the foxiest women, but even this cannot convince him of his masculinity. Symbolic phallic imagery and images of fake power surround John's character and mock his failed masculinity, as if to remind him of what he supposedly should have but lacks. For instance, he keeps a frog, named Stefan. When Stefan dies, Nelle, the most beautiful woman John gets to date, gives him another frog as a present. John also keeps a battery powered toy monkey, which plays the cymbals. When John is speaking to Nelle, the "monkey" keeps going off on its own and playing his cymbals even though John shuts it off, which might be seen as a comical metaphor for random and uncontrollable erections. However, the definitive phallic image for John is the human nose. When people make fun of John's whistling nose, he scornfully remarks, "You disparaged my nose. I won't stand to be disparaged." The phallic connotations of the human nose, with its protruding shape, is indeed a grave reminder to John of his phallic lack. At one point, Elaine licks "white cream" (from spilled coffee) off John's nose. In one of the cases he takes, a Barbra Streisand impersonator (he is never named) sues his plastic surgeon for making his nose too big. He had indeed asked for a bigger nose to look more like Streisand, but not *this* big. John protests that he cannot take this case because "it's just that I have a thing… about… that." When he meets with the client, his nose makes John so nervous that he can't even say the word "nose." At the sight of such a big "nose," John's already frail self-esteem as a man fails to stand (Figure 20).

John does many things to reinvigorate his masculinity. His most successful way of doing this is looking at the mirror and "hearing bells." He does this before going to court to revive his confidence. When he needs confidence in his sexuality, say, before a date, he hears Barry White songs. By channelling Barry White, he gets rhythm and is better able to please his lady friends. With his deep, low-pitched voice and colossal body, White seems to lend some much-needed masculinity to John.

In another episode ("Judge Ling"), Coretta, a new litigator at Cage & Fish, decides to help John with his insecurities, and demonstrates the padded muscle suit she invented, that "under a shirt, looks completely natural." (Figure 21). Being the desperate guy he is, John gives it a try and, of course, fails miserably. This comedic situation is a perfect example of the Butlerian idea of gender as performance. John literally *wearing* his masculinity and performing it might even be considered as a form of drag. John's masculinity is so transparently fake that it falls with a thud. When this charade backfires, John is actually more insecure and less masculine.

Before getting back to the implications of John strutting about in the office wearing Coretta's suit, we should look to the character of Claire Otoms. The assessment of the many queer possibilities Claire offers will prove useful in considering John's performance of masculinity.

Claire Otoms (Figure 22) was added to the cast in the fifth and last season, and became a regular soon after. She is an elderly English lady played by Barry Humphries, a drag performer who is famous, in some circles, for his portrayal of the character of Dame Edna Everage, his own invention. Although every character in the show, especially the guest characters, is exaggerated to the point of caricature, Claire must be the most abhorrent one. She is physically massive, loud, "manly," a blabbermouth, and, overall, insufferably obnoxious. She causes a commotion everywhere she goes to; others characters find it incredibly hard to stay in her presence. However, what makes Claire an interesting specimen for a queer reading is the way she is presented by the producers of the show.

The opening credits of the first episode Claire appears in ("Judge Ling") lists "Dame Edna Everage" as a guest star, and the closing credits read "Dame Edna Everage appears by arrangement with Barry Humphries." Thus what we have in our hands is a female character (Claire), who is played by a female actor/character (Dame Edna), who, in turn, is played by a male actor (Humphries). The creation of "gender trouble" by putting layer upon layer of identities (genders, actors, characters) presents a rich arena for queer transgression. But is crediting Dame Edna Everage with the portrayal of Claire Otoms a neat way to "bury" the original gender identity of Barry Humphries? It

could be… For instance, transgression occurs only for a viewer who might make an effort not to privilege femininity in a woman, or lacks a strict notion of how a woman should look. Otherwise, for the audience member who cannot make room for the possibility of Dame Edna Everage being a woman and sees Claire simply as a drag performance, transgression is out of the question. Therefore, the power of Claire's queer potential rests on Humphries's ability to pass Dame Edna Everage as a "real" woman. This is where the strong possibility of a queer transgression is overridden.

Going back to John's "padded" masculinity… When John runs into Claire in the unisex in his padded suit, flaunting his obviously "fake" masculinity, she says, "Well, John. One of us isn't being entirely honest with ourselves, is he?" Claire's remark is important in two respects. Firstly, its self-conscious emphasis on honesty doubles the meaning of her rhetorical question and turns it on its head, adding to the scene's comedic flavour. For, who is Claire to speak about honesty, especially about gender, when her own femininity is clearly a "fraud," i.e. performed by a man? Here, the joke skips Dame Edna as the performer and the underlying assumption is that no one in the audience takes Claire to be a woman anyway. This assumption, unlike the opening credits of the show, underlines Humphries as the performer behind the character of Claire. Since Claire's queerness depends on Dame Edna's passing as a "real" woman, this joke negates the power of possible queer moments. Actually, jokes like this that cancel out the presence of Dame Edna Everage become a running gag in the fifth season. For example, when Claire takes the witness stand to testify in court, this exchange occurs:

> Bailiff: "Swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the whole truth?"
> Claire: "Do I strike you as a person capable of the whole truth?"

Here, Claire's honesty with her gender identity is made into an issue once again. Claire is proclaimed a fraud in every possible opportunity and the jokes on Humphries's drag performance thrive on the "falsity" of his performance.

Claire's remark to John in the unisex, secondly, and more importantly, serves to naturalise John's seemingly fake masculinity. Since it is Claire who reprimands John

for not being honest with himself, and Claire herself undoubtedly lacks that honesty, the falsity of John's gender performance is diminished. In other words, by underlining the character of Claire as a drag performance, John's masculinity is rendered "less fake" – at least his performance is true to his sex, whereas Claire is a "man pretending to be a woman." The depiction of the emphasised "unoriginality" of Claire's gender leaves no room to argue the unoriginality of John's gender.

Claire's most telling queer appearance is in the aforementioned episode called "All of Me" (see pp 71-72). In this particular episode, Ally successfully averts every possibility that could turn Helen into Helena before going into court, but just as they are getting into the elevator, they run into Claire who yelps a high-pitched "Hello!" at them. Seeing Claire for the first time, Helen is so shocked by her that Helena takes over and insults Claire ("Is there a parade in town? They seem to be missing a float."). Ally is upset and she reprimands Claire: "Nice, Claire! You scared the Helen out of her." Here, Helena assumes control to defend Helen against Claire's queerness. This specific instance is a potent example of how this postfeminist identity lacks a queer edge.

Incessantly trying to reinvent himself as a "man's man," always failing, and as a result feeling more and more feminine, John's masculinity shrinks and shrinks. His longest relationship is with Nelle Porter, who enters the show at the beginning of the second season. She is a tall, blonde and extraordinarily beautiful woman, and a very good lawyer. On the other hand, she is not what one would call "feminine" with contrast to other women in the show: She is an aggressively ambitious and careerist woman, who dresses in neat and safe business suits, and wears her hair in a tight bun during work hours. She also makes the point that she has no interest in having children several times.

Once Nelle joins the firm, she doesn't lose much time before she makes passes at John. John is terrified with these direct sexual advances, and it takes quite some time for him to find the courage to accept a relationship with her. He keeps saying that being with a woman as beautiful as Nelle scares him because he is a "funny little man." However, he is convinced that he might be able to carry out a relationship with Nelle when he sees her in the unisex bathroom letting her hair loose after workday. Therefore, it might be deduced that what scares John is not Nelle's beauty as opposed to his ordinary looks,

but her domineeringly masculine traits as opposed to his feminised manhood. The image of Nelle getting ready in the bathroom before leaving the office is also the image of Nelle stripping off her masculine qualities. Her blonde hair flowing down her back is the instantly recognizable guarantee of her femininity. Once John is assured of Nelle's femininity and she is no longer a threat to his frail masculinity, he starts a relationship with her.

Nevertheless, the relationship itself is burdened with this same problem right up to its end. Even after he is convinced that Nelle is unthreateningly feminine, he cannot bring himself to be the manly man he believes he should be. All through their affair, Nelle is always the aggressor who exerts control over the relationship and initiates sex. To balance this to his own satisfaction, John keeps devising ways to keep Nelle rigidly fixed in her femininity. He gives her shoes, heels of which he can control with a remote to make Nelle (who is much taller than he is) shorter at will. He also keeps another remote control for her hairpins, to loosen her firm bun and expose her hair – her most feminine feature. When all else fails, they split up and become enemies: The feminine man versus the masculine woman.

