

**The 21st Century American Family in *Californication* – Issues of
Ideology, Narrative and Gender**

Eeva Likitalo
University of Tampere
School of Modern Languages and Translation Studies
English Philology
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Pro gradu -tutkielmani tavoitteena oli tarkastella, miten ja millaisena amerikkalainen televisiosarja *Californication* esittää amerikkalaisen perheen. Käsittelen perheen esitystä sarjassa ideologiana, joka tuotetaan katsojille tutujen narratiivien avulla yhä uudestaan normatiivisen viitekehyksen sisällä, mikä tuottaa tietyille esityksille hegemonisen ja luonnollisuutta imitoivan aseman suhteessa muihin, vaihtoehtoiisiin esityksiin. Yhtenä merkittävistä teoreettisista välineistäni on Louis Althusserin näkemys ideologiasta yksilön kuvitteellisena suhteena tämän elettyyn kokemukseen todellisuudesta, ja Althusserin käsitys televisiosta yhtenä merkittävimmistä ideologisen työn välineistä yhteiskunnassa.

Lähestyn sarjaa osana media- ja televisiotuotannon järjestystä, missä normit, perinteet ja tutut kaavat ohjaavat sarjassa tarjottua esitystä amerikkalaisesta perheestä. Mielestäni eksplisiittisestä ja mediassa kritisoidusta sisällöstään huolimatta *Californication* on nähtävissä osana perheen televisioesitysten jatkumoa, joka on perinteisesti keskittynyt kuvaamaan valkoista heteroseksuaalista ydinperhettä muiden etnisyyksien ja perhemuotojen kustannuksella. Analyysini sijoittaa sarjan perheen representaatioiden trendien jatkajaksi, jossa keskeisellä sijalla on jo 1970-luvulta lähtien ollut ns. dysfunktionaalinen ydinperhe, jonka sisäiset konfliktit ja ongelmat ovat keskeisessä asemassa sarjan dramatiikassa.

Vaikka (ydin)perheen patriarkaalinen instituutio esitetään sarjassa päällisin puolin kriisissä olevana ja toimimattomana, se asetetaan sarjassa ideologiseen kamppailuun muiden, perheen tärkeyttä potentiaalisesti haastavien ideologioiden, kuten individualismin ja liberaalin seksuaalisuuden, kanssa. Tämän kamppailun seurauksena sarja luo dikotomian valkoisen, heteroseksuaalisen ydinperheen arvomaailman ja sarjan tapahtumapaikan, Hollywoodin, korruptoituneen kulttuurin välille. Nojaamalla voimakkaasti romanttisen komedian narratiiviseen rakenteeseen sarjan kritiikki toimimatonta ydinperhettä kohtaan kääntyy toissijaiseksi tehostuskeinoksi kuvattaessa sarjan päähenkilön, Hank Moodyn, kasvua kohti aikuisuutta ja vastuullista vanhemmuutta korruptoituneessa ympäristössä. Perheen ideologia sukupuolittuneena sosiaalisena instituutiona on myös läsnä *Californication*issa, ja sarja tarjoaa pitkälti nykyisin televisiossa jo vallalla olevia sukupuolittuneita subjektipositiioita. Ulkonäkökriteerit ovat merkittäviä kummankin sukupuolen edustajille sarjassa, mutta naiseus tuotteistetaan ja asetetaan suhteessa miehen dominoivan positioon sarjan tapahtumissa ja Hankin kertojaäänän kautta. Naiseuden esitysten problematiikka ilmenee selkeimmin tarkasteltaessa perheen äidin, Karenin, esitystä suhteessa sarjan lapsettomiin ja perheettömiin naishahmoihin, jotka kalpenevat moraalisuudessaan ja ovat vapaampia seksuaalisen suuntautumisensa suhteen kuin sarjan ideaaliäiti. Isyyden esityksessä taas patriarkaalinen, etäinen perheenisä on väistynyt emotionaalisemman ja ”pehmeämmän” isähahmon tieltä. Feministiseltä kannalta tarkasteltuna merkittävin muutos perheen sisäisessä järjestyksessä onkin vanhemmuuden esittäminen haluttuna ja sukupuolesta riippumattomana positiona, jossa tärkeintä on kyky antautua, sitoutua ja asettaa toisen etu oman edelle. Kokonaisuutena *Californication* esittää nykyaikaisen amerikkalaisen perheen ikuisen rakkauden ideologian ja romanttisen komedian heteronormatiiviseen ja konservatiiviseen ydinperheasetelmaan kietoutuneena.

Avainsanat: ideologia, narratiivi, ydinperhe, heteronormatiivisuus, hegemoninen maskuliinisuus

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1. Introduction

Historically, families, both as audience and a narrative force, have a long tradition on American television since the rise of the medium as an everyday home appliance in the 1950s. Numerous television shows have relied on, and continue to rely on, the domestic sphere occupied by a family as the central locale in which the events, comic or dramatic, are presented to take place. One need only choose one of the many present-day sitcoms such as *Everybody Loves Raymond* or *According to Jim*, to see that the representations of the American family continue to be recycled and re-invented in television production. Furthermore, the discussions of family are not restricted to depictions of the domestic sphere, but family is often presented as one of the motivational factors affecting the lives of the characters of television shows even when the family does not serve as the primary focus in the narrative. For instance, in the case of professionalism, in shows such as *Lipstick Jungle* and *Grey's Anatomy*, family is referred to as clashing with the careers of the characters, male and female, and as such a factor in their lives that creates conflict and trouble, or, at times, provides them with comfort and a new perspective. The depictions of the family, in short, feature frequently in American television narratives, making it a crucial object of research in media and television studies. This also applies to the primary material of this thesis, the Showtime Networks Inc. produced American television show *Californication*, which, despite its explicit content, to a large extent focuses on the family.¹ I find that the show offers as the central motif the reunion of the family, which connects it with the traditions of television representations, as well as ties it into a wider social context as the ideology of the nuclear family has been one of the key values in American society for decades.

At present, many critics argue that the American family is at a state of crisis. William

¹ *Californication: The First Season*, perf. David Duchovny, Natasha McElhone, Madeleine Martin, Madeline Zima and Damian Young, Showtime Networks Inc., DVD, 2007. Showtime Networks Inc. is a subsidiary of the American mass media company CBS corporation. For more information, see www.cbcorporation.com.

Douglas sees that the debate ranges from nostalgic and dated views, promoted especially the conservative political Right, which see the family as facing serious deterioration due to the structural and demographic changes taking place within the family. Issues of divorce, one-parent households, and decreased fertility rates, for instance, are seen as signs of “the erosion of the American family.”² On the other hand, others view the changes taking place as “the inevitable imposition of more compelling and more enduring social trends.”³ While the debate remains unresolved and the family will undoubtedly serve as a source for political ammunition for decades to come, Chambers notes that during the postmodern era, when “nations are engaged in struggles over local, national and international identities,” the family as a topic of research holds special importance. “In this period of major shifts in meanings, everyday practices and representations of 'family' we find that social and cultural theory, political debate and the news media claim 'the family' as a critical topic. It now occupies centre-stage.”⁴ Thus, during a time of significant changes, the family continues to serve as a central issue both in society and on television.

In 2007, Tom Kapinos, the creator of *Californication*, characterised his work as follows: “I see it as a family show. It just happens to be a very fractured, f*cked up family . . .”⁵ With Kapinos' blunt yet revealing comment in mind, in this study, I will examine the first season of *Californication* first aired in the United States in 2007.⁶ The aim of my study is to detect how the family, family members and the family order are represented, reproduced, justified and organised on contemporary television in the US. As the quotation above suggests, despite many other issues the show touches upon, *Californication* can be seen as most centrally built around the issue of the American family and trouble within it, which makes it an excellent object of study for the purposes of this thesis. I hope to find aspects in the show that reflect the alleged “state of crisis” of the American family, and

2 William Douglas, *Is Something Wrong in Suburbia?* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2003) 1.

3 Douglas, 1.

4 Deborah Chambers, *Representing the Family* (London: Sage, 2001) 1.

5 Fred Topel, “Tom Kapinos on *Californication*,” *CanMag.com* 14 Aug 2007, 14 Jan 2009 <<http://www.canmag.com/nw/8655-tom-kapinos-californication-interview>>.

6 For directors and airing dates of individual episodes, see Appendix. I have limited my study to the first season of the show because the consequent seasons of the show are not yet available at the time of conducting the research.

aim to discuss to what extent *Californication* offers a progressive attitude towards the family, or whether it can be identified as a show that speaks of the power of normativity, tradition and nostalgia within the medium.

Californication tells the story of a white middle-class American family in a somewhat morally corrupt setting of modern day Los Angeles. The show depicts the life of the novelist Hank Moody (played by David Duchovny), who after moving from New York to L.A. with his partner Karen (Natasha McElhone) and their daughter Becca (Madeleine Martin) in order to make a screen version of his novel “God Hates Us All,” has lost Karen and Becca to a film producer, Bill (Damian Young). In the first season of the show, the central focus is on Hank's attempts to overcome his writer's block, get Karen and Becca back, and rediscover his self-worth and abilities as a parent and spouse. In the process, Hank is depicted as achieving little victories in his quest as well as suffering some losses, at times losing his faith, and, throughout it all, numbing the pain by drinking, using drugs and having sex with a number of women. In the end, Hank and Karen are reunited, and reconciliation within the family is granted.

The show has been categorised as an adult comedy and suitable for persons of 18 years or older as it “contains very strong language, strong sex, sex references and hard drug use.”⁷ For the same reasons, it has been subjected to criticism by some media critics and pro-family movements. For instance, in a review in *The New York Times*, Alessandra Stanley sees the explicit content of the show as a cheap means to gain an audience, and deems it as an “adult show with a childish point,”⁸ and the pro-family organisation Family First promoted a boycott on the show after episode 2, which displays Hank as smoking marijuana and having sex with a woman until they both vomit, was shown on television.⁹ However, not all critics have been as drastic in their opinions on

⁷ *Californication: The First Season*, DVD. However, I would argue that whilst most often classified as a comedy, the show also makes use of elements of television drama and the romance narrative, and thus should be defined as more of a hybrid of multiple genres. Issues of genre and narrative will be discussed in section 3.

⁸ Alessandra Stanley, “Self-Loathing in California. Self-Critique? No Way!” *The New York Times* 13 Aug. 2007, 22 Jan. 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/13/arts/television/13stan.html?_r=1>.

⁹ Mark Schliebs, “Drugs, Sex and Vomit Prompt Californication Boycott Call,” news.com.au 4 Sept. 2007, 22 Jan. 2010

Californication, and the first season of the show proved to be the most popular of Showtime produced new series in the U.S. since 2004.¹⁰ In addition, *Californication* has gained positive attention for instance through BAFTA and Golden Globe nominations, and in 2008, the actor David Duchovny won a Golden Globe in the category “Best Performance by an Actor in a Television Series – Musical or Comedy” for his role as Hank Moody in the first season of the show.¹¹

The importance of studying television and the messages it mediates lies in that television can be identified as an important source of information and entertainment in the everyday lives of people of the western world. As Strinati notes on popular culture, a central medium for which television can be identified as: “It is not only . . . development which makes popular culture and its analysis a relevant topic of inquiry. More important is the increasing extent to which people's lives in western capitalist societies appear to be affected by the popular culture presented by the modern mass media.”¹² Different media are gaining more attention in people's lives, and in relation to television consumption, according to A.C. Nielsen Co. as quoted by Herr, Americans are watching more traditional television than ever – the set is on for six hours and 47 minutes per day on average – and there is at least one television set in 99% of American households. The average American, then, watches television for over four hours each day, amounting to two months of non-stop watching per year or nine years by the time they turn 65 years old.¹³ Therefore, the images and constructions of the surrounding world the medium offers, are not to be dismissed as meaningless – rather, within television and media studies, along with many other academic fields, television has long been identified as a powerful tool as a transmitter of messages and views of the world. As Purvis and Thornham note: “the narratives of television drama, . . . construct, mediate and frame

<<http://www.news.com.au/boycott-planned-over-sex-vomit/story-e6frfkp9-111114340114>>.

10 Josef Adalian, “Showtime Renews 'Californication' – Duchovny Show Greenlit for Second Season,” RBI: Variety.com 6 Sep. 2007, 22 Jan. 2010 <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117971522.html?categoryid=1238&cs=1>>.

11 Official Website for the Annual Golden Globe Awards, “Nominations and Winners – 2007,” The Hollywood Foreign Press Association 2008, 22 Jan. 2010 <<http://www.goldenglobes.org/nominations/year/2007/>>.