Another one of the long relationships John has is with Melanie West (Anne Heche), who enters the show as a client in the fourth season and stays for seven episodes. Melanie is yet another weird character that David E. Kelley loves to put in his shows. She is suffering from Tourette's syndrome, which is characterised by involuntary ticks of the whole body, including howling, screaming and blurting out words and phrases. For example, when relating how she accidentally ran over her boyfriend in trial, she screams "Splat! Pancake!" I would argue that Melanie is the queerest character in *Ally McBeal*. Not because she has lesbian undertones, but because of her Tourette's (Figure 23). The symptoms of this syndrome not only establish Melanie as a constant outsider to the society, but also give her an enormous parodic power, a power she sometimes deliberately uses as an effective way to undermine her surroundings. Her squeals, screams and howls, and the involuntary words she utters have the power to transgress, therefore might indeed be considered as queer performatives. Moreover, she tells John that she cannot stand "Normalcy . . . And I walk away." John and Melanie make a good

couple because they take up on each other's ticks and stutters, and probably because John finds a perfect match for himself in Melanie's "queer"ness.

In "Reach Out and Touch," John brings Melanie into the unisex to give her "a big secret," and shows her (and the audience) his "hole-in-the-wall," which later comes to be known simply as "the hole." This hole, where John "comes for solitude," is an obvious metaphor for his latent homosexuality. The image of John in the confined space of his hole is reminiscent of "being in the closet." The fact that the door to his hideaway is opened through a secret passage in a toilet stall not only associates "the hole" with the anus and anality, but also draws attention to the abject quality of homosexuality, with its suggestion of waste and faeces. Sometimes, John comes out of his hole unaware that someone is in the stall, causing shock and panic, which adequately symbolises the tumultuous reaction "coming out" as a gay man brings about. Moreover, when John is away on a trip, Richard takes on the hole and gives remote controls to the office staff; he "outs" John, so to speak. Learning about this, dismayed and angry, John enters the hole, only to find a disco ball hanging from the ceiling and ABBA's "Dancing Queen" on the stereo. Since admiration for '70s disco music, especially ABBA, is a quintessential characteristic of a stereotypical understanding of the gay male culture, this scene not only symbolises John's outing, but also his being forced into an identity. Before Richard outed him, John was ambivalent and free; now that everyone knows he "has a secret hole," his ambivalence is moulded into an identity with appropriate cultural codes that place him in his right place in the discourse.

Under the light of this reading, the fact that Melanie is the first person that John shows his hole (therefore, comes out) to is another indication of her queerness; John knows that Melanie will understand. After John shows his hole to Melanie, they have a rather tense conversation about marriage. Melanie doesn't believe in marriage whereas John firmly does. In the middle of their conversation, Tourette's causes Melanie to slip out "Fudge!" In slang, "fudge" refers to anal intercourse and "fudge-packer" is a derogatory word for gay men. Therefore, Melanie's slip further reveals that John's latent homosexuality is epitomised by his hole-in-the-wall.

Ultimately, such extensive presentation of John's latent homosexuality is indicative of the crisis his masculinity is going through. Herein lies the basic assumption; a man who feels he is not masculine enough is a "lesser" man, and *must* be gay. Therefore, insinuations of homosexuality within a subtext indicate the predicament masculinity is in. The plot twist devised for Billy in the third season addresses this issue in a more compact, overt and much more direct way.

In the pilot episode, the character of Billy Thomas is developed as Ally's childhood sweetheart, and he spends the first two seasons in the rather thankless role of a "Ken doll." In these seasons, he is put in situations that only serve explorations of Ally or Georgia (Billy's wife) as characters, while he is reduced to a prop for these plot threads. With the commencement of the third season, however, Billy is given a life of his own outside the offices of Cage & Fish, his marriage and his quasi-relationship with Ally. What happens at the beginning of the third season is that, Billy decides to go to a self-help group called "Increasing Male Sensitivity Towards Women," where self-proclaimed misogynist men gather to tackle their issues with women. "Hello. My name is Billy and I'm a male chauvinist pig," is Billy's introductory line to this group. He attends these caricaturised group therapy sessions for some time, where men wallow in self-hatred for being such pigs, confess in tears how they have been disrespectful to their wives. The predicament of these men is that they were brought up to be providers for their families, "but what happens when our woman partner usurps that role?" At these sessions, Billy spills the beans: He doesn't want Georgia wearing sexy dresses, he doesn't want her to become a senior partner, he actually doesn't want her to work at all. He wants to be greeted by his wife after the workday, who has been waiting for him to come home, with a pair of slippers and the dinner ready. But things go a little differently for the group when Billy gets worked up with his own rhetoric, and decides not to apologise for wanting these things. Billy's self-acceptance as a "male chauvinist pig" turns the self-help group into a "pigsty," with the group screaming "Penis! Penis! Penis!" in unison to reclaim their manhood, or chanting "Bitch!" These rebellions in the group are usually accompanied by pig squeaks on the soundtrack, echoing in the streets of Boston.

After accepting his newfound side in the group, Billy makes it known to his friends and colleagues, much to Georgia's grief, that he is a male chauvinist pig, and that he has no intention to change this or apologise for it. This sudden and overtly contrived change in Billy's character, his insistent assertion of his chauvinism is obviously presented as a case of "coming out of the closet," and there are many details that point that it might indeed be the coming out of a gay man.

What are the things that superimpose Billy's coming out as a chauvinist with the coming out of a gay man? Simply, the fact that this is a process of coming out. Billy problematises his feelings, he tries to deal with them, he tries to get help to change them, and ultimately accepts himself as he is, only to advocate his new identity. When he speaks to Georgia about this, her reaction is "I never saw this in you," delivered with appropriately teary eyes. Billy says neither did he, "But it's there. And I'm sick of denying it."

Billy feels he is "being punished for sharing my feelings." He even gets beaten up (twice, by Georgia) for asserting his identity. When he gets his hair bleached and parades in the office with pride (while "There's a New Man in Town" plays on the soundtrack), he induces shocked reactions from the other employees. He wears his platinum blond hair as a sign of "the new man" that he is (Figure 24). Such bodily decoration, presented as a sign of Billy's chauvinism, of course, is not a code that is traditionally attributed to the man that Billy comes out as. Thus, the platinum blond hair as a cultural code, which might easily be read as an indication of homosexuality on a man, is resignified to accommodate a very different meaning. Coming out, assertion of identity, getting beaten up and the bleached hair all make plenty of room for a gay reading of Billy. This merging of homosexuality and chauvinism might be read as a critique of the gay male culture, which has indeed grown more and more chauvinistic since the '70s. However, I believe the importance of this narrative concerning Billy's chauvinism lies in its direct association of the masculinity crisis of the modern man with homosexuality. As I have tried to illustrate above in the character of John Cage, "The New Man" of the postfeminist era is a very feminised creature. He feels he is a failure as a man, that he is failing his gender, and so, that he is "less of a man." John's presentation as a closet case and Billy's coming out combine their apparent failure as

men to the possibility of their homosexuality. Ultimately, in the world of *Ally McBeal*, homosexuality is a symptom of the failure to be a proper man.

In the fifteenth episode of the third season ("Prime Suspect"), the reason for Billy's sudden change is revealed; he is diagnosed with a brain tumour. In the next episode, he dies. This presentation of male chauvinism alongside sickness makes a striking practical joke on masculinity, reminding one of what Kate Millett calls "the pathology of virility" in *Sexual Politics* (1970:22). However, regarding the homosexual undertones of Billy's coming out, it might be said that it is ultimately homosexuality that is being pathologised.

There is only one openly gay character that visits the show, and that is the abovementioned Streisand impersonator. He is also the only character on the show that does not have a name. This character is a single-handed example of how homosexuality fails to transgress. As I have mentioned before, the Streisand impersonator is never named. Similar to Sedgwick's idea of silence and "not speaking" as performative acts, I would argue that the "not naming" of this gay character has performative power, too. Naming is one of the classical examples of performative acts. Not granting a name to the Streisand impersonator denies this character his individuality; he is simply a gay man, which seems enough to know. However, his homosexuality is dubious, too. He does not come out and is not once referred to as gay. His homosexuality is revealed only when he refers to a lost lover as a "he." As far as the languages that lack a gender differentiation between pronouns is concerned, (for instance, in Turkey, where this thesis is being written), this man is not even gay. Homosexuality is so tightly fitted into the heterosexual matrix that it has no power to transgress. A person's homosexuality is not even considered as knowledge, and thus, queer possibilities of the Streisand impersonator are eradicated.

Getting back to the namelessness of this character, the fact that he has no name has one other, very different implication. When he is performing, without his own individuality interfering, he *is* Barbra Streisand. The namelessness of the character makes it much easier to wipe out the identity of the performer, and provides the drag performance with a much better success. However, when the specificity of the performance is considered

(it is not *a* woman being performed here, but a specific one, namely, Barbra Streisand), queer possibilities fall short of transgressing. The gender of the performer might be vague, but the audience knows for sure that what they are watching is a performance *of* Barbra Streisand, not *by* her.

The character of Richard Fish, the other senior partner at the Cage & Fish law firm, and his relationship with John may provide queer possibilities. If John Cage is the epitome of "The New Man," Richard is a satire of "The Old Man." Although he is not the violently macho man of the past, he is nevertheless a blatant bigot, a misogynist and antifeminist. In episode seventeen of the first season ("The Playing Field"), he advocates in court that "[The plaintiff] is a woman, therefore disabled." In the nineteenth episode of the second season ("Let's Dance"), he defends a firm which discriminates against women by putting up the defence that "Women are inferior. Made that way by God." In the episode where Ally and Ling go out on a date ("Buried Pleasures"), the following exchange occurs between Ling and Richard:

> Ling: "Why is it okay for two women to kiss but not two men?"
> Richard: "Seriously?"
> Ling: "Yes."
> Richard: "Well… In strict anthropological terms, mankind is all about the propagation of the species. Without procreation, mankind would become extinct. To facilitate procreation, male species must become aroused. Watching two women take their tongues to each other arouses the male species, which fosters the urge to procreate and accordingly ensures the survival of the human race. To the contrary, watching two butt pirates go at it could make a man go limp for a week. The species become threatened. . . . Blame me for anthropology."

As the examples above –the likes of which are many in the show– suggest, Richard flaunts his bigotry and homophobia so garishly that he obviously is not to be taken seriously. Actually, he is not even superficially offensive. Indeed, many gay and queer clients prefer him as their lawyer because he represents the bigotry that they are up against. Also, Richard is depicted as shallow in almost every aspect. He says that he studied law not because he is interested in justice, but because he wants to earn "piles and piles of money." He actually cries tears of joy when Ally wins a lawsuit and gets the jury to order the defendant to pay her client a six-figure number to compensate the

damages. He is also unethical; he finds it incredibly hard to uphold the lawyer-client privileges. However, as his character is developed in the following seasons, the audience gets to see that he has a heart of gold underneath it all (like every other character in the show). When the financial state of the firm starts going bad, he pays the salaries from his own pocket because he cannot bring himself to fire his employees.

Richard and John are more than just colleagues; they share a very special friendship since they started the firm together. They always go to each other during crises to share problems, especially sexual ones, and ask for advice. The homosocial bonding they share, and their professional partnership are reminiscent of a homosexual relationship, which is sometimes turned into a joke. In the seventh episode of the second season ("Happy Trails"), Richard and John are in a toilet stall, the former giving pointers to the latter to perfect his first kiss with Nelle. They don't know that Nelle herself is outside eavesdropping on them with Elaine. From what they hear, John and Richard sound like they are making out in the stall. A more revealing thing happens when Richard announces that he is getting married to Liza; John is so annoyed by this news that Richard says: "It doesn't mean I don't love you." Jokes like these underline the homosexual overtones of John and Richard's homosocial relationship.

Richard's sexual relationships with women (with Whipper, who is a judge and much older than Richard; and with Ling) attract attention for the striking features of their fetishistic natures. Sexual fetishism carries powerful queer possibilities because it contravenes the codes of normative reproductive sexuality, especially the inherent phallocentricism. According to Freud's definition, which to this day dominates the psychoanalytic understandings of this phenomenon, sexual fetishism is a "deviation." He writes of his fetishist patients as "cases . . . in which the normal sexual object is replaced by another which bears some relation to it, but is entirely unsuited to serve the normal sexual aim." (Freud 1987:65). Freud also maintains that:

> "A certain degree of fetishism is . . . habitually present in normal love. . . . The situation only becomes pathological when the longing for the fetish passes beyond the point of being merely a necessary condition attached to the sexual object and actually *takes the place* of the normal aim, and,

> further, when the fetish becomes detached from a particular individual and becomes the *sole* sexual object." (1987:66-67, original emphases).

Thus, in psychoanalytical terms, sexual fetishisation is pathological if it replaces the "normal," reproductive sexual urges of a person. It is a "displacement" of sexual desire, from the "normal" object to the "aberrant" one.

Richard has a sexual fetish for "wattles," which he describes as the sagging and wrinkled fold of skin on necks. This is why he primarily goes for older women. He caresses wattles of women with his finger to stimulate himself sexually. His affinity for wattles is so sexually charged that he and Whipper have a fight when she sees him caressing Janet Reno's wattle. And when they break up, Whipper seduces Richard again by holding out her neck in a very sexual manner.

Richard's fetishistic sexuality is not limited to wattles. His sexual relationship with Ling consists merely of fetishes: She licks his finger, or "gives him hair" (rubs her hair all over his body), or he "does her knee pit" (caresses her knee pit with his fingers which gives not only Ling but all female characters great sexual pleasure for unexplained reasons). When the fact that their sexuality is based *solely* on fetishistic pleasures without an emphasis on intercourse, i.e. penetration, is considered, Richard and Ling seem to epitomise the queer transgression of every phallocentric stipulation put forward by normative (heterosexual) discourse. However, their fetishistic sexuality always carries the undertone that it is *secondary*, a mere substitute for what they should be doing.

The fetishism of Richard and Ling is explained by Ling's lack of interest in the "real" sexual act of intercourse. She says she doesn't much like sex because "it's messy." In fact, their relationship is always fraught with frustration on both parts: Richard is frustrated because he wants to have "real" sex, while Ling is frustrated because Richard keeps pushing her. Their discussions of this subject (sometimes comical, sometimes dramatic) go on for most of the second season. The fact that this is made into such an issue in the plotlines concerning Richard and Ling's relationship carries the implication that sex without penetration is not "real" sex. This idea that fetishistic pleasures cannot

be accepted as legitimate sexual preferences on their own accord and must be accompanied by penetrative sexual acts upholds the phallocentric ideal of normative sex.

Richard's fetishisation of body parts might be an interesting aspect of his sexuality, but it proves useless as a queer transgression, because in the end it is strictly phallocentric. However, I would argue that Richard's true queer potential lies in his interest in interspecific sex, traces of which can be found in his covert sexualisation of animals. In fact, it might be concluded that Richard is in fact a zoophile, a paraphiliac who is characterised by a sexual attraction towards animals. Originally, the word "wattle" is not used for humans. According to Dictionary.com, the definition of a wattle is "A fleshy, wrinkled, often brightly colored fold of skin hanging from the neck or throat, characteristic of certain birds, such as chickens or turkeys, and some lizards." As this definition suggests, Richard's favourite fetish is towards an animal characteristic. In the twelfth episode of the third season ("In Search of the Pygmies"), he hints that he is no stranger to bestiality. In this episode, Richard, suspecting that Ling might be having an affair, follows her to find out where she is going. When he confronts her about this, the following exchange occurs:

Ling: "If you really need to know, I go dancing."
Richard: "Dancing?"
Ling: "Yes."
Richard: "So there's somebody else now."
Ling: "It's not what you're thinking."
Richard: "It's a woman?"
Ling: "No."
Richard: "A poodle?"
Ling: "No!"

Considering that a wattle, when taken literally, is the sagging neck of an *animal*, and Richard thinks that Ling may be cheating on him with a *poodle*, he might be the first closet zoophile on American TV. The fact that he usually refers to men and women as "animals" who are trying to procreate might also be thought of as a significant indication of his buried zoosexual tendencies. That his last name is "Fish," a water-dwelling animal, gets an ominous meaning when considered in this context. The most striking example of all would be Richard fondling what he calls the "triceps wattle" (the

sagging flesh under the upper arm), for his own sexual pleasure, of Judge Julia Brattle, who is known tellingly as "Bulldog" (Figure 25).