12 Dominic Strinati, An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004) xii.

13 Norman Herr, “Television Statistics,” Internet Resources to Accompany the Sourcebook for Teaching Science 2007, California State University, California, 24 Nov 2008 <<http://www.csun.edu/science/health/docs/tv&health.html>>.

our social and individual identities.”¹⁴ Patterns and norms are learned, often at an unconscious level, which may well affect our takes on the surrounding world. In relation to the family on television, William Douglas notes that

television portrayals are often considered realistic, a condition that enhances the likelihood that viewers will develop beliefs consistent with those of television. Television families usually behave in ways that 'make sense' to viewers and commonly defined as confronting problems and behaving in ways that resonate with viewers.¹⁵

When the viewers are faced with new life stages, Douglas sees that “television content may play a significant role in shaping the beliefs that viewers develop about real family life, especially when television families are seen to act in ways that appear appropriate and/or effective.”¹⁶ It can be said, then, that television not only reflects the state of the family in society, but also, works to mould our understanding, experiences and expectations of it quite significantly.

In addition, it is noteworthy that the distribution of television shows of different national origins does not limit itself within the boundaries of a nation, but shows are often available to massive audiences through globalised networking, the internet and multinational production companies throughout the commercialised western world. As Strinati continues: “It is clearly important in other societies, both past and present, but in these [western] societies the sheer volume of popular media culture which is made available needs to be considered.”¹⁷ Indeed, mediated images seem to penetrate our everyday lives on television and computer screens at an accelerating speed, offering perspectives of the world.

In light of these facts, I find that studying *Californication* and its representation of the American family does not mean discussing a meaningless piece of entertainment, but will demonstrate how television can and should be taken as a transmitter of certain aspects and ideologies which potentially affect our understanding and perceptions of the surrounding world. I

14 Tony Purvis and Susan Thornham, *Television Drama: Theories and Identities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) ix.

15 Douglas, 10.

16 Douglas, 11.

17 Strinati, xii.

find that studying the family in television representation bears special importance because of the family's nature as an organising institution that is often taken to function as a moral centre and carrier of values desirable in society. Even though the show has gained plenty of media attention, it has not been under academic scrutiny previously. In my opinion, the disagreeing views of the show in the media speak of *Californication* as portraying shocking and potentially ground-breaking elements in relation to the representation of the family, which is one of the reasons why I have chosen it as the topic of my study. More importantly, I believe that focusing on a show that is not directly categorised as a pro-family show will offer fresh insights into the topic of the American family as presented on contemporary television – after all, it seems clear that *Californication* does not conform to the one-sided rightist pro-family discourse promoted by the likes of Family First. I believe that a close inspection of the representation of the family ideology in *Californication* will show how the ideology of the family is constructed, what themes prevail in family representation while others are deemed dated, and hopefully, also why they prevail. Moreover, I believe that my analysis will demonstrate how the restrictions and norms of the medium of television matter in the equation.

In this thesis, I will approach the issue of the family in *Californication* as primarily an ideology as understood by sociologist Louis Althusser and his followers. I have chosen Althusser because I, like many other media scholars, find his focus on the representational and imaginary nature of ideology to be very useful and applicable to the medium. Furthermore, I believe that his theory on the nature of ideology as an imaginary construction that organises social practices and formations can be applied to the study of family representation in the show. In section 2, I shall present the theoretical frame of reference for this study and discuss Althusser and his followers notions on ideology as applied to television studies in more detail. Furthermore, as the issue of family ideology has a long history in television representations, by relying mainly on the works of Deborah Chambers, Estella Tincknell and Ella Taylor, in section 2.2. I will discuss the development

of televised American families from the 1950s until the end of the 20th century. In section 2.2., I will also pay attention to the changes occurring in society and public debate at different times in order to see how social changes and movements have affected television representations of the family. My assumption is that feminism, being a prominent and important movement in relation to family and gender politics in the latter half of the 20th century, will have reflected itself upon the ideology of the American family on television increasingly towards the new millennium.

In section 3, I will move on to analysing the primary material of this thesis, the first season of *Californication*. Firstly, in section 3.1., I attempt to position the show *Californication* as part of the continuum of family representations since the 1950s by detecting how, and in what respects, the representation it offers pays homage to the traditions and typicalities detectable in its predecessors. My aim is to draw on the American family in the show as an Althusserian ideology, which seeks to make socially dominating and preferred values and images seem natural even though they should be perceived as reflections of a desired social order rather than facts of life. I hope to find reflections of contemporary gender and family politics within that ideology, and will therefore pay special attention to possible progressive aspects and change in the family representation the show offers. Secondly, in section 3.2., I will continue to focus on the family as an ideology, discussing it as a formation that is challenged by competing and alternative ideologies, which potentially serve to compromise the importance and dominance of the family formation as a central ideology in the lives of the characters in the show. Third, in section 3.3., I will discuss the show in relation to its genre and narrative in order to see to what extent the course of events in the show is determined by the rules and norms of television representations and narratives. I believe that the norms of the romance narrative will prove to be of special importance in this section as the grand narrative throughout the first season of *Californication* revolves around Hank and Karen's relationship as both ex-lovers and parents to Becca.

In section 4, I will move on to discussing the show from a more gendered perspective in

order to see to what extent gender affects the characters within, and outside, the family formation. I will focus on the construction of the two genders in relation to the typicalities and trends of mediated gender representations as well as detecting possible gender-specific subject positions within the ideology of the family. In section 4.1., I will focus on discussing men and masculinity in the show, and in 4.2., I shall provide a more detailed discussion on how women are portrayed in the show within the ideology of the family as well as outside it. Most importantly, I will focus on discussing whether there are detectable differences between gender representations in relation to the family formation – in other words, I attempt to see whether certain ways of being a man or a woman affect the characters' access into the sphere of the family. In section 4.3., then, I shall approach the gender politics of the ideology of the family. I will pay special attention to parental relations, responsibility and the socialisation of children in order to see whether the show promotes a gender-specific and differentiating approach to the parents as gendered subjects, or whether it allows for joined effort and flexibility for the parents independent of their gender.

Within the boundaries of this thesis, I will not be able to provide as detailed a discussion on the issues of class and ethnicity, as represented on television and as part of the spectrum of American families, as it would deserve. I will nevertheless refer to those issues briefly where relevant. Neither will I be able to discuss the multitude of intertextual references present in the show as nearly all of the episode titles entail one. In addition, a link can be drawn between the character of Hank Moody and the main character of many of the author Charles Bukowski's works, Henry Charles "Hank" Chinaski.¹⁸

As I examine the issues of media, television, ideology, family and gender in this thesis, my work can be described as touching upon the fields of gendered media and television studies, women and men's studies as well as feminist studies.

¹⁸ Howard Sounes, Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life (New York: Grove Press, 1998) 185. Sounes defines Bukowski as a writer of semiautobiographical fiction, which links Hank Moody with both Chinaski and Bukowski. Resemblance between the three lies, in addition, in that they all deal with a drinking problem and are involved with a number of women sexually.

2. Theoretical Frame of Reference

As the aim of my thesis is to analyse the ideology of the family in *Californication*, the theoretical frame of reference will consist of an in-depth discussion on the two key concepts, ideology and the family. First, in section 2.1., I will define the concept of ideology in classic Marxist terms. For the most part, however, I will focus on Louis Althusser and his follower's work on the concept of ideology. I will begin with presenting the basic ideas of Althusser's theory of ideology, and then move on to discussing how they can be applied to television studies and, also, how ideology in Althusserian terms affects our daily perceptions of the world and 'reality' through television. In section 2.2., I will move on to exploring the American family and the ideology of the family from a feminist perspective. In this section, I will also summarise aspects of the history and development of family-centered shows and the depiction of the American family on television in general. As the discourses and representations on television often do not belong to one show category exclusively, but affect one another across multiple genres and formats, I will not restrict my discussion solely to family-centered shows but shall use other television shows and films as examples when necessary.

2.1. Ideology and Television

Ideology is a concept that has been widely used in Marxist scholarship and cultural critique. For Karl Marx, a classic scholar in the field, ideology served as a tool in his well-known socialist critique of the capitalist world. According to Marx and Engels,

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who

lack the means of mental production are subject to it . . . In so far, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age; thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.¹⁹

Ideology, then, can be defined as “the means by which ruling economic classes generalize and extend their supremacy across the whole range of social activity, and naturalize it in the process, so that their rule is accepted as natural and inevitable, and therefore legitimate and binding.”²⁰ Marx used the term to criticise the unequal division of labour and distribution of profits in society. He argued that by having the power to control not only the material means of production, but also the production and distribution of ideas in society, the ruling class is able to convince the working classes to acquiesce in a system that exploits their labour as they are paid less than the value of what they produce.²¹ It fools the actors within society to operate under “false consciousness”, building their lives on illusory ideas that in fact “perpetuate the status quo and continue the class system of oppression.”²²

Since Marx's writings on ideology, the concept has been much discussed and developed further by a number of critics and scholars. John Thompson emphasises the importance of meaning in the process, defining ideology as “the ways in which meaning is mobilized for the maintenance of relations of domination.”²³ From this perspective, the set of images, myths and ideas, or “beliefs and assumptions – unconscious, unexamined, invisible”, that seek to be understood as 'universal' or 'natural' in society despite the fact that they originate in particular sociocultural conditions and vary in time and place, can be said to be at the core of ideology.²⁴ This aspect of ideology has been developed by the noted French neo-Marxist Louis Althusser.

19 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970) 60-1.

20 Tim O'Sullivan et al. *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1993) 109.

21 Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007) 54.

22 Mimi White, “Ideological Analysis and Television,” *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, ed. Robert C. Allen, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1992) 165.

23 John Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1984) 5.

24 Prabha Krishnan and Anita Dighe, “Affirmation and Denial: Construction of Femininity on Indian Television,” *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader*, ed. Charlotte Brunson et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 51.

The work of Althusser emphasises the multifaceted nature of ideology. First of all, he provides the grounds for approaching ideology as a negotiation of different meanings rather than actual facts of existence. Although Althusser's views have been criticised and revised, his takes on ideology are nevertheless valuable in studying visual culture and the significance of representations. Althusser's theory on ideology emphasises the systems of representation – “language, myths, religion”, and so on “as crucial factors in not only the construction of an individual as a social subject, but one's very sense of identity.”²⁵ As Thornham and Purvis note, Althusser's theory suggests that

As individuals, we have our identities constituted through ideology: we can become subjects – makers of meaning and authors of our actions – only by being subjected, by operating within the conceptual frameworks or 'maps of meaning' . . . which ideology constructs for us.²⁶

In other words, ideology “interpellates” or “hails” us, asking us to position ourselves within its terms of reference, and according to our responses works to position us as subjects in its framework.²⁷ In this sense, ideology appears as omnipotent and inescapable, but still allows different positions for individuals to take. Althusser argues that “in ideology the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that expresses a will (conservative, conformist, reformist, or revolutionary), a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality.”²⁸

Reality and ideology are invisible constructions, largely beyond reach and inaccessible as neutral entities. As Mimi White notes, “there is no such thing as being 'outside' ideology.”²⁹ For Althusser, ideology “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. . . [and] man is an ideological animal by nature.”³⁰ Ricoeur interprets Althusser's ideology as “something that pushes us, a system of motivation . . . that proceeds from the lack of a clear

25 White, 169.

26 Purvis and Thornham, 75.

27 Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984) 47-8.

28 Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Allen Lane, 1969) 234.

29 White, 170.

30 Althusser, *Essays on Ideology*, 36, 45.

distinction between the real and the unreal.”³¹ We can only make sense of ourselves and our social experiences within the boundaries that language and the meaning systems – or, ideologies – available in a given society set for us.³² Thus ideology engulfs not only the subordinate, but everyone in society is subjected to it, even the ones whose interest it is to reinforce dominant ideology.

Being a Marxist, Althusser also recognised the significance of the structure of production in creating a basis for the wider superstructure of society. He did not, however, agree that the structure of production was to explain the superstructure comprehensively, but applied the idea of a social formation in his work. According to Althusser, the social formation comprises of a variety of interrelated practices, namely the economic, the political, and the ideological.³³ These areas of social practice “do not exhaust human experience but designate the key arenas within which individuals find their identity in the social formation.”³⁴ The different arenas are distinct but coexist in human activity and experience, and all the different areas are characterised by disunity, contradiction, complexity and heterogeneity. Thus they are all arenas for contestation, and the interests of an individual “may work in concert, whereas at other times they may be divided or come into conflict with one another.”³⁵ From this point of view, ideology matters, but how it matters, is not always clear-cut or predictable.

Althusser provides one more useful notion in connection with ideology – that is, the concept of “ideological state apparatuses”.³⁶ He used the term to refer to institutions that act in the transmission and negotiation of dominant ideology. Althusser lists religion, education, politics, the law, the family, media and culture as such and argues that as the state is essentially the state of the

31 Paul Ricoeur, “Althusser's Theory of Ideology,” *Althusser: A Critical Reader*, ed. Gregory Elliott (Oxford: Blacknell, 1994) 55.

32 Liesbet van Zoonen, *Feminist Media Studies* (London: Sage, 1994) 24.

33 White, 168.

34 White, 168.

35 White, 169.

36 Althusser also recognised what he titled “repressive state apparatuses” referring to the existence of the army, government, administration and prisons, for instance (see *Essays on Ideology*). This aspect of state apparatuses is not, however, relevant for my thesis and thus will not be discussed any further.

ruling class, despite the variety and internal contradictions, these institutions are said to function as its agents.³⁷ Not directly controlled by the ones in power, the institutions can operate as “ideological battlegrounds”, but will nevertheless in the end function “in favour of dominant ideology, although Althusser fails to explain exactly why and how this is achieved.”³⁸ According to Althusser, the fundamental function of ideology is the reproduction of submission to the established order through ideological subjection in which individuals are trained into the rules of the ruling class. In this system, ideology is manipulated at different times to work as an agent of exploitation and repression.³⁹ Ideology, then, becomes an issue that is experienced, transmitted, negotiated, contradicted, reinforced, imagined but nevertheless inevitably lived throughout society in both the personal and the social. And at the core are representations, images and the imaginary instead of reality. As Ricoeur summarises Althusser's thinking: “We are never related directly to what are called the conditions of existence, classes and so on. These conditions must be represented in one way or another; they must have their imprint in the motivational field, in our system of images, and so in our representation of the world. The so-called real causes never appear as such in human existence but always under a symbolic mode.”⁴⁰

Althusser's views on ideology are a fruitful theoretical source when applied to television studies. First of all, as Purvis and Thornham point out, “the mass media can be seen as the most powerful form of 'ideological apparatus' in contemporary society.”⁴¹ And, as television has been and continues to be an important tool for the mass media, its identification as a crucial ideological apparatus in the western world is self-evident. Addressing its audience continuously with its messages, it has become a natural part of one's everyday life and experiences, providing “a constantly updated 'window of the world'.”⁴² As noted in the introduction, Americans spend a

37 Althusser, *Essays on Ideology*, 17-20.

38 Van Zoonen, 24.

39 Althusser, 6-7.

40 Ricoeur, 61.

41 Purvis and Thornham, 76.

42 Purvis and Thornham, 76.

significant portion of their day watching television. In addition, the audiences and consumption of American television shows does not remain within the borders of the US, but at a time of increasing globalization the shows and representations receive attention in numerous countries in the western world. Thus television's significance to an individual's life should not be underestimated as its imagery penetrates everyday life on a regular basis – after all, it cannot be denied that a complete isolation from media and media images is becoming a near impossibility. Television's messages, often taken to represent “'liveness', or 'nowness', its constant flow of images seeming to transmit and record everyday reality . . .” despite their imaginary nature, can then be read as messages transmitting ideology in Althusserian terms.⁴³ With its pervasiveness and images taken to be reflective of reality, television in the western world is a very powerful carrier of ideology, or an ideological state apparatus.

Indeed, the very nature of television – distributing images, representations and narratives of the world instead of reality – resembles Althusser's definition of ideology to a remarkable extent. It provides an imaginary or artificial relationship between the image, referent and (imagined) reality, which is inevitably ideological due to its imaginary nature and simultaneous strive to be understood as 'truth'. As Stuart Hall notes, television works to “produce an ideological consensus about how the world works and what it means.”⁴⁴ It fills in the picture of an increasingly fragmented world, providing “information” about social groups unfamiliar to us, and providing us with tools to categorise and label these groups. However, this information is not a reflection of reality, but of ideology: “What is re-presented, then, is not reality but ideology, and the effectivity of this ideology is enhanced by the iconicity of television by which the medium purports to situate its truth claim in the objectivity of the real, and thus to disguise the fact that any 'truth' that it produces is that of ideology, not reality.”⁴⁵ Television works not to represent reality, but to construct an image of reality

43 Purvis and Thornham, 76.

44 Hall (1977) as referred to by Purvis and Thornham, 76.

45 John Fiske, “Postmodernism and Television,” Mass Media and Society, ed. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (London: Arnold, 1996) 54.

to be applied as an explaining relation between image and referent, and thus following from Althusser's definition of ideology, will inevitably offer ideas not neutral, but a will, hope or nostalgia. Television, then, is a thoroughly ideological medium both at the level of its messages and essence.

Another notion proving the applicability of Althusser's theory in the field of television studies can be seen at the level of the individual and subjective experience. This aspect has been explored by audience and reception studies that focus on how, why and with what consequences television products are consumed by individuals. Despite the fact that “studies of television viewing consistently show, for the most part people turn on the television hoping to be entertained . . .”⁴⁶, the images and messages that television programming offers have a more profound impact on the individual. A suitable example of the issues constantly on display on television and in media representation, and perhaps one of the most contested and criticised, is that of gender, which I will also discuss in my analysis of *Californication*. It has been proven in critical readings of media representations that stereotypical representations of the genders not only affect our evaluation of others and the surrounding world, but also our own sense of selves from an early age. As Barrie Gunter reports:

Spence, Helmreich and Stapp (1975) demonstrated that stereotypic beliefs were significant factors affecting how people perceived themselves and have an effect particularly on levels of personal self-esteem . . . the observation of male and female models in the child's environment has been postulated as a major source of gender-role information. The developing child has two principal sources of models – the home and school environments and the mass (chiefly audio-visual) media.⁴⁷

In other words, the information that television offers affects our very sense of self and experiences of our place and purpose in a given setting, or more accurately, ideology. Despite, or, on the other hand, perhaps precisely because of television's nature as “something so close, so much a part of day-to-day existence, that it remains invisible as something to be analyzed or consciously

46 Robert C. Allen, introduction, “More Talk about TV,” *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, 1.

47 Barrie Gunter, *Television and Gender Representation* (London: Libbey, 1995) 1.

considered,”⁴⁸ it escapes the viewer that a depiction is never “just an illustration . . . it is the site for the construction and depiction of social difference.”⁴⁹ Media representations of issues such as age, class, profession, nationality and gender, to name a few, are at play in determining a person's suitable place within an ideology, and affect our individual experiences. Naturally, our reaction to these representations can vary, as Althusser noted in his theory as well, but it cannot be denied that they nevertheless affect us and force us to position ourselves within that ideology. We acquire subjectivities in relation to the ideologies offered to us by society:

The dominant ideology works to reproduce itself in our subjectivities, so, regardless of our material social conditions, all of us who are subjects of capitalism have, to a greater or lesser degree, subjectivities inscribed with white, patriarchal bourgeois ideologies. . . . ideology does not just re-present itself in pictures of reality, but reproduces itself in the subjectivities upon and within which those representations work. Ideological reproduction and representation are part and parcel of the same process.⁵⁰

And in times of increasing consumption of different media, the representations they offer matter a great deal. As MacKinnon notes, “The way we think about gender, and about so many other features of our lives, is both reflected in and produced by the images that surround us in our culture. Popular conceptions are vitally concerned with popular culture.”⁵¹

As noted by Althusser in his use of the concept of social formation, however, ideology does not appear in a neutral or straightforwardly accepting environment, but both the individual's and society's competing values and interests serve to create an “ideological battleground” where dominant ideology and meanings may come into conflict. Similarly, television can be interpreted as an arena for contestation of meaning. After all, it cannot be said that media or television content provides a consistently uniform picture of, say, gender or the family, especially in the time of increasing globalization and segmentation of audiences and target groups. In addition, an individual's interpretation of themselves may vary greatly in relation to different ideologies that

48 Allen, 3.

49 Gillian Rose, Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2007) 7.

50 Fiske, 55.

51 Kenneth MacKinnon, Representing Men: Maleness and Masculinity in the Media (London: Arnold, 2003) 23.

they have encountered, making the whole negotiation of “the self” a conflicting and inconsistent, neverending process. Althusser's theory, however, has been criticised for leaving too little room for contestation: “the operation of the 'ideological apparatus' as he describes it is so effective in positioning us as subjects that it would seem to exclude conflict or struggle.”⁵² This is why I shall follow the ideas of Hall and Gramsci on hegemony to explain the workings of dominant ideology in the form of representations and images.

Antonio Gramsci used the term hegemony to describe the constant, ongoing struggle between the dominant and subordinate groups in society – according to Stuart Hall, “struggle at the level of ideology, of representations, but struggle which is never completed.”⁵³ For Gramsci, hegemony served as a tool to move away from the solely class-related ideas of dominant ideology in favour of the ideological and cultural. Hegemony is not power achieved by arms, but, as Rosalind Gill notes on Gramsci's work,

It denotes processes through which a group or party is able to claim social, political and cultural leadership throughout a society or social formation. Hegemony does not mean domination. Rather, Gramsci emphasized the need to win approval or consent. It is an active, ongoing process which is always temporary and contested.⁵⁴

The relevance of theories of ideology in studies on visual and audiovisual culture lies precisely in the persistence of certain, hegemonic meanings over others, and the reasons and mechanisms for “making the meaning *stick*.”⁵⁵ Every ideological sign, according to Hall, is always a potential point of struggle over meaning, making hegemony at best an “unstable equilibrium.”⁵⁶ Referencing Hall's work, Purvis and Thornham point out that “events, real or fictional, are not simply transmitted by television, argues Hall; they are assigned meaning or 'encoded' by being placed in a structured context of the television narrative, and this meaning is open to contestation.”⁵⁷ Thus although television messages are loaded with potential meaning, and as van Zoonen argues, “clearly, the

52 Purvis and Thornham, 76-77.

53 Purvis and Thornham, 77.

54 Gill, 55.

55 Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London, Verso, 1991) 195.

56 Hall (1977: 334) as quoted by Purvis and Thornham, 77.

57 Purvis and Thornham, 77.

media are the contemporary mediators of hegemony, the question being how, and to whose avail, particular ideological constructs . . . are produced in media content,⁵⁸ messages can be and are interpreted in different ways according to our individual frameworks of knowledge despite the producers' original preferences.

The ideological frameworks of knowledge, however, does not diminish the importance of ideology in studying television. Ideological critique (or analysis), when applied to television studies, focuses most importantly on studying the tension between meanings, how they are constructed, and what ideas seem to prevail and persist throughout, and why. At the core of the analysis is to discover, according to Mimi White,

what meanings are made available through the medium and its programs and the nature of viewer engagement. In drawing on . . . various methods of analyzing texts, the ideological perspective assumes that television offers a particular construction of the world rather than a universal, abstract truth. In other words, ideological criticism examines texts and viewer-text relations to clarify how the meanings and pleasures generated by television express specific social, material and class interests.⁵⁹

After all, as Althusser's theory implies, it can be argued that all representations and images are portrayals of the "real world", but as such nevertheless imaginary portrayals that cannot be neutral in their message, but in essence imply a perspective or perspectives over others. As Carter and Steiner point out: "The media are important for many reasons, including their long acknowledged power to represent 'socially acceptable' ways of being or relating to others . . . media texts never simply mirror or reflect 'reality', but instead construct hegemonic definitions of what should be accepted as 'reality'."⁶⁰ And, what is to be accepted as 'reality', as can be drawn from my discussion on Althusser and his followers, is in fact ideology. Thus, with their words in my mind, I shall be approaching the American family in *Californication* as an ideology where certain values are emphasised and naturalised over others, but also as an arena where meanings and values come to conflict. This, I believe, will be fruitful and enlightening in exploring what the contemporary

58 Van Zoonen, 24.

59 White, 172-3.

60 Cynthia Carter and Linda Steiner, Critical Readings: Media and Gender (London: Open University Press, 2004) 1-2.

American family is like on television in the new millennium. After all, as I have shown, many media and television scholars agree that television is not merely a medium transmitting irrelevant or random portrayals of the world, but the representations it offers both reflect the values of society, either reinforcing or contesting them, and influence our everyday experience and understanding of the world. Television not only provides a perspective on 'reality' – it may well create it in the first place. Thus it is important to explore the different ideologies that can be detected within television narratives, and that is what I attempt to do in my analysis of *Californication*.