Zoophilic undercurrents of Richard's sexuality might be deliciously transgressive on a whole new level, but before the series is over, he is quickly normalised: In the very final episode of the show, Richard gets married to Liza Bump who is a new associate at the firm. It is not only the fact that he gets married that normalises Richard, but also the fact that he gets married to Liza.

Liza joins the show in the last half of the fifth season. She is a 21-year-old litigator who went through college in two years. Because of her youth and innocent looks, she is known as "Lolita" (Figure 26), but she is famous for her vicious ways and her fierce competitiveness. To win cases she makes use not only of her childishness, but also of her femininity. She talks in baby talk with eyes wide open, and fakes crying in courtrooms: Her performance of innocence and childhood borders on caricature. She also flaunts the fact that she is a virgin every time she gets the chance. Her performance of femininity is even more exaggerated: She makes passes at John to win a case, and lets Richard lick sweat off her neck to *stop him* from having sexual thoughts about her. Richard is extremely attracted to her: "She's even more naughty, more cunning, more delicious than Ling. And Ling was amazing!" Indeed, Liza is very much like Ling, with her striking brunette hair, her meanness and her perfect looks. What sets her clearly apart from Ling is the fact that she is not Asian. Liza's huge eyes are outstandingly in contrast with Ling's tiny eyes. Liza is a Western Ling with appropriately round eyes.

The big age gap between Richard and Liza is never mentioned, which brings Richard's relationship with Whipper to mind. The intergenerational gap between Richard and Liza is no less profound than the gap between Richard and Whipper. However, this age gap is a non-issue in Richard and Liza's relationship, whereas, in the first two seasons a big deal was made of the fact that Whipper is much older than Richard. This approach is very much in line with the normative understanding that there is nothing wrong with an older man being with a younger woman, but that the relationship between an older woman and a younger man is unhealthy. The sexual attraction of an older woman towards a younger man insinuates promiscuity on her part, while a younger woman has

to bear no stigma for being with an older man. This is why the age difference between Liza and Richard is deemed perfectly normal, while Whipper's old age is endlessly problematised. The fact that Richard marries Liza, but not Whipper (who makes it clear that she wants to get married to Richard) reveals the normativity of this approach. Liza's virginity fends off the carefree and promiscuous image of the elderly Whipper's liking for a younger man.

Ultimately, the woman Richard takes till death do them part is intergenerational like Whipper, but acceptably so because she is the one who is younger. Liza is also beautiful and brunette like Ling, but without the disgrace of an interracial relationship. Because she is so young, by marrying Liza Richard forfeits his most important queer facet, namely his fetish for wattles. In Liza, the non-normative aspects of Richard's sexuality and previous relationships are carefully sifted, and Richard is invariably pushed into the prescribed standards of what one's sexual desires should be aimed at: A young and virginal Caucasian woman...

In *Ally McBeal*, the strongest queer resistance comes from Cindy McCauliff, a male-to-female transsexual. Because she refused to have her penis amputated, she is ultimately a woman with a penis. She enters the show as a client in the second episode of the fourth season ("Girls Night Out"). She wants to sue the company she worked for because they fired her for not accepting a mandatory physical examination. She wants to keep her penis a secret, and Richard and Ling, who take Cindy's case, do a good job of keeping it secret. However, when Cindy starts dating Mark Albert, one of the associates at Cage & Fish, things get complicated.

Cindy passes unmistakably as a woman, and Lisa Edelstein, the actress who plays Cindy, passes as a transsexual. With her throaty voice and angular facial features, Edelstein is both beautiful and masculine (Figure 27). Thus she is convincing both as a woman and a transsexual. Since she is never seen naked, it is her performative utterances that set her gender. "I'm really a man," she says to Richard and Ling. She explains, "I've been on oestrogen on a long time. This is my real hair, my breasts are real, too. . . . The shots and the pills have softened my voice. I don't grow facial hair. My skin is soft. I am a woman in almost every way, except the one that would be

discovered if I had to take that physical." Within thirty seconds, she utters two conflicting performatives: "I'm really a man" and "I am a woman." Because of her unclassifiable body, her very being is a transgression. Richard, unable to bring herself to talk about Cindy as "she," refers to her with the neutral pronoun "it." Cindy's performative act of declaring her manhood is enough to transgress every expectation of the addressee. However, once this transgression settles in, Cindy has little chance of reclaiming her identity as a woman. The performative "I'm *really* a man" situates Cindy as an aberration of a woman. Then she has to go through the steps of convincing others that she *really* is a woman by pointing out one by one to the "realness" of her hair, breasts, voice, etc.

Cindy's performative acts provide a fascinating example of the vacillations of queer: Her declaration that she is a man is transgressive because it underlines her ambiguity. However, she then has to justify the existence of her penis, only to have to struggle with justifying herself as a woman, all the while she can be neither this, nor that. In her ambiguity lies her queer power. Word gets around the office that Mark's girlfriend has a penis but the audience gets to see only Ally's and John's reactions (other than Richard and Ling). When Ally hears about Cindy, she freezes and stands petrified for moments, while John goes blank, obviously at a loss for words. The knowledge they get about Cindy, for a moment, a queer and transgressive moment, breaks the binarism they take for granted.

Richard feels he has to talk to the unknowing Mark about this, but lawyer-client privileges keep him from doing so. When he asks Ally what he should do, she says that he shouldn't tell Mark. Ally later reports this exchange to Cindy: "[I told Richard] that he shouldn't tell Mark. But I think you should." The characters refer to this particular knowledge as "the truth (about Cindy)." Once people learn "the truth" about Cindy, she is practically forced to admit to it, and to come out as "a woman with a penis." As I mentioned above, it was Cindy's ambiguity, the fact that she is "a woman with a penis" that was queer, because her ambiguous body shattered the underlying binarist assumption that Cindy is *in fact* (firstly) a man, *then* (secondly) a woman. However, Ally's insistence that Cindy should tell "the truth" shows otherwise. In this instance, ambiguity is not the way to queer transgression because *it is this very ambiguity that*

Cindy is pressured into admitting, not the fact that she is a man. The pressure on Cindy is to expose her ambiguity, not her "true" sex, and this is an attempt to put a label on her ambiguity.

To clarify this point; queer would call for underlining Cindy's ambiguity, because it is transgressive and not classifiable. However, once Cindy starts dating Mark, it is the fact that she does not admit to her ambiguity that is transgressive. This is made explicit by the persistent call for Cindy to confess the ambiguity of her body, and it emerges as a different way of labelling and taming her queer potential. Here, the most effective transgression would be the assertion of Cindy as a "real" woman; the less ambiguous, the more transgressive.

On the other hand, it should be noted that acknowledging Cindy as a woman is transgressive to the extent that it disavows the supposed reality of her prior sex. On the other hand, Cindy's acceptance as a woman is *not* transgressive to the extent that it disavows the ambiguity of her body, and reaffirms the binarism of sex by pushing her into one and only one category; woman. How do we distinguish between the two?

In the twelfth episode of the same season ("Hats Off to Larry"), the acknowledgement of Cindy as a "real" woman does occur. She retains Richard to get an official warrant from the court to get married. In court, Richard defends gay marriage: "Congress once said blacks couldn't marry whites. Love that Congress!" Just as the judge is about to rule, Mark stands up and asks to be heard. As opposed to Richard's defence of gay marriage, Mark makes a point that this is not a case of gay marriage because Cindy is indeed a woman, "I don't care what her birth certificate reads." However, the motion is denied anyway. To make up for this official ruling, Richard proposes to hold a symbolic marriage ceremony for Cindy and her groom (Figure 28). With this ceremony, Cindy is brought into the domain of discourse as a complete woman. The recognition this ceremony bestows is not official but symbolic, and its lack of officialism preserves Cindy's queerness. The fact that Melanie loudly barks right after Cindy says "I do," is a tribute to the queerness of the occasion. I contend that Cindy's symbolic acceptance to Cage & Fish does not normalise her but "queers" the space she is accepted to. But the

question remains: Is it at all possible to distinguish what is queer and transgressive from what is "normal" and affirmative?