2.2. Theorising the Family in American Society and Television

As discussed in 2.1., the family can be identified as an ideological state apparatus in Althusserian terms as it can work to transmit and perpetuate dominant ideology within society through socialising children into society's norms and preferred ways of action and thinking. The family, after all, plays an important part in the socialisation process of an individual, which McQuail defines as

the teaching of established norms and values by ways of symbolic rewards and punishment for different kinds of behaviour . . . [or] the learning process whereby we all learn how to behave in certain situations and learn the expectations which go with a given role in society.⁶¹

Naturally, not all real families work in similar ways and stand for the exact same values and belief systems. However, as one of the tasks of the family is to equip their children with adequate knowledge to function in a socially acceptable and preferred way in society, the values reinforcing dominant ideology can be said to play a role in the socialisation process nevertheless. As Jane Flax notes:

The interaction of gender and class and the reverberations of unconscious experience in everyday life can be seen clearly and are felt intensely in the family. This fact and the importance of the family in reproducing persons who will, partly unconsciously, reproduce contemporary society including gender-, race- and class-based relations of domination, make an investigation of the social relations of the family an especially important project for feminists.⁶²

61 Denis McQuail, *Introduction to Mass Communication Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 1987) 280.

62 Jane Flax, "The Family in Contemporary Feminist Thought: A Critical Review," *The Family in Political Thought*,

In Althusserian terms, the family can be approached from another perspective, as well. That is, the family can be identified as an ideology in itself. After all, it is a system charged with values, beliefs and expectations that strives to be understood as 'normal' or 'natural', although, as Flax argues referring to the culturally dominant ideal of the term, “*the* family does not exist.”⁶³ Flax's definition of the family as an abstract entity where “ideology, feeling, fantasy, wishes, and reality” complexly intermingle, corresponds to Althusser's definition of ideology as an imaginary relationship to one's state of existence (c.f. Chapter 2.1).⁶⁴ In addition, its roots embedded deep in patriarchy, the family can be argued to be a formation used to justify and naturalise the systematic rule of the father, which makes the family an ideology by definition as a formation of oppression and unjust rule in Marxist terms in society and between genders.

Traditionally, the ideal of the family in the United States has largely relied on the white nuclear family definition of an intact unit consisting of a male breadwinner, (stay at home) wife, and their blood-related or adopted children.⁶⁵ This family, normatively middle-class, white and Anglo-American, is built heavily on the tradition of patriarchy, which Teresa L. Ebert defines as “the organisation and division of all practices and signification in culture in terms of gender and the privileging of one gender over the other, giving males control over female sexuality, fertility, and labor.”⁶⁶ This traditional, or more accurately, modern ideal of the family experienced its major peak during and after the industrial revolution in the 19th century that separated work and home into separate spheres that carried distinct roles and expectations for the two genders.⁶⁷ Kingsley Davis elaborates on the nature of the modern family:

ed. Jean Bethke Elstain (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982) 224.

63 Flax, 223.

64 Flax, 223.

65 Judith Stacey, *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) 6.

66 Teresa L. Ebert, “The Romance of Patriarchy: Ideology, Subjectivity, and Postmodern Feminist Cultural Theory,” *Cultural Critique* 10 (1988) 19.

67 Kingsley Davis, “Wives and Work: A Theory of the Sex-Role Revolution and Its Consequences,” *Feminism, Children and the New Families*, ed. Sanford M. Dornbursch and Myra H. Strober (New York: Guilford Press, 1988) 76.

Simply to describe the system is to suggest its major weakness. It involved two interrelated dichotomies: that between the workplace and the home and that between the breadwinner and the homemaker. Never before had the roles of husband and wife been so distinct. The income of wife and children was determined by forces over which they had no control, and it was funneled to them through the husband, giving him an iron grip on the family's economic destiny while involving him in minimal personal contact with the family members.⁶⁸

The ideal of the modern setting, despite its evident defects as noted by Davis, persisted in American society well into the 20th century and the patriarchal breadwinner pattern was perceived as “normal”, its absence “abnormal”.⁶⁹ Deborah Chambers lists authorities – or ideological state apparatuses – such as the church, the state and private business, educational system, sexual education and the media as central in reinforcing the modern model of the family to persist until the mid-twentieth century.⁷⁰ Despite the rise of what Davis titles the “egalitarian system” at a time of increasing urbanisation and industrialism in the 1950s, when women entered the workplace at an increasing speed, the average marrying age of women started to rise and hence, the production of children diminish, the inequalities remained far from resolved.⁷¹ Bolted into patriarchy and traditional roles for the genders, the ideas about separate spheres and the patriarchal division of labour within families did not disappear despite the new ideology of companionship in the “egalitarian” marriage: “The ideology of the companionate marriage thus effectively worked to conceal the continuing power imbalance inherent in the institution . . . there was a powerful residual sense that 'separate spheres' for men and women were still inevitable, even within the home . . .”⁷² And, “unsurprisingly, the main burden of the domestic ideal fell upon women's shoulders . . . the family was increasingly represented as the primary ideological centre of women's lives.”⁷³

The ideas and norms about American family life have affected the portrayals of the American family on television throughout decades, and the depictions can be said to correspond to

68 Davis, 76.

69 Davis, 75.

70 Chambers, 57.

71 Davis, 77.

72 Estella Tincknell, *Mediating the Family: Gender, Culture and Representation* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005) 18.

73 Tincknell, 12.

the state of the family in public debate and rhetoric. In the 1950s, the American television family reflected the general cultural post-war consensus: “wartime anomie and chaos were supposed to be replaced with cohesion and familial stability.”⁷⁴ The era is generally seen as a time of shows “emblazoning idealized portraits of middle-class dynamics into the national unconscious” in sitcoms such as the *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *Amos 'n' Andy*, and *The Life of Riley*.⁷⁵ Ethnicity was portrayed to some extent, but as a rule focused on first generation European immigrants; when black, Hispanic and Asian family life was dealt with, it was “the butt of the joke”, as can be seen in the character of the Cuban Ricky Ricardo with a Latin temper in *I Love Lucy*, for instance.⁷⁶ The families, mostly nuclear, middle-class and white, as a rule recognised and were in pursuit for the bourgeois way of life. As Ella Taylor notes:

A quick survey of the major sitcoms of the 1950s suggests a vast middle class of happy American families who had already made it to the choicer suburbs (*Leave it to the Beaver*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*) or were on their way there (*I Love Lucy*) or aspired to middle-class status (*The Honeymooners*, *The Life of Riley*).⁷⁷

By the end of the decade, the shows depicting characters of different ethnicities had all given way to a range of even more standardised domestic comedies that “idealized versions of white middle-class families in suburban communities [and] mirrored the practices of ethnic and racial exclusion seen in America's suburbs more generally.”⁷⁸ This, however, did not necessarily require perfection or flawlessness of the characters – rather, the “need to 'work at' producing the ideal family 'for real'” stood at the core of the shows.⁷⁹ Crises and threats to the family remained nevertheless mostly at the level of quarrels and “unclouded by financial troubles, street violence, drug abuse, or marital discord . . . these [1950s comedy] shows proposed family life as a charming excursion into

74 Tincknell, 6.

75 Chambers, 72.

76 Lynn Spigel, “Family on Television,” [The Museum of Broadcast Communications](http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/F/htmlF/familyontel/familyontel.htm), accessed 13 Mar. 2009 <<http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/F/htmlF/familyontel/familyontel.htm>>. Date of publication not stated on the website.

77 Taylor, 26.

78 Spigel, “Family on Television.”

79 Chambers, 72.

modernity, but resting firmly on the unshakable stability of tradition.”⁸⁰ All in all, providing a solid unit against the threats of the post-industrial era and the Cold War at hand, the family stood as a marker of stability in both society and on television, and as such a irreplaceable intact unit on which to build a victorious nation on: “images of a triumphant family and nation were fused within the national nostalgia of a golden era of wholesome family values.”⁸¹ The white middle-class nuclear family rose to the prominence as a haven for “caring, commitment, loyalty, sacrifice, permanence and morality.”⁸² In this equation, women possessed maternal and wifely virtues “framed within the feminine domestic category of full-time motherhood”, whereas men were often depicted as breadwinner fathers, as in the ideal and self-sacrificing mother and authoritative paternal father portrayed in the show *The Waltons*.⁸³ Television, then, played up to its role as an ideological state apparatus, transmitting hegemonic and preferred ways of thinking and behaving.

Ella Taylor records that the 1960s generally followed the trend of the happy “affable family comedies” of the 1950s in shows such as *My Three Sons*, *Dennis the Menace*, *The Patty Duke Show*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and *The Donna Reed Show*.⁸⁴ However, Lynn Spigel sees the changes taking place in society – rising divorce rates, the sexual revolution and the rise of feminism – as having a noticeable impact on the depiction of the American family on television. Coinciding with the loss of America's first family at John F. Kennedy's death in 1963, the scope of representations widened to include broken families, single parents (although never divorced but widowed), and families of a lower class.⁸⁵ Possible problems within the families were dealt with in socially relevant dramas and documentaries: “*Hunger in America* and *Harvest of Shame* . . . depicted underprivileged children, while other documentaries such as *Middletown* or *Salesmen* chronicled the everyday lives or typical Americans, demonstrating the impossibility of living up to

80 Taylor, 27.

81 Chambers, 72.

82 Chambers, 72.

83 Chambers, 72.

84 Taylor, 29.

85 Spigel, “Family on Television.”

the American family ideal.”⁸⁶

The second wave of feminism, roughly timing from the 1960s until the end of the 1970s brought about several influential feminist critics whose work can be seen as founding in theorising the family. In fact, it can be said that feminist critique has been the most resourceful field of study to question and problematise the power of the family ideal and its restricting representations in political and cultural debate as well as their impact on individual lives. Although diverse and sometimes conflicting in argumentation, “feminist enquiry is unified by the belief that females and males, femininity and masculinity are equally valuable. Feminist scholars continue to seek to identify, critique and alter structures and practices that actively or passively hinder equality.”⁸⁷ The classic works, Simone de Beauvoir's *La Deuxième Sexe* (1949), translated into English as *The Second Sex* (1953), and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), gaining ground in the early 1960s at the beginning of the second wave of feminism, are generally noted as the first to question the patriarchal family setting in which women were left in the position of the “second sex” or the (un)happy housewife and thus undermined in their ability to act as equals to men in all spheres of life.⁸⁸

Since the work of de Beauvoir and Friedan, feminist scholars have developed their analysis and critique of the family further through various approaches and methods. The writings of Kate Millet (1969) and Shulamith Firestone (1970), for instance, were of the radical feminist movement, and desired to abolish the biological family as the basis for all women's oppression. “The heart of woman's oppression is her childbearing and childrearing roles”, which, according to Firestone, resulted in a psychology of power through the socialisation process. Consequently, “children, in turn, are defined in relation to this role and are psychologically formed by it; what they become as adults and the sort of relationships they are able to form determine the society they will ultimately

86 Spigel, “Family on Television.”

87 Julia T. Wood, “Feminist Scholarship and the Study of Relationships,” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 12 (1995) 104.

88 See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Del, 1963).

build.”⁸⁹ To be freed from the “tyranny” of their biology and break the chains of patriarchy, Millett called for a “cultural revolution, which, while it must necessarily involve the political and economic reorganization traditionally implied by the term revolution must go far beyond this as well.”⁹⁰ In their writing, family appeared as the ultimate evil construction and the source for inequality which hindered the development of women into individuals and socialised children into repeating the same pattern. Betty Friedan's coining of the term “feminine mystique” corresponds to Millett's and Firestone's views: a woman caught in the trap of the mystique is oppressively defined only in relation to her role as wife and mother, and “has no independent self to hide even in guilt; she exists only for and through her husband.”⁹¹

Identifying the problematic of the family not in their existence but “particular forms of the social organization of biology, kinship, and child rearing”, Gayle Rubin argued for a less dramatic approach than that of the radical feminist writers.⁹² Coining the still prominent concept of the sex/gender system which she defined as “the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed needs are satisfied . . .”, she argued that “sex as we know it – gender identity, sexual desire and fantasies, concepts of childhood – is itself a social product.”⁹³ By using the sex/gender division, Rubin identified the subordination of women as “a product of the relationships by which sex and gender are organized and produced.”⁹⁴ The suppressing of similarities and emphasis of differences of the sexes in socially preferred ways, in her view, lead to a division of labour according to one's sex and served to create inequality between the sexes. Flax elaborates on Rubin's theory with respect to the organisation of the family: “The family is the source of women's oppression, because under patriarchal domination, it is the agency in and through which women and men are engendered –

89 Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution (New York: Bantam, 1970) 72.

90 Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (New York: Doubleday, 1969) 362.

91 Friedan, 41.

92 Flax, 241.

93 Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex,” Toward a New Anthology of Women, ed. Rayna P. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975) 159.

94 Rubin, 177.

replicating men who dominate, women who submit.”⁹⁵ A change in the roles of the genders within family and society, then, could be a change towards equality – the family need not be abolished.