This question is one that is bound to hang over every queer reading. But as a final judgement, although Ally and John are not queer characters, and *Ally McBeal* is not a queer text, I believe that the fictional space of Cage & Fish is indeed a queer one, not because (hetero)normativity does not exercise authority there, because it indeed does, but because the shortcomings of this very normativity is slightly more transparent in Cage & Fish than it might have been somewhere else. Maybe this explains why Ally and John are the two characters who leave the firm in the end. The queer milieu of the Cage & Fish offices questions (even if it does not completely contest) the fixity of their identities and this requires them to keep reinventing their genders and sexualities.

Notes:

[1] When numbering the episodes, I exclude the pilot, as is the custom. Therefore, "the first episode" refers actually to the second episode that has aired.

[2] It is also interesting to note that Thomas gives this line that I quoted in an endnote to his essay and does not explore it any further. He also goes on to claim that it is a "silly enough point" that he repeats only in the classroom to his students to make the frat boys uncomfortable. What operates in Thomas's disclaimer, however, is an active reassurance of *his own* heterosexuality. By claiming that "autoeroticism as homoeroticism" is a "silly" point made just to jolt the immature homophobes, he keeps his own autoerotic activities clear of homoerotic "danger."

[3] A very similar dynamic can be seen in *Sex and the City*, in episode four of the third season ("Boy, Giry, Boy, Girl"), where Carrie decides to leave her bisexual boyfriend. Her simplistic explanation is this: "I'm an old fart. What can I say?"

[4] Fenway Park is the official home of Boston's baseball team Red Sox, and Ally is an avid Red Sox fan.

[5] Similarly, in *Legally Blonde*, the austere and brutal law professor who has been giving Elle a hard time turns up at the beauty parlour Elle goes to, and gives her much-needed encouragement to defend her femininity.

[6] By that time, Ally is not only a mother but also a partner; Cage & Fish has become Cage, Fish & McBeal.

CONCLUSION

The TV show *Ally McBeal* is said to represent a new woman. My contention is that the show is not merely representative, but performative. The show hails, interpellates and performatively constructs this new woman. Performativity is not a single moment, but a ritual of reiteration: Many performatives come together to solidify over time, and create the "naturalness" of an identity. A TV show that consists of 112 episodes is indeed a very efficient way of putting performativity to use, with the readily available weekly opportunity to interpellate the audience and utter performatives in its name through its identification with the protagonists.

The most obvious performative act in the show explicates how the performative power of *Ally McBeal* works at the level of its audience. Vonda, Elaine and Renee sing Peggy Lee's "I'm a Woman" at the bar as a surprise for Ally's birthday. The song's title is a very direct performative. Just as the song is starting, Richard tells Ally to "listen to the lyrics," "feel yourself," and that it is a "potential theme song." The lyrics go:

> I can wash out 44 pairs of socks and have 'em hangin' out on the line
> I can starch and iron 2 dozens shirts before you can count from 1 to 9
> I can scoop up a great big dipper full of lard from the drippins can
> Throw it in the skillet, go out and do my shopping, be back before it melts
>   in the pan
> 'Cause I'm a woman! W-O-M-A-N, I'll say it again
>
> I can rub and scrub this old house 'til it's shinin' like a dime
> Feed the baby, grease the car and powder my face at the same time
> Get all dressed up, go out and swing 'til 4 am and then
> Lay down at 5, jump up at 6 and start all over again
> 'Cause I'm a woman! W-O-M-A-N, I'll say it again
>
> If you come to me sickly you know I'm gonna make you well
> If you come to me all hexed up you know I'm gonna break the spell
> If you come to me hungry you know I'm gonna fill you up with grits
> If it's lovin' you're likin', I'll kiss you and give you the shiverin' fits
> 'Cause I'm a woman! W-O-M-A-N

This is a good list of the traditional gender roles of women: Cooking, looking after a baby, taking care of the household, looking good, getting "dressed up," being feminine and serving her man, both at the house and in the bed. The recurring performative

chorus emphasises that "I'm doing these *because* I'm a woman," or "The fact that I am doing all these things so efficiently is *caused* by the fact that I am a woman." A Butlerian reading, however, would go "I'm doing these things, *therefore* I'm a woman. Lest you're not convinced, let me spell it out: 'W-O-M-A-N' and 'I'll say it again'." Thus the apparent causation in the chorus "*'Cause* I'm a woman" is misleading. How this song is appropriated in *Ally McBeal* is also of significance. There are three women on stage that not only sing *for* or *to* Ally, but also sing *instead of* her. The performative works to construct Ally herself as a woman, not the singers. The fact that the song is presented to her as a birthday celebration connects Ally's womanhood to her *birth*, thus establishing it as a predestined and natural attribute. As a result, the performative "I'm a woman," quickly turns into an essentialist understanding of womanhood.

When the fact that this performative is uttered for and instead of Ally by other people is considered, a question might be raised: Does it work at all? Can it even be legitimately considered as a performative? The answer would be, yes, it does, and it can. Vonda, Elaine and Renee assume Ally's identity when they sing. Richard's warning that Ally should feel herself in the lyrics demonstrates this. Her friends have chosen this song for Ally's birthday as a joke, an in-joke, at that: They are making fun of the traditional side of Ally's womanhood. Ally indeed picks up on this and gets very uncomfortable. On another level, the reference to this song as Ally's "theme song" is a self-reflexive in-joke for the producers of the show[1]. For them, this is a neat and comical way of addressing the controversy surrounding *Ally McBeal*'s conservatism. Within the plotline, the joke Ally's friends make puts Ally in the passive position; she is forced to sit there and listen while Vonda, Elaine and Renee utter performatives in her name. This might not work. But with the joke the producers of the show make, Ally McBeal is not passive. On the contrary, the singers are really just her mouthpiece; she actually is the active one. Thus, the performative might not work for the character of Ally McBeal, but on the level of the audience, it works.

With this very performativity at work, new gender identities for men and women are created. In the last chapter, while many characters were examined under the light of queer understandings of sexual, gender and identity issues, special attention was paid to Ally McBeal and John Cage, because of their prominent and definitive characteristics

that define the gender identities in the postfeminist era. These gender identities are constructed with opposition to each other, thus fulfilling the binary oppositions of the heterosexual matrix. These "new" identities are not only opposite, but also complementary: Ally's fantasy world, which is primarily visual, is coupled with John's fantasy world, which is always auditory. Visual and auditory; female and male... Interestingly enough, these identities are constructed based on their fluidity: Ally is trying to reclaim her femininity; what defines her is her quest to be a "real" woman. Similarly, John is trying to come to terms with his threatened masculinity; he is a man who constantly tries to prove his masculinity. With this quality, it might be said that traditional versions of femininity and masculinity are ridiculed in the characters of Ally and John. However, performative acts that run parallel to this ridicule turn them into prototypes of new gender identities. In other words, the fluidity of these characters quickly congeal, and their identities are fixed within their apparent fluidity.

Furthermore, these postfeminist identities are extremely class-specific, in that, they only pertain to the particular group of urban professionals. This is clearly demonstrated in the character of Elaine, who is the only regular character in the show who is not a white-collar careerist. As a result of her decidedly pink-collar status, she is never deemed worthy of postfeminist achievements. The most prominent example that reveals Elaine as a woman who is undeserving of certain accomplishments that transcend previously established roles is her failed attempt at being a postfeminist mother. In the end, Elaine never gets to "have it all" while Ally effortlessly completes her life, enjoying the luxury of doing this on her own terms as a postfeminist woman. This approach to Elaine and Ally as women of different class standings might seem in line with the pluralistic claim of postfeminism because of the fact that it suggests a difference between their existences as women. However, the fact that Ally's experience as a woman is projected onto Elaine is indicative of an unfair generalisation by which the singular experience of a white-collar woman is taken as referential to evaluate a woman of a "lesser" stature. Ally's postfeminist identity, in contradiction with the postfeminist claim of pluralism, is hegemonic where it should simply be irrelevant to Elaine.