Nancy Chodorow too argues for the significance of the social aspect in the equation, and sees that the core of the feminist problematic within families can be located in the reproduction of mothering. “Through relation to their mother, women develop a self-in-relation, men a self that denies relatedness.”⁹⁶ In Chodorow's view, the fact that women are largely responsible for early child care and the socialisation of children causes an unbalanced and gender-specific socialisation process. The foundations of later gender differentiation are created in early childhood as girls are “initially brought up in a feminine world, a world in which it is desirable to acquire a feminine identity. They later on go into a world where masculine virtues are important . . . a self-perpetuating cycle of female deprecation apparently develops.”⁹⁷ Boys, on the other hand, experience themselves and are experienced by the mother as an “other”: “Boys must reject the female aspects of themselves and the primary relatedness to the mother to be male; girls can and must reject neither.”⁹⁸ Within a patriarchal society, then, women through the socialisation process are granted a culturally devalued role and boys acquire an identity evolving around differentiation and independence of the mother. This, according to Chodorow, can only be avoided by involving men in early child care:

Masculinity would not be tied to denial of dependence and devaluation of women. Feminine personality would be less preoccupied with individuation, and children would not develop fears of *maternal* omnipotence and expectations of *women's* unique self-sacrificing qualities. This would reduce men's needs to guard their masculinity and their control of social and cultural spheres which treat and define women as secondary and powerless, and would help women to develop the autonomy which too much embeddedness in relationship has often taken from them.⁹⁹

Family, then, becomes defect in Chodorow's view in its gender-differentiated division of labour, not

95 Flax, 242.

96 Nancy Chodorow, Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory (New Haven: Yale Polity Press, 1989) 15.

97 Chodorow, Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory, 41.

98 Flax, 247.

99 Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) 218.

its existence.

All in all, feminists of the second wave offered multiple aspects on the family that challenged the traditional or modern take on the family. Whilst explaining the origins of the problems in different ways and offering sometimes conflicting solutions, the feminist critique on the family revolved and still revolves around the following issues: the unequal division of labour, absence of fathers in child care, exploitation and devaluation of women's work in the family, reducing the identity of women into that of mere wife and mother, the rule of the father and women's lower status in the family hierarchy, division of life into the private – or feminine/domestic – and public/masculine spheres, and, most importantly, reinforcing, through socialisation and family patterns, the oppressive gender system that values men over women in the labour market, salaries, career opportunities, and overall effort. In short, the patriarchal family can be seen to work towards reinforcing inequality between the genders, and a change is needed in order to free the family and its members from the rule of patriarchy.

The issues brought about by the second wave of the feminist movement coincided with new perceptions of the family on television. By the beginning of the 1970s, the focus of television shows had changed significantly from depicting “domestic bliss” of the 1950s to “blazing a trail for the array of social problems that became the standard fare of television families.”¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the change that took place within the two decades was drastic, as Taylor notes:

The 1970s television family became a forum for the articulation of social conflicts of all kinds. The vast majority of series with domestic settings offered viewers troubled or fractured or reconstituted families. These domestic dramas reflected the anxiety about the erosion of domestic life that was beginning to punctuate the rhetoric of politicians and policymakers, social scientists and therapists. From the more visible problems like spouse or child abuse, divorce, and teenage pregnancy to the less tangible areas of marital conflict, social trouble was increasingly being defined as family trouble.¹⁰¹

Spigel describes the decade as a time of significant change as the representations of the American family became more varied, “although never completely representative of all American

100 Taylor, 66.

101 Taylor, 65.

lifestyles.”¹⁰² The idea of the family as being dysfunctional strengthened substantially during the time. The first prime-time abortion took place in 1972 in the show *Maude* that also featured a divorced heroine; *All in the Family* presented a family in a working-class setting with political disagreements between both generations and genders; *The Mary Tyler Moore* show featured a single-by-choice career woman (although resembled a familial setting being primarily about relationships within a family-like workplace); *The Jeffersons* portrayed the life of a middle-class black family for a total of eleven seasons since its takeoff in 1975; and *Kate and Allie* portrayed two divorced mothers who form a new household with their children.¹⁰³ Simultaneously, however, shows such as *A Little House on the Prairie*, *The Waltons* and *The Brady Bunch* continued on the path set for them by the domestic bliss of the mid-20th century family shows.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed an even more diversified selection of families on television. Family comedies never left the stage, but they were joined by a multiplicity of alternative family depictions. Shows such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty* portrayed very wealthy families with problems such as marital infidelity, incest, rape, alcoholism and a range of other issues that pictured the family as decidedly dysfunctional. Dysfunctional families or families in crisis featured (and continue to do so) in pseudo-therapeutic shows such as *Jerry Springer* and *Oprah*.¹⁰⁴ According to Spigel, the shows *Cops* and *America's Most Wanted*, through editorialising, went as far as to suggesting that “crimes such as robbery, prostitution, or drug dealing are caused by dysfunctional family lives rather than by political, sexual racial, and class inequities.”¹⁰⁵ As Chambers notes: “Feelings of ambivalence and despair about family life were expressed in a number of different ways through media representations of the family.”¹⁰⁶ The family was a source of trouble and irony. Simultaneously, however, idealised and nostalgic portrayals of white middle-class family life in the style of the 1950s were evident in shows such as *The Wonder Years* and *Brooklyn Bridge*. *The*

102 Spigel, “Family on Television.”

103 Spigel, “Family on Television.”

104 Spigel, “Family on Television.”

105 Spigel, “Family on Television.”

106 Chambers, 93.

Cosby Show, featuring a successful black family living in a bourgeois ideal, although criticised as unrealistic, applied the ideology of the American family and the American dream to refer to the African-American population more clearly than ever.¹⁰⁷ Despite the rise of the dysfunctional family, idyllic family depictions survived as an inherent part of marketing schemes that sought to attract the part of the public that supported the fast emerging pro-family values rhetoric provided by the political right during the Reagan era.¹⁰⁸

Thus the depictions of family on television in the last decades of the 20th century continued to mirror the cultural debate on the matter. With feminists and liberals on the one side, the political right on the other, Stacey notes, “gender, sexuality, reproduction and family here [the US] are the most polarized, militant, and socially divisive in the world . . .”¹⁰⁹ The political right take the family as something that is essential to the functioning of society, and use the ideology of the family in their rhetoric to appeal to the public or explain social ills. Judith Stacey records the words of the former Illinois Governor Jim Edgar in 1995: “As governor, I can tell you that about 80 percent of the problems that hit my desk you can trace back to the breakdown of the family structure in our society, and I think anyone who doesn't want to admit that is kidding themselves.”¹¹⁰ Symbolic of nostalgia for “those better times” of domestic tranquility and stability in an individual's life and that of society in general, the family and traditional family values have been used as ammunition in numerous political debates. As Chambers notes on the significance of the family in present-day American society:

The nuclear ideal is invented and reinvented, and kept alive in political rhetoric and fiction through endless mobilisation against the perils of dysfunctionality. The middle-class white nuclear family may be a figment of the public imagination, but it has come to stand for something beyond itself: moral purity and goodness. It has come to represent something that *ought* to exist.¹¹¹

107 Chambers, 125.

108 Tincknell, 36.

109 Stacey, 47.

110 Stacey, 1.

111 Chambers, 66.

Stacey refers to the Reagan-Bush era as the age of “pro-family, anti-feminist, anti-gay and anti-abortion” for the Republican party in power, but adds that also Bill Clinton, a Democrat, after his election as president “jumped on the family-values trolley. Republicans and Democrats alike now compete to promote their politics in the name of the family – meaning one particular kind of family.”¹¹² That is, the white nuclear middle-class, morally pure and good Anglo-American family that in reality fails to represent the range and variety of ethnicities and family forms in the United States. In addition, the family as a topic of research or political debate is as a rule assumed heterosexual, which excludes a significant portion of present-day families.¹¹³ Although steps towards more egalitarian family politics have been taken during the last fifty years, the restricting values and ideals of the patriarchal family still persist on multiple fronts in society in the United States even in the new millennium.

In response to the views from the political right, feminists of the third wave, or the post-modern time, have largely followed upon the footsteps of the second wave, although the biology-determined radicalist views have been subjected to critique and given less attention. Currently, issues of day-care services, household division of labour, normative heterosexuality and gay family rights, inequalities in professional life, assisting victims of domestic violence and covert power relations following the tradition of patriarchy even in relationships where both spouses define the relationship as based on equality, can be identified as central to current feminist family research.¹¹⁴ Despite steps towards more egalitarian family politics, it should be remembered that “while seemingly universal, the particular structure of patriarchy at any given moment is always historically determined since it is formed in conjunction with a specific social formation and its dominant mode of production.”¹¹⁵ For instance, Caryn E. Medved elaborates on Pamela Stone's 2007 study on the professional mothers who leave their successful careers after having children:

112 Stacey, 4.

113 Chambers, 18.

114 Greer Litton Fox and Velma McBride Murry, “Gender and Families: Feminist Perspectives and Family Research,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62 (2000): 1166-9.

115 Ebert, 19-20.

one in four white, college-educated, married, professional women is at home . . . [and] the vast majority of high-achieving women quit their careers as a last resort. These women report being praised for departing the workplace for full-time mothering yet discouraged in any attempts to persist in combining work and family aspirations. Second, these women also report their decisions are shaped by the persistent lack of assistance from husbands on the home front.¹¹⁶

Inequalities, then, more covert, harder to identify than at the beginning of the second wave, still define family life at large, and should remain questioned and further problematised.

On the other hand, Stacey records the rise of the “postmodern family of woman”, which is a result of high divorce rates, female-headed households, women's better access to education and employment, but also, men's lack of commitment to familial responsibilities.¹¹⁷ This nevertheless defines the family as a female project, which results in possible problems in rights, equal parenting and shared responsibility from a male perspective. In the postmodern condition, then, family and its members are torn in multiple aspects. Old roles and the ideal of the patriarchal nuclear family persist in nostalgic memories or rightist rhetoric despite its unrealistic and simplifying nature. Simultaneously, the old roles are questioned and proven oppressing in demand of recognition of alternative family forms and need for more liberal family politics supportive of individual choice and desires.

The television shows of the late 1990s and in the new millennium, reflective of the diversity of public debate, continue to provide a variety of portrayals of the American family. Despite the range, Chambers along with many other critics, do however see that “a predominance of media images lock on to a narrow anglocentric, aspirational nuclear family discourse and celebrate it.”¹¹⁸ Whilst the idealisation of the past is most palpable in commercials and reruns of old shows, its presence in family-based sitcoms persists, albeit sometimes twisted and portrayed through irony: shows such as *Married ... With Children*, *Everybody Loves Raymond* and *According to Jim*, along with many others, have successfully used the setting of the 1950s family shows. Alternative

116 Caryn E. Medved, “Opting Out: Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home - by Pamela Stone,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 70 (2008) 1330.

117 Stacey, 50-1.

118 Chambers, 94.

families and familialism in a homosexual context have appeared in shows such as *Ellen* and *The L-Word*, with the latter combining elements of family issues and a wider trend to portray “families of choice” with a focus on an urban lifestyle, friendship and plural sexualities – a trend evident in *Will & Grace*, *Sex and the City*, *Seinfeld* and *Friends*, for instance.¹¹⁹

The television programming of recent years, when focusing on the nuclear family, seems to have been mostly occupied with continuing on portraying the dysfunctional family: “Within Hollywood cinema, television drama and the tabloid press there is a persistent and often lurid fascination with the idea of the 'state of crisis' of the white anglo-nuclear family.”¹²⁰ *Jerry Springer* and *Dr. Phil* still provide their analyses of troubles in families, and *Six Feet Under*, *Arrested Development* and *Desperate Housewives* revolve around family troubles and secrets more or less explicitly. Although contributing to the range of family depictions, Chambers criticises the category of the dysfunctional as pathologising, arguing that “it perpetuates the myth of a 'functional', ideal family and therefore focuses the blame for the breakdown in family relations internally on families themselves rather than locating it within the context of wider structural problems of society.”¹²¹ The portrayals of dysfunctional families, then, cannot necessarily be taken to serve as cultural critique, but in fact reinforcing rightist pro-family values that idealise the traditions of the patriarchal family.

It can be concluded that the ideology of the family on television has been and continues to be an important source for drama in television narratives. The family has been opened up to new interpretations and conflicts, broadening the public understanding of the power of the ideology and possible problems embedded in it. Furthermore, the ideology of the family intertwines with the changing and increasingly fracturing representations of gender in the media, making the situation even more complex.¹²² The scenery is without a doubt colourful and varied, as Segal notes: “it is evident that the family on television is as full of mixed messages and ambivalent emotions as it is in

119 Tincknell, 134.

120 Chambers, 99.

121 Chambers, 99.

122 Issues of gender are discussed in section 4.

real life.”¹²³ In my point of view, however, this does not mean that the portrayals are freed of values and belief systems – rather, I believe that the power of the ideology is precisely in its ability to persist through changing sociocultural conditions. Thus, keeping recent developments of gender representation and the ideologies of the family in American society in mind, my attempt is to analyse *Californication* to provide a perspective on the American family as it appears on television in the new millennium.