Chapter III explored not only the performative power of *Ally McBeal*, but also the queer possibilities of this very performativity. Turning this show's particular performative

power on its head to achieve queer transgressions proved mostly in vain. Both Ally McBeal and John Cage are defined as characters whose sexual and gender identities are in crises. On the other hand, their standing as "identities in crises" is quickly normalised into a very normative fixity that efficiently disavows and "otherises" atypical identities and queer non-identities. So much so that, it is not very hard to understand why so much media controversy has taken place around the gender politics of the show: "The Career Gal" is indeed dangerously close to "The '50s Housewife," while "The New Man" might indeed still be "The Old Man" waiting to come out. However progressive they both might seem, Ally and John are essentialists in the worst sense of the word. For them, gender is fixed, sex is biologically determined, sexuality happens between a loving couple (as opposed to alone or between more than two people), and procreation is an unquestionably mandatory item in every person's life plan. Queer has no room to thrive in such steadfast investment in normative identities.

Turning to the secondary characters of the show for possible transgressions produces mixed results. Supporting characters like Billy, Elaine, Richard and Ling indeed provide room for queer digressions. Billy's closeted homosexuality, Elaine's double-layered identity, Richard's fetishistic pleasures and latent zoophilic tendencies and Ling's all-encompassing perfection come close to challenging heteronormative gender and sexual identities. However, the queer possibilities of these characters are always overly compensated for and diminished by forcing them back into an unadulterated normative frame. Billy is killed off midway through the third season because by that time his character has become too dangerous to accommodate. Elaine is subsumed under her class status and proves irrelevant because of her pink-collar position. Richard's perversions are counterweighed by giving him a wife who perfectly makes up for everything that is perverse about him. Finally, the possibility of creating queer trouble through Ling is wiped out by surrounding her with "real" but safer queer characters; with relation to the appearance of Margaret Camaro who is presented as a "real" lesbian, possible doubts about Ling's sexuality and gender are averted.

At the end of the day, individually queering these regular characters of the show proves unfruitful, which might be expected. On the other hand, recurring guest characters like Melanie West, Claire Otoms and Cindy McCauliff seems more rewarding. The positive

correlation between the syndrome Melanie suffers from and her queerness is especially productive in creating queer parody. On the other hand, Melanie is a short-lived character, and once her queerness becomes too much of a burden, she is left outside the show. With respect to Melanie, Claire seems like a much better source of queer disobedience. Because she is played by a man in drag, Claire promises a valuable utilisation of Butler's famous examples of drag performances. However, the possible ambiguities of this character are always eradicated by highlighting that she is "actually" a "he." This approach implies an "originality" of gender, which defies all chances of queering, because queer rests on the understanding that there is no original gender or sexuality. The character of Claire is a good example of how limited the power of queer is. If Melanie were to be given more screen time, she probably would have been tamed out of her queerness much like Claire. Nevertheless, the recurring guest character of Cindy McCauliff comes closer to providing the purest possible queer achievement. With the presence of her indistinct body that refuses to be pushed into a category of sex, she forces the other characters into acknowledging her both as a man and as a woman at the same time. The final recognition of her womanhood comes as a queer success, even though it seems like a Pyrrhic victory: When accepted as a woman, Cindy is fitted into a normative category of sex, which might be construed as an affirmative reclamation of her queer edge. All the same, the fact that Cindy is acknowledged as a woman in spite of the ambiguity of her body sends a different message. This acknowledgment does not normalise Cindy's sex, but Cindy queers the normative understanding of the category of sex. She is a woman with a penis, so her acceptance into dominant discourse as a woman shows that womanhood is not an issue of the form of one's genitals and it is indeed possible to be a woman without being female.

Queer performativity, by definition, is never an easy thing to achieve. No matter what, queer always faces the danger of failing, turning into affirmative statements, or losing its way into oblivion. Thus a queer transgression is always restricted, and when achieved, the result is always provisional. The aim of queer performativity would be to reiterate heterosexist performatives by modifying them and stripping them off their original intention. *Ally McBeal* offers good opportunities for this, albeit it is not a queer text. Not only the supposed originality of heterosexuality is boldly underlined, but also the binarisms that queer theory seeks to rival are rigidly reaffirmed. The rigidity of this

affirmation is indeed striking because *Ally McBeal* achieves this within a seemingly very pluralistic space. Gay men and women, transsexuals, fetishists, and queer characters of all sorts are brought into the show and some of them are given recurring guest spots. However, as the analysis in the last chapter shows, the existence of these characters is always compensated by reaffirmations of heterosexuality and gender. Thus, *Ally McBeal* ultimately fails to transcend the binarisms it ridicules.

On the other hand, *Ally McBeal* might be as queer as American network TV can get. Ally and John are not queer characters, because they provide the major identification points for the audience. When large masses of people are expected to tune in, no producer is bold enough to create queer protagonists who might jeopardise normative identification. Paradoxically, the fictional space of Cage & Fish is abundant in queer characters that provide powerful queer potential. Moreover, the overall tone of the screenwriting itself, mostly by David E. Kelley, might be said to be queer. The plotlines, especially the weekly courtroom dramas are rather mischievously aimed at overturning audience expectations. For instance, the nineteenth episode of the first season ("The Inmates") involves the case of a waiter who was fired for *not* being gay, on the grounds that gay waiters add to the ambiance of fine dining in a French bistro. Episode eighteen of the second season ("Those Lips, That Hand") has a man suing his former employer for firing him for having bad hair – interestingly enough the plaintiff's hair is so terrifyingly bad that the employer who fired him comes off sympathetic. In the sixth episode of the third season ("Changes"), an *employer* sues her *employees* for sexual harassment, just as the second episode of the fourth season ("Girls' Night Out") has a *man* suing a *woman* for sexual harassment.

This kind of upending parody is a typical characteristic of queer, which is probably why *Ally McBeal* is rich in queer potential. If it weren't for Ally and John, *Ally McBeal* might have been a saliently queer media text. Also, if it weren't for Ally and John, this show would not have been made at all. This is the underlying paradox of queer, in that, it can never be a pure challenge to the system: Without the likes of Ally and John around, queer does not exist.

Notes:

[1] Many producers do this as a way to fight the hype around their TV shows. For example, *The Sopranos*, a very popular American TV show, is extremely criticised for perpetuating the cliché of the Italian gangster. In the fourth episode of the third season ("Employee of the Month"), these criticisms are addressed by the producers, by devising a subplot about an Italian rapist whose ethnicity is mistaken by the rape victim's husband.

Figures

Figure 1 – Ally McBeal (Calista Flockhart) and Bridget Jones (Renée Zellweger)

Figure 2 – Bridget Jones and Elle Woods (Reese Witherspoon – *Legally Blonde*)

Figure 3 – A *Cathy* comic

Figure 4 – Tarnished femininity: The opening credits of *Sex and the City*…

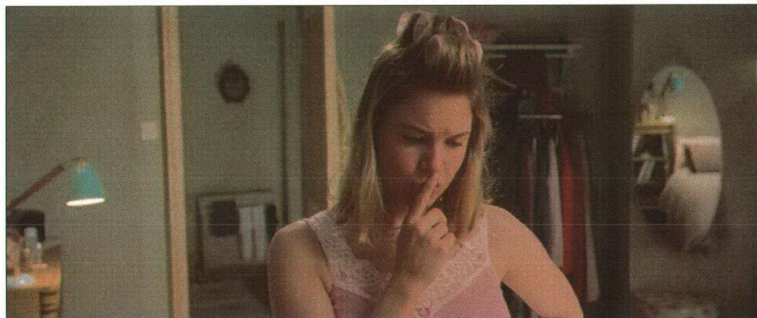

Figure 5 – "Major dilemma" for the postfeminist woman.

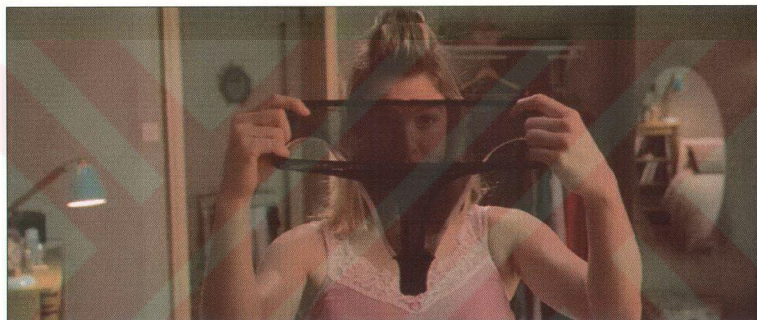

Figure 6 – "If I actually do, by some terrible chance, end up in flagrante, surely these would be most attractive at crucial moment."

Figure 7 – "However, chances of reaching crucial moment greatly increase by wearing these scary stomach-holding-in pants."

Figure 8 – Postfeminists come in fours; brunette, blonde or redhead. The single careerists of *Sex and the City*…

Figure 9 – …and the married and "domesticated" women of *Desperate Housewives*.

Figure 10 – June 29, 1998 issue of *Time* magazine.

Figure 11 – Guilty femininity: Hemlines behind bars. *Ally McBeal*

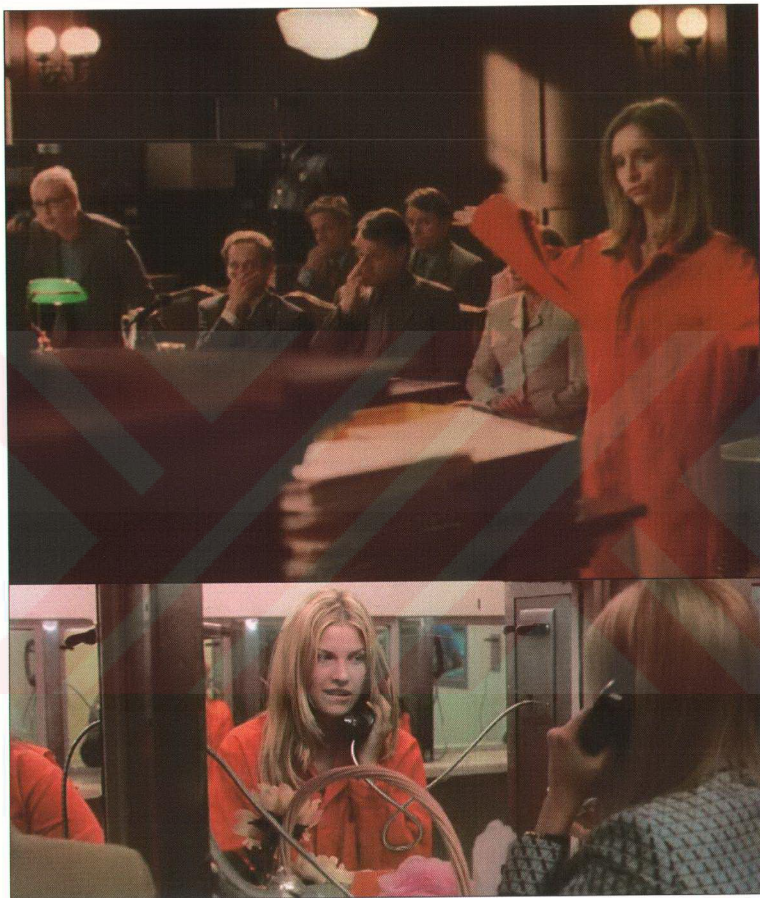

Figure 12 – Punished femininity: "Are you all right? You look so… orange." *Ally McBeal* and *Legally Blonde*

Figure 13 – Playing with sexualities: Ally and Ling, making out and making up

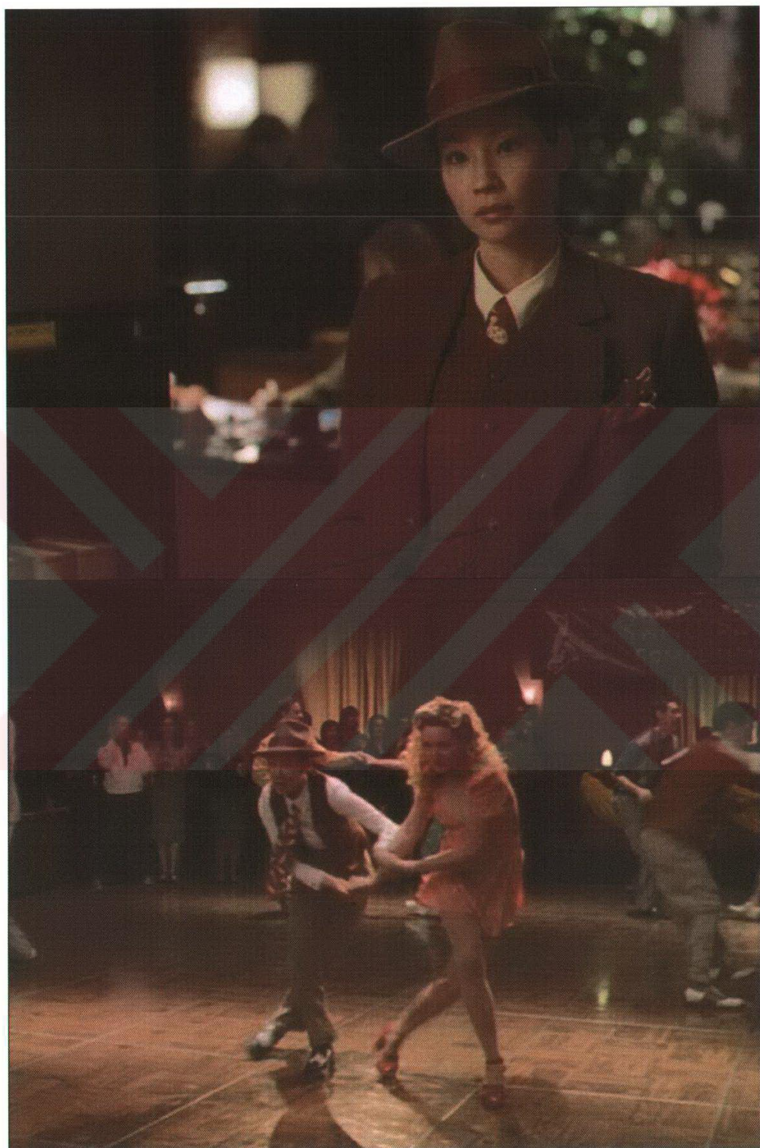

Figure 14 – Performing masculinity: Ling in drag with her/his partner Elaine. *Ally McBeal*