123 Spigel, “Family on Television.”

3. Deconstructing the Family in *Californication*: Typicalities, Ideology and the Power of Narrative

In this section, I will move on to analysing the primary material of my thesis, *Californication*. My analysis of *Californication* will focus on the representation of the family in the show with the help of the theoretical tools provided in section 2. The aim of my analysis is to detect the tensions and viewpoints both within and around the issue of the family to see how the family appears in the show in question, and attempt to place it within the frame of present-day television shows as far as the boundaries of this thesis allows. More precisely, in my analysis I will discuss whether the American family is shown as a social formation that has a future, what that future appears to be like, and to what extent it allows for change and alternatives for the whole concept of the family and its members in the show. In section 3.1., I will explore the ideology of the family as depicted in *Californication* and analyse it in relation to the characteristics that spring from the tradition and development of family-centred television shows and public debate. In 3.2., I will discuss competing ideologies that potentially threaten to compromise the family and pro-family values and thus serve to its decline in the show. In section 3.3., I will discuss aspects that I find nevertheless speak for the hegemony of the ideology of the (white heterosexual nuclear) family; special attention in the equation will be given to the significance of the issues of genre, narrative, slant and solution of the show. My analysis relies mostly on the dialogue between the characters, but, when necessary, I will provide descriptive references to the visual elements of the show.

3.1. *Californication* and the Normative American Television Family

Despite the variety of themes present in the show, in line with the creator Tom Kapinos' own views on the matter as noted on page 2, I find that one of the central and most crucial of themes in *Californication* is that of the family. The show begins with depicting the protagonist, Hank Moody,

a novelist suffering from a writer's block, as trying to balance his career (or lack thereof), single life and being a father to his 12-year-old daughter, Becca. Becca lives with her mother, Karen, whom Hank still loves but has lost to a successful and wealthy media producer, Bill. In the pilot episode of *Californication*, Karen announces her intentions to marry Bill, and the whole of the first season of the show builds up to their wedding that takes place in the season finale “The Last Waltz”. During the course of the season, Hank expresses his will to start over with Karen on multiple occasions, but Karen rejects him as she is determined to marry Bill. For most of the season, Hank and Karen's daughter Becca lives with Karen and Bill, and her parents have joint custody; Bill's teenage daughter, Mia, also lives in the family home. Their family life is interrupted by either Hank's visits or Bill's absence because of work-related matters, which often leads to Hank being given space in the family home – he even stays the night in episode 8, appearing at the breakfast table in Bill's clothes. Despite Karen's occasional “slips into a past life”¹²⁴ with Hank, Karen marries Bill in the season finale. Things do not, however, end well for Bill as Karen eventually decides to leave him and drives off from the wedding with Hank and Becca, shouting: “Quick, quick! Just go, drive the car! . . . Quick, before I change my fucking mind!”¹²⁵ In the scene, the nuclear family unit, once destroyed, is brought back together and depicted driving away from the wedding in Hank's convertible, happy and laughing.

In *For Marx*, Althusser characterises ideology as “an organic part of every social totality. It is as if human societies could not survive without these specific formations, these systems of representations. . .”¹²⁶ When applied to the field of television studies and the analysis at hand, this aspect of ideology can be argued to provide the core for the narrative of *Californication* as well. More precisely, it is the ideology, or social formation, of the family that serves to provide the underlying motifs and justification for the events and characters in the show. The first season of

124 “LOL” 5. From hereon, when referring to *Californication*, I will indicate both title and the number of the episode in question. All of the episodes referred to in this thesis are from the first season of the show.

125 “The Last Waltz” 12.

126 Althusser, *For Marx*, 232.

Californication is clearly built around the family and the tensions within it: Hank is most strongly motivated by his will to get his family – namely Karen and Becca – back, whereas Karen is torn between the two men, Bill and Hank, and the family formations they represent. The characters and the events, then, seem to be occupied with the fall of the nuclear family and the rise of new family formations – a fact that further serves to the identification of family as ideology in the show as a set of meanings that manage to make certain aspects of it “stick” whilst conforming to social change (cf. section 2.1.).

Despite being a product of the new millennium and presenting conflict within the family, *Californication* seems to rely on a number of characteristics that origin from the 20th century traditions of the American family on television as presented in section 2.2. First of all, although widened to include a multiplicity of family forms and ethnicities, the representations of the nuclear family on television have a long history of being ethnically biased. In my view, *Californication* serves to contribute to this normative imagery purely due to its evident lack of non-white characters. By leaving the issue of race largely invisible, the show can be deemed guilty of making use of the prevailing dominance of whiteness in the media and family representations, reinforcing the ideology of the American family as normatively white. As Richard Dyer, a notable scholar in studying ethnicity and especially whiteness, notes on cultural representations of race: “Other people are raced, we [whites] are just people... [and] there is no more powerful position than being 'just' human'. Those who occupy the positions of cultural hegemony blithely carry on as if what they say is neutral and unsituated – human not raced.”¹²⁷ Whiteness is offered as the norm and in that respect the show relies on the stereotypic formulations that Chambers characterises as follows: “Television versions of American society historically have been biased in terms of ethnicity, gender, and class such that a White, male, middle-class voice has been especially strong.”¹²⁸ It cannot be ignored that in *Californication*, that voice becomes palpable in the protagonist and narrator, Hank. The

127 Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997) 1, 4.

128 Chambers, 14.

characters who appear on a regular basis and serve to the ongoing plot of the first season of the show are nearly exclusively white, and representatives of other ethnicities appear mainly in the background of the scenes in restaurants or other public places. Merely one woman of Asian origin is given a line in the dialogue when she has sex with Hank in the pilot episode; Becca's black teacher features in one scene in the pilot; and the director of Hank's book's screen version who features in four episodes of the season, Todd Carr, is black. Ethnicity is referred to only once in the season in the dialogue, where it is implied to be determining to the characteristics of an individual – a point which can easily be deemed as racist and prejudiced. In the scene, the film director Todd Carr thanks Hank for sleeping with his wife:

Carr: Did me a favour actually. Got me out of a horrible fucking marriage.

Hank: Oh, you and Sandy splitting the sheets? Do tell.

Carr: That bitch is crazy. Last time I ever marry a fucking white woman.¹²⁹

Portrayed to take place in Los Angeles, the population of which in reality is known for its diversity, multiplicity of minorities and an especially large Spanish-speaking community, *Californication* can easily be characterised as ethnically one-sided and biased.¹³⁰ Naturally, the interactions and locations in L.A. are in reality intertwined with a number of complex issues such as class, suburbanisation and inequalities of pay and opportunity. Especially noteworthy is the idea of “white supremacy” which Laura Pulido defines as “the set of hegemonic structures, practices and ideologies that reproduce whites' privileged status.”¹³¹ Using L.A. as an example in her case study, Pulido argues that the spatial aspect of racism and ethnic segregation, primarily springing from economic inequality, has largely been ignored despite the fact that it serves as a crucial factor in explaining the different environments present in multicultural urban spaces. Marks agrees: “When a

129 “Fear and Loathing at the Fundraiser” 4. The dialogue also brings to the surface the continuing minority position of non-white characters of television representation and in *Californication*. I find it highly questionable that the dialogue could take place the other way round so that Hank would talk of a black woman disrespectfully, with similar emphasis on her ethnicity, without consequence.

130 “2006-2008 American Community Survey Estimates: Los Angeles City, California,” U.S. Census Bureau July 2008, 10 Mar. 2009 <http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en>. The U.S. Census Bureau records that 40 % of the population of the city of L.A. is foreign-born, and out of the 3,7 million inhabitants nearly a million are non-U.S. citizens. The largest minorities are of Asian and Latin American origin.

131 Laura Pulido, “Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California,” Annals of the Association of American Geographers 90.1 (2000) 15.

parent or parents purchase a home, for example, they typically act so as to preserve, perpetuate, or extend whatever social class and race privileges they already have.”¹³² Pulido summarises on the issue that “. . . space is a resource in the production of white privilege . . . neighborhoods are not merely groupings of individuals, homes and commerce, they are constellations of opportunities with powerful consequences, for both the recipient and nonrecipient populations.”¹³³ This “environmental racism” could then serve as an explanation – or an excuse – to the near-exclusive white set of characters in the L.A. of *Californication* as well and define its portrayal of the spatial demographic of present-day L.A. as realistic. However, in my view this does not demolish the fact that as a narrative on the American family, the show fails to portray the diversity and variety of American families. As Chambers notes on the field of white studies: “There is a distinctive anglocentric bias woven into much research that infers an anglodominant discourse combining race with nation and culture to produce a naturalisation of a particular version of and disposition towards white ethnicity within dominant representations of familiness.”¹³⁴ *Californication*, then, for its part reinforces the traditions of television representations as ethnically biased with a disproportionately wide selection of white characters, as noted in 2.2. on Tincknell and Spigel. This imbalance undoubtedly serves to the dominance of whiteness in society and media representations of the family, thereby reinforcing the marginalisation of families of other ethnicities within the spectrum of the US as a nation and implying a white future for the nation in public imagery.

In addition to being white, the family in *Californication* can be identified as somewhat typical in its exclusive focus on portraying the successful middle class. Rather than depicting the working families in the style of the 1950s and 60s television shows, *Californication* depicts the lives of the more glamorous in a style similar to a number of current television shows such as the fictional *Lipstick Jungle* or the reality show *The Real Housewives of Orange County*. However,

132 Stephen R Marks, “Teasing Out the Lessons of the 1960s: Family Diversity and Family Privilege,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62 (2000) 620-1.

133 Pulido, 30.

134 Chambers, 16.

Chambers lists notions of material wealth, consumerism, education and possession of cultural capital as markers and basis for bourgeois ideology and middle-class familialism ever since the 1950s, all of which nevertheless apply to *Californication* and appear as a given to the characters on the show.¹³⁵ They are depicted as homogeneous in relation to class, and social difference or money are not an issue to any of them; in fact, they are all portrayed as completely removed from any financial issues. Not even Hank suffers from financial troubles despite having suffered from a writer's block for five years (conveniently enough, this is explained by the income from the screen version of his novel).¹³⁶ He drives a convertible Porsche, albeit a little worn-down and with a “funky smell,”¹³⁷ and is encouraged by Karen and his agent and close friend Charlie Runkle to take on a job as a blogger for a magazine called Hell-A only to be a good example for Becca – money is never introduced as a factor: “Keep the job Hank. For Becca's sake. Give her something to look up to.”¹³⁸ All of the other characters on the show can also be defined as educated middle-class professionals occupied with either the entertainment industry of Hollywood or the lifestyle services associated with it. Bill is a producer, Hank's book is made into a movie, and Hank's best friend Charlie is also his agent, Karen is an architect and Charlie's wife Marcy owns a beauty salon that, in Charlie's words, makes sure that “Angelina's cookie” is free from pubic hair.¹³⁹

As the characters in the show are successful and in professions one could argue are idealised in the ever commercialising and star-struck society, the show continues on the trend set by the 1980s soap operas such as *Dallas* or *Dynasty* that were largely occupied with portraying the misfortunes, dysfunctionality and unhappiness of the bold and beautiful families.¹⁴⁰ Spigel, however, notes that in the soap opera genre, the wealth of the families depicted is largely seen as

135 Chambers, 90.

136 “Filthy Lucre” 9.

137 “Filthy Lucre” 9. The title of the magazine, Hell-A, is undoubtedly a pun that further emphasises the show's attitude towards the moral state of the L.A. it portrays.

138 “Whore of Babylon” 3.

139 “Fear and Loathing at the Fundraiser” 4. Angelina is most likely a reference to the American actress Angelina Jolie.

140 *The Bold and the Beautiful* is a Bell-Phillip Television Productions, Inc. produced ongoing show that similarly relies excessively on a complex set of familial relations within the L.A. fashion industry as their central source for drama and narrative. For further information, see www.boldandbeautiful.com.

resulting in decadence which then explains the dysfunctionality of the families rather than seeing the American family as failing in all social classes. It could be argued, then, that *Californication* is a hybrid in its take on class as it does not depict the family as straightforwardly working or middle-class in the style of the classic sitcom model still evident in *Everybody Loves Raymond* or domestic dramas such as *7th Heaven* or *Life Goes On*, but feeds on both the glamour of the soap opera and the issues of domestic dramas and comedies. The show does nevertheless reinforce the white hegemony of the successful middle-class in American television programming as it remains at a safe distance from depicting, let alone assessing, the significance of class and possible class differences that unarguably have an effect on the family and its formations in reality.

In relation to the troubled lives of the white characters in the show, the show appears to have moved on from the typicalities of the 1950s and 60s white bourgeois sitcom family bliss at least to an extent. In episode 8 “California Son”, the narrative offers some critique towards the families of the golden era – the 1950s and 60s – as described in 2.2. Hank's confrontation with his father in the episode can be seen as an objection towards the setting of families past. In the episode, it becomes clear that Hank's parents were not in a happy marriage during the golden era of the white American family, but stayed together for the sake of the children. Hank's father Al appears as a bad husband and parent with a number of extramarital affairs:

Al: I know things are crazy for you right now... I've been there, in my own way. Just don't go so far that you cannot find your way back. That's all I'm saying. Keep'em close. Family comes first.

Hank: That sounds hysterical, coming from you and all.

Al: What, was I so bad? Your mother and I were together till the bitter end.

Hank: Bitter it was. I can't believe you're going to be all noble about this shit... you were always fucking someone else.

Al: Your mother and I had a lot of problems. We were married young, and we were never compatible in that way. You know what I mean? I'm not proud of certain things I did, but if I had to do it all over again, I'm not sure I'd go at it differently.

Hank: Why do you say that?

Al: Because there's not a woman that I've met that I haven't fallen in love with, whether it was for 10 minutes or 10 years. What would have been better? A lifetime of denying that? Your mother was into all that catholic guilt shit, not me. . . . Life's too short to dance with fat chicks.

Hank: Let me get this straight... the lesson here is to keep the family together and fuck

around on the side if your wife doesn't want you anymore.

Al: Hey it's your life... yours to screw up if you want to. . . . You're not going in the right direction.¹⁴¹

The dialogue, which takes place in the form of a flashback between father and son when Hank is still together with Karen, shows that insisting on staying in an unhappy marriage does not only influence the parents, but has a profound effect on the children: Hank is clearly bitter and disrespectful towards his father for what he did to his mother. The dialogue suggests an approach towards the modern family which is very much in line with feminist family criticism that questions the whole concept of the modern patriarchal family form as a flawed social formation as noted in 2.2. It is notable, however, that Al seems to be trying to give Hank advice so that he would not make the same mistakes he did. Therefore, despite the implication that the bliss of the golden era has been an illusion for the previous generation in the Moody family, it may still be a desirable goal for others, including Hank and Karen. In other words, the nuclear ideal is not entirely discarded as dated in the episode. But at a time of dysfunctionality and the postmodern condition of the family, it requires work and sacrifice just as was required in the 1950s sitcom where families were faced with one minor crisis after another that required resolution in order that the family be able to re-establish their family bliss. In the 21st century, however, the crises appear to be of an entirely different calibre compared to those of the sitcoms of the golden era.¹⁴²

Reflective of national and familial anxieties in the postmodern era as noted in 2.2., the television family of recent decades has been largely occupied with portraying conflict and trouble within the family. *Californication* follows the trend of depicting dysfunctional families. The show begins with Hank and Karen having failed in their attempt to form a stable nuclear unit with Becca. Karen, especially at the beginning of the season, does not hesitate to call Hank an “asshole”, “child”, and criticises his sexual habits and lack of self-control: “You're out there sticking your dick

141 “California Son” 8.

142 Sources for crises to the family formation in the show will be discussed in more detail in section 3.2.

in anything that moves. . .”¹⁴³ In the pilot episode, she expresses her criticism of Hank's irresponsibility as a parent after finding out that Becca has found a naked woman – Todd Carr's wife – in his bedroom. The scene brings to the surface the realities of shared parenting and custody issues, but also, infidelity:

Karen: Twelve-year-old finds naked slut in dad's bedroom. Are you still feeling cute?

Hank: Oh, she mentioned that, huh?

Karen: Yes, she mentioned that.

Hank: So... What? You're jealous?

Karen: What? You are so lucky I don't take away the little custody you do have. Bill tried to convince me...

Hank: What? You're getting legal advice from your boyfriend, Bill, now? That's sweet!

Karen: Don't start now, OK.

Hank: You started when you cheated on me.

Karen: I did not cheat on you.

Hank: In what universe is fucking someone when you're married to someone not cheating?

Karen: Oh, the one in which you were never actually married.

Hank: That is a bullshit technicality.¹⁴⁴

Indeed, a large portion of the dramatic conflicts in the show build on Hank and Karen's relationship and the post-family setting that they create. However, it is noteworthy that the dysfunctionality of the family is largely in line with Chambers' arguments about the pathologising nature of the category as noted in 2.2.: again, it is not the modern family model in itself, or the social conditions surrounding it, that are being proven as inherently dysfunctional in the show; rather, the dysfunctionality is blamed on the individuals in the setting and explained by Hank's inability to commit to his family and be a good husband and father when he had the chance.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, the myth of the functional ideal family lives on.

In following with the unstable and changing patterns of the present-day American family, the unit that Karen, Bill, Becca and Mia form in their new home is also noteworthy. For much of the season, the new family, or as Bill describes it in the season finale, “a blended family,”¹⁴⁶ is

143 “Pilot” 1. It is noteworthy, however, that throughout the course of the first season of the show, Hank is not unfaithful to Karen or any other woman he is involved with for more than one night, which distinguishes him from his father. Rather, in this situation, it is Karen's infidelity that is under scrutiny.

144 “Pilot” 1.

145 The portrayals of men in the show will be discussed in more depth in section 4.

146 “The Last Waltz” 12.

portrayed as the most stable family unit that relies on two failed families combining to make a new one. Their family unit, then, could be described as artificially put together from a modern perspective, one in which the members of the family largely agree to the new, non-blood-related family formation, which is characteristic of what Stacey defines as the postmodern family condition. Stacey characterises the postmodern family as a multiplicity of family forms, “a condition of pluralism and flexibility.”¹⁴⁷ Chambers agrees and sees the widening variety of family forms as resulting from the routinisation of divorce, remarriage, step-families, joint custody, domestic partnership, cohabitation, two-career families or decisions to remain single or a single parent.¹⁴⁸ Bill and Karen are determined to marry, and Mia and Becca are establishing a sibling relation, as Mia notes: “I’m just teasing. That’s what sisters do, right? They borrow clothes, talk about boys, conspire against parental units . . .”¹⁴⁹ Hank’s continuous interruptions to their family life also supports the view of the postmodern condition, as Stacey notes that a shift in kinship ties towards extended families is also characteristic of it. As Karen says to Hank in the pilot episode: “I want you in my life... what happens to Becca is our responsibility, and like it or not, we are tied to each other for life.”¹⁵⁰ It appears as a given to both Karen and Hank that because of Becca, they cannot forget their past as a family and will always need to incorporate each other into whatever family formation they may have in the future. In this respect, the family unit in *Californication* could be described as combining blood-related familialism and a hybrid family of choice. Thus it can be said that making use of the theme evident in shows such as *Once and Again* and *Starter Wife* that similarly build their narrative on the tension between the past nuclear unit and the adults’ attempt to build a new life after divorce, the family setting in *Californication* feeds on the tension between the new and the old, and the past and the future of the characters in the show.

It is, however, noteworthy that *Californication* does not escape the boundaries of the

147 Stacey, 37.

148 Chambers, 143.

149 “Turn the Page” 11.

150 “Pilot” 1.

patriarchal family ideology or imply post-familial or post-nuclear values in relation to the postmodern family condition, but appears to serve to the widening variety of family representations that nevertheless conform to a certain framework and thus seem to fail at questioning the hegemony of the ideology. Chambers sees the widening variety of depictions as typical of present media representations of the family, and therefore titles the postmodern family condition as “hybridised familialism”.¹⁵¹ She sees that whilst rethinking the significance of biological ties of a modern nuclear family, the postmodern media families “do not necessarily undermine modern family-values discourse even though they might be transcending such values. On the contrary, they seem to run parallel to, as well as being in tension with, white nuclear family-values discourse.”¹⁵² It seems that in *Californication* the past nuclear unit has been replaced with another somewhat patriarchal two-parent household that fits rather effortlessly into the model of a two-parent household with the average number of two children, Becca and Mia, all under a shared family home that is only interrupted from time to time by Hank's visits to see his daughter, and blatantly also Karen. Karen and Bill share an elaborate house in a suburb, the interiors of which Karen has designed, which Hank describes as “her own Barbie dream house”,¹⁵³ implying that Karen has regressed to a typical and anti-feminist Barbie life, resembling the 1950s' suburban family bliss, with Bill – but admittedly simultaneously wanting her to come back to a similar life with him:

Hank: Don't marry him. Marry me.

Karen: Hank, don't fuck with me.

Hank: I'm not fucking with you. I don't work without you.

Karen: Oh, I get it, you want your muse back?

Hank: You'll save me. And I'll save you. I fucked up, I think we fucked up and... in matters big and small and I never asked you. I'm asking you now. Marry me.¹⁵⁴

Hank continues to express this will throughout the season, and in a scene where Hank has asked Karen to read his new book that he has finally managed to write after his writer's block, Hank openly expresses his will to “go back and do it all over again . . . only this time . . . do it better, do it

151 Chambers, 116.

152 Chambers, 116.

153 “Hell-A Woman” 2.

154 “Pilot” 1.

right. With jewelry.”¹⁵⁵ The relationship between Hank and Bill further emphasises the tension between the two family formations as the two men seem to be competing for the same position in the family; in other words, in the new blended family, there still remains only one father position to accompany the mother, Karen. As Bill puts it in episode 3 after Hank has found out that Bill owns Hell-A magazine – the one Hank is supposed to blog for: “Keep the job, Hank. Get back on your feet. Get on with your life. And forget about the woman you didn't want to marry.”¹⁵⁶ There is only room for one starring couple of the opposite sexes, and that remains at the core of the narrative throughout the first season. Thus the nuclear model lives on and is constantly brought to the table along with the ideals of the 20th – and evidently the 21st – centuries romance narrative by Hank and Bill's wooing of the desired female, Karen.¹⁵⁷

The show fails to embrace the postmodern family condition with its representation of sexual orientation as well. Stacey finds that the complexity, diversity and change of the postmodern family condition is crystallised in gay and lesbian families.¹⁵⁸ As noted in 2.2., media and television representations of sexual orientation have become more widely accepted and prominent in shows such as *Will & Grace*, *Desperate Housewives* and *Ellen*. The familial setting of a two-parent household in *Californication*, however, is very closely linked with heteronormativity, “an ideology that promotes gender conventionality, heterosexuality and family traditionalism as the correct way for people to be,”¹⁵⁹ which has been the historically dominant characteristic of television families and media representations in general. In *Californication*, homosexuality is also referred to, but nevertheless remains largely invisible or represented as something undesired and unacceptable at least for the male characters.¹⁶⁰ Lesbianism, then, appears as a sexual experiment between women, and as such, an experiment that reinforces the characters', namely Marcy's, sureness of her own

155 “Filthy Lucre” 9.

156 “The Whore of Babylon” 3.

157 The romance narrative is discussed in more detail in section 3.3.

158 Stacey, 108.

159 Libby Balter Blume, Stephen R. Marks and Ramona Faith Oswald, “Decentering Heteronormativity: A Model for Family Studies,” *Sourcebook of Family Theory & Research*, ed. Vernon L. Bengtson et al. (London: Sage, 2005) 143.

160 Heteronormativity in relation to men and hegemonic masculinity is discussed in more detail in section 4.1.

heterosexuality: after finding out that Hank's producer Charlie has cheated on her with his assistant Dani, Marcy takes her revenge by sleeping with Dani in episode 9. However, it does not take her long to realise that she is not a lesbian:

Marcy: Do you know how hard it is to get a girl off? It is like disconnecting a bomb. I mean, there's all these wires and shit down there. Who knows which one you're supposed to cross or pull. Plus, the studies show that the female orgasm is, like, what, 99% mental. Who has time for that?

Karen: Okay, so that's good. So you wanna go back to the 4-minute grunt-fest? Things like in, out, done.

Marcy: Give me a mouthful of cock any day.

Karen: Right.

Marcy: Suck, gargle, spit works like a charm. I mean, call me old-fashioned, but... .

Karen: So, you're done with the lesbitarian experiment.