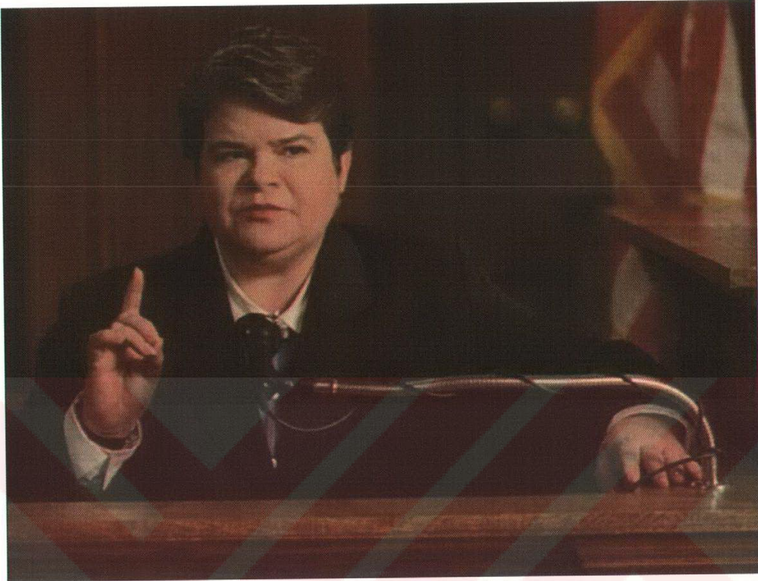

Figure 15 – The opposite of femininity: Margaret Camaro in *Ally McBeal*

Figure 16 – Performing conservative femininity: Elaine in *Ally McBeal*

Figure 17 – Performing motherhood. *Ally McBeal*

Figure 18 – The monstrous child. *Ally McBeal*

Figure 19 – The postfeminist Madonna/Whore with the Baby Jesus. *Ally McBeal*

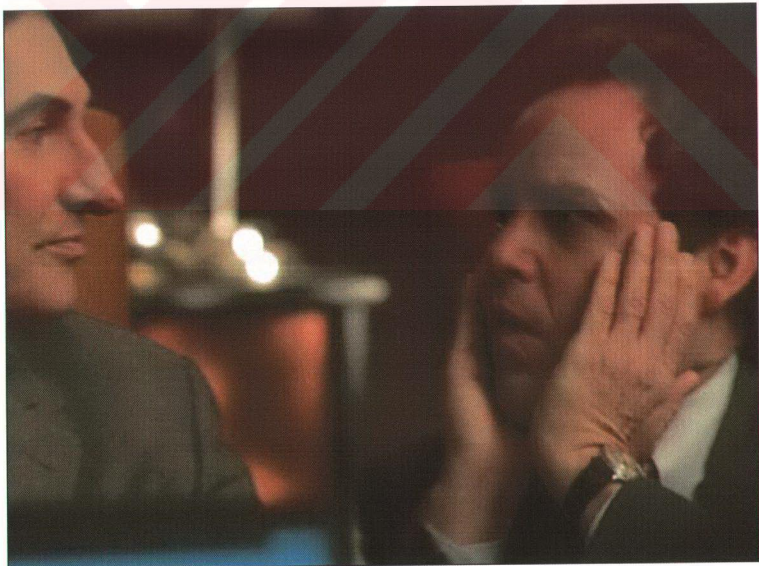

Figure 20 – Threatened masculinity: John's fear of big noses in *Ally McBeal*

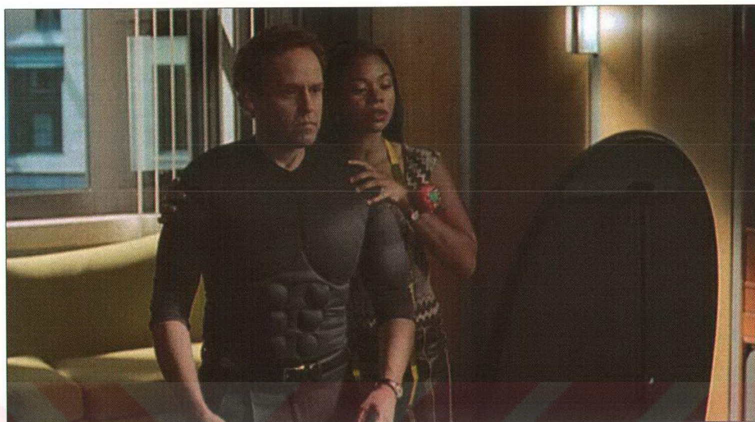

Figure 21 – Wearing masculinity: John in a padded suit. *Ally McBeal*

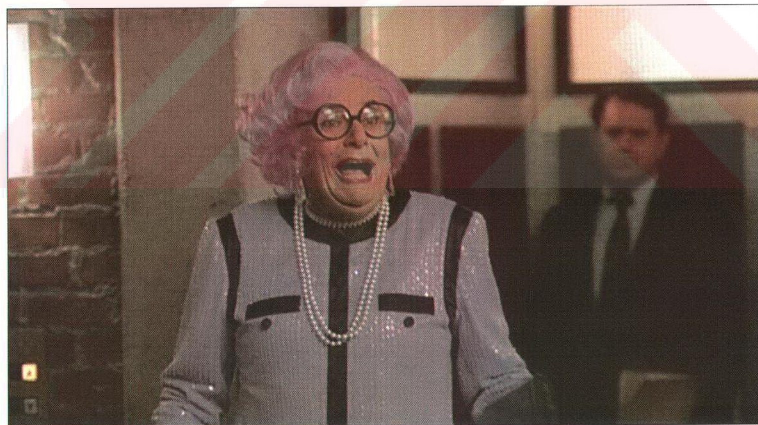

Figure 22 – Wearing femininity: Claire Otoms (Dame Edna Everage [Barry Humphries])

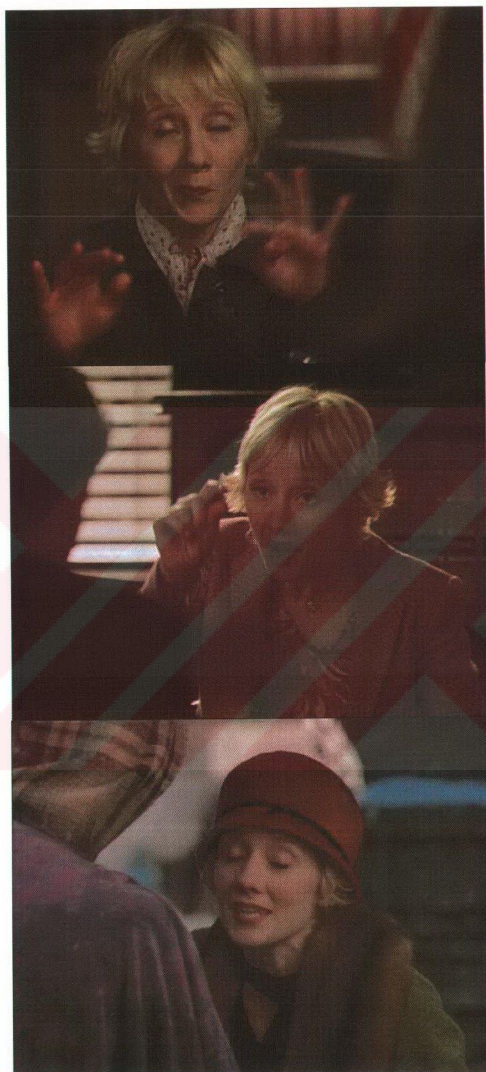

Figure 23 – Melanie ticking, twitching, barking, screaming. *Ally McBeal*

Figure 24 – Being chauvinistic, being gay: Billy Thomas in *Ally McBeal*

Figure 25 – Having symbolic sex with a "bulldog": The zoophile Richard Fish in *Ally McBeal*

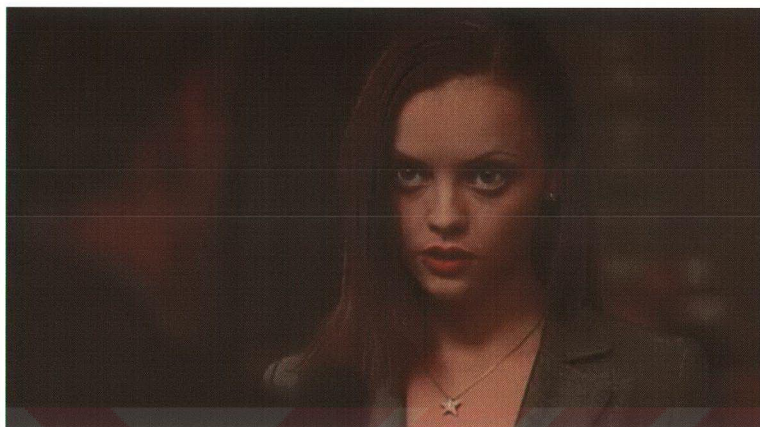

Figure 26 – Performing big-eyed innocence: Liza Bump in *Ally McBeal*

Figure 27 – Masculine/feminine: Cindy McCauliff (Lisa Edelstein) in *Ally McBeal*

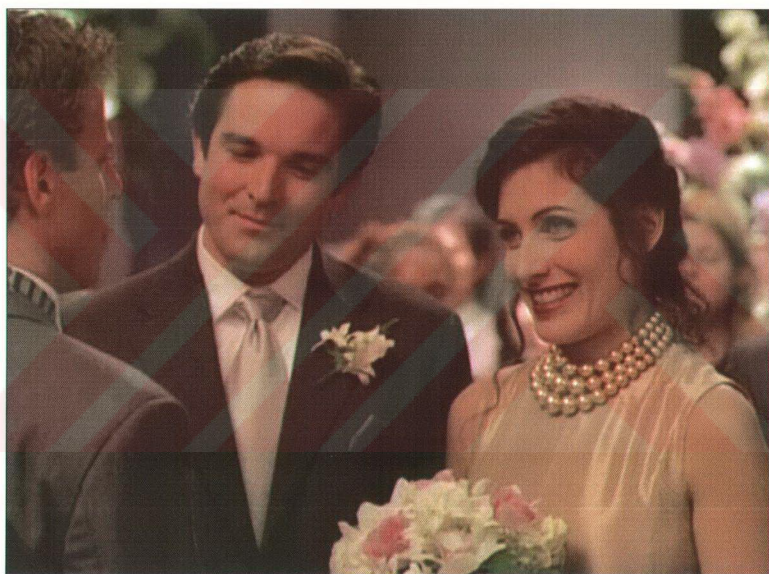

Figure 28 – Marrying the transsexual: Cindy and her groom. *Ally McBeal*

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