Marcy: The grass is always greener, you know?¹⁶¹

Thus heterosexuality is offered as the norm for Marcy as well as she describes her “lesbitarian experiment” as a last resort in order to spice up their marriage, nothing more: “Married people bored out of their minds, looking for some strange. It never solves what was wrong in the first place.”¹⁶² Simultaneously, the homosexual perspective is further undermined in the show in that rather than being introduced as a question of identity for Marcy, homosexuality remains merely on the level of sexual encounters and her wanting to try something new.

For the new generation, however, homosexuality is referred to as a possible option in the first episode. In a meeting with Becca's teacher, Hank expresses his happiness when he thinks that his daughter is lesbian: “Oh, thank God. She's a lesbian. Thank God. . . . I think we can all agree by and large that men are assholes. I, for one, am happy that she prefers the fairer sex. It looks like we are the proud parents of a lesbian daughter. Up high!”¹⁶³ But as this turns out not to be true, homosexuality is never presented as a (possible or) serious option in the show for the main characters although its existence is recognised and referred to. Homo- or bisexuality is only present in Dani who has sex with both Charlie and Marcy. But, most notably, homosexuality is not present

161 “Filthy Lucre” 9.

162 “The Devil's Threesome” 10.

163 “Pilot” 1.

in the lives of any of the family members. Therefore the family in *Californication* can be deemed as typical in relation to their sexual orientation as well in all three generations portrayed in the show.

It appears, then, that the show conforms to the project of the nation as white, the continuance of which is also thereby secured as white heterosexual relationships are most likely to produce white offspring, who are likely to follow the socioeconomic footsteps of their parents. With this logic, the reproduction of the white, heterosexual bourgeois social order is secured in the show. Thus the family of *Californication* can be deemed a typical television family of the 21st century, which does not appear to offer many alternatives or new ideas in relation to class, ethnicity or family forms. In terms of (dys)functionality, *Californication* does follow the trend of the dysfunctional family which distinguishes the show from the most stereotypical nuclear family depictions that reigned in the 1950s and 60s sitcoms and other family-oriented shows. The postmodern condition of the family is recognised and alternative family forms are presented, which can be argued to be a result of the changes in real families, social policy, and political and feminist thought as noted in 2.2.

It seems, however, that the family of choice in *Californication* does not take the family to new levels either – after all, what Bill and Karen attempt to form is tightly in line with what the ideal nuclear family is apart from the blood relation between all family members. Todd Gitlin characterises the process of reflecting social conflicts and change in the media and entertainment as follows:

Major social conflicts are transported into the cultural system, where the hegemonic system frames them, form and content both, into compatibility with dominant systems of meaning. Alternative material is routinely *incorporated*: brought into the body of cultural production. Occasionally oppositional material may succeed in being indigestible; that material is excluded from media discourse and returned to the cultural margins from which it came; while elements of it are incorporated into the dominant forms.¹⁶⁴

In my view, in the case of *Californication*, whereas social change on the level of family forms and the postmodern family condition are recognised, they are not presented as improvement but rather,

164 Todd Gitlin, "Prime Time Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment," *Television: The Critical View*, 5th ed., ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 532.

as Gitlin says, as conflict within a certain framework, and a conflict that remains unresolved unless a step backwards towards the golden era of the family is taken – a neo-familial aspect in accordance with conservative values as promoted by multiple campaigners and movements in the United States, underlies the narrative.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, as noted in section 2.1., the hegemony of an ideology is constantly challenged, questioned, and as such tested by a number of alternative ideologies that potentially either threaten or reinforce the dominance of the ideology. The ideological battle at play in *Californication* is that of the new postmodern condition against the old two-parent nuclear family setting. The postmodern condition detectable in the show, however, whilst implying a possibility of alternative family forms, does not seem to be directing the ideology of the family beyond the framework of the heterosexual bourgeois ideal.

3.2. The American Family Ideal Challenged? Competing Values and Ideologies

As noted in section 2.1., ideology according to Althusser and his followers is characterised by a constant struggle against challenging ideologies that threaten its hegemony within a framework – be it society, an institution within it, or in the case of *Californication*, a television show. In my view, despite providing a rather normative take on its representation of the family as shown in 3.1., it can be argued that *Californication* does nevertheless bring to the table a number of issues both within and around the family that can be read as ideologies competing with that of the family in the show. This, again, emphasises television's role as an ideological state apparatus that works to transmit ideology, which serves to prove the applicability of Althusser's theory to the medium.

First of all, as noted in section 3.1., *Californication* recognises a shift away from the post-war patriarchal American family bliss evident in for instance *The Waltons* towards a more flexible take on family forms, which can be seen as a product of ideological struggle in society and also

¹⁶⁵ Chambers, 143. Chambers lists institutions and campaigners such as the Institute for Family Values, the Council on Families in America, the American Family Panel, Communication Network, the Progressive Policy Institute, and the Republicans and leaders of the right-wing Christian Coalition as promoting familialism that fails to take into account family conflicts and the hierarchies of power, gender and ethnicity.

media representations as noted by Gitlin in section 3.1. Despite its evident shortcomings in portraying the true multiplicity of American family forms as noted in 3.1., the show does allow for some variation in its realisations of family and can therefore be argued to at least pursue to challenge the strict nuclear family form that has dominated the discourse for decades. After all, Bill and Karen attempt to form a reconstituted family, Marcy and Charlie are a family unit without children, and in episode 2, Hank encounters a porn star who turns out to be a single mother, which can interestingly be argued to entail a feminist cause as the character serves to separate reproduction from its significance as a marker and exclusive privilege of a normative heterosexual companionship.¹⁶⁶ Thus as a product of its time, the show acknowledges the rhetoric of public debate of the nuclear family in crisis as exemplified in section 2.2., which to some represents a fall of morals and values and the whole of society, whereas others, including a number of scholars in the fields of sociology and feminism, interpret the changes as resulting from a shift to a more egalitarian society. The latter, then, see the changes within the ideology of the family as characteristic of the postmodern era that is defined by change, instability and an ever-increasing variety of options.

Secondly, as already noted in 3.1., the idea of the family in crisis is connected with the idea of dysfunctionality, which is characteristic of the representation of the family in *Californication* as well and challenges the ideal of the stable nuclear family unit in the show. In a flashback in episode 8, “California Son”, Hank and Karen have a fight during which Karen reveals to Hank that she has been sleeping with Bill. The following dialogue both exemplifies the dysfunctionality of the original family unit, and more importantly, speaks of the family as being built around a relationship and communication between two adults, namely Hank and Karen:

Karen: It feels to me like we're fucking dying here! We are not talking! We are not fucking! Nothing is happening! . . . And I find myself wanting to talk to other people.

Hank: Like Bill, you fucking talking to Bill? The Jolly Green Giant? I'm kidding, Karen. I don't even wanna go down that road. Have you fucked him?

166 “Hell-A Woman” 2. A more detailed discussion on the character of the porn star and the representation of women in the show is provided in section 4.

Karen: It's so fucking typical. You go straight to the fucking. You don't care if I'm talking to him, if I tell him things...

Hank: Just answer the fucking question! You didn't answer me.

Karen: Yes, I did. You know me. The talking and the fucking go hand in hand.¹⁶⁷

Also Becca, having overheard the fight, acknowledges the centrality of her parents' relationship to the stability of the family and confronts Hank after Karen locks him out of the room:

Becca: Are you going to get a divorce?

Hank: I think that's the good thing about never being married. It's impossible to divorce.

Becca: You know what I mean.

Hank: I know what you mean, and I'm doing the best I can!¹⁶⁸

Hence, the state of romance between the romantic couple serves as the beginning and end of family for both the adults and children in the show, and consequently the instability of the relationship threatens the nuclear family unit and leads to its dysfunctionality. Thus despite other factors presented in this section that I see as also serving to the dysfunctionality of the family, the pathologising aspect of the category of the dysfunctional family as noted by Chambers is nevertheless present in the show.¹⁶⁹ After all, as the ending of the season exemplifies, the (dys)functionality of the family unit is finally presented as a matter of choice rather than dependent on factors family members cannot influence. Karen simply changes her mind and expresses the possibility of her opinion changing again, simply jumping from one family formation to another as she desires.

The link that is drawn in *Californication* between family instability and the romantic couple, I find, is closely connected to Anthony Giddens' idea of confluent love, which he argues is a significant factor in postmodern relationships. According to Giddens, confluent love is characterised by an active and “pure” relationship that is to take place only as far as it serves the participants of the relationship as opposed to the “for-ever’ and ‘one-and-only’ qualities of the romantic love complex.”¹⁷⁰ Thus despite the idea of romantic love being the basis of the modern egalitarian yet

167 “California Son” 8.

168 “California Son” 8.

169 Cf. section 2.2.

170 Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*

oppressive marriage as well, the idea of the disposability of relationships distinguishes confluent love from its modern version. This also sets the show apart from the family centered shows of previous decades which largely focused on maintaining the status quo of a patriarchal family setting in shows such as *The Waltons* or *Happy Days*.¹⁷¹ The idea of confluent love is further exemplified in the show through Karen, who in episode 4 refers to her past life with Hank as an illusionary, fairy-tale like story that no longer serves as a good base for building a family on: “Once upon a time, I used to love you. And no matter what, you will always be a part of my life. But I'm not in love with you anymore.”¹⁷² Romantic love is presented as the dominating ideology behind familial relations, and its confluent – or postmodern – nature appears as a justified reason to experience a number of family forms with different people during one's lifetime. Thus at the level of ideological struggle, the here-and-now type of confluent love challenges the romantic forever-after type as a basis for a relationship and family, and also questions the family unit's ability to provide fulfillment throughout a lifetime of monogamy with the same partner, which is characteristic of the modern egalitarian marriage model and television shows in the past as exemplified in 2.2. In the first season of *Californication*, then, confluent love and the freedom to choose emerge as explanations for the instability of (wealthy white middle-class) family formations and especially that of the nuclear family model.

Third, the idea of confluent love brings to the surface another ideology that could be said to challenge the family in *Californication* – that is, the ideology of individualism during the postmodern era. In my view, individualism can be identified as a recurrent theme in contemporary television shows, especially ones that are built around professionalism and a high level of education such as *Grey's Anatomy* or *Lipstick Jungle*. In *Californication*, whilst recognising their responsibility as parents, the adult characters' personal lives are driven by a need for personal fulfillment, excitement and professional success which compromises their willingness to sacrifice

(Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992) 8.

171 Cf. section 2.2.

172 “Fear and Loathing at the Fundraiser” 4.

their own ambitions for the sake of the family unit unless it appears to them as a formation that ensures their access to these privileges – Hank wants to reunite with Karen for love, but also because he needs her as her muse in order to be able to write. Douglas sees this as typical of real contemporary American families, noting that “personal achievement has come to take priority over commitment to the family.”¹⁷³ In accordance with the instability of the postmodern era, the show emphasises the importance of the family as a formation that is built around mutual gain for all family members rather than a straightforward breadwinner model of the modern era which, as noted in section 2.2., Davis sees as unable to offer equality for its members. The lack of mutual gain or joint pursuit thereof, then, seems to lead to individual interests and needs taking the limelight. As Karen puts it in episode 9, refusing to return to the patriarchal setting of their past in which Hank's work is central and Karen is her muse: “I'm not that person anymore. I'm not your fucking sounding-board-cum-security blanket.”¹⁷⁴ The dominance of the ideology of individualism over family matters appears to be clear to the new generation in the show as well. In episode 7, after Hank breaks his promise to Becca to spend the evening with her – admittedly due to parental responsibility of helping Karen save Mia from her abusive teacher – Becca is disappointed in Hank and interprets the events as another sign of his selfishness. Consequently, she expresses her will to become independent of her father's actions and states her recognition of the confluency of love as stated by Giddens: “It's all well and good to talk about happy endings. But if a person can't deliver, if he keeps screwing up, well, eventually, I guess you kind of just have to say, 'fuck you', or words to that effect.”¹⁷⁵ In other words, the new generation appears as equally capable of adopting the individualistic agenda of their parents.

In relation to personal gain over that of the family, it is also noteworthy that Charlie, Karen and Marcy all have extramarital affairs, Bill spends extended periods of time away from home due to work-related reasons, and Hank spends all his time at the set during the filming of his novel into

173 William Douglas, 5.

174 “Filthy Lucre” 9.

175 “Girls Interrupted” 7.

a movie, which leads to the aforementioned argument between Hank and Karen in episode 8. The argument can be read as an statement on that neither the breadwinner model of a stay-at-home mother and the absent father, nor an unequal division of responsibilities or support are acceptable. Hence the show supports a feminist cause in familial relations, which distinguishes it from more clearly patriarchal families presented in shows such as *According to Jim* or *Everybody Loves Raymond*, for instance. At the height of the argument, Karen shouts: “Hank, I know you're busy. It comes with the territory. But I have not had a conversation with you for like three months! You don't give a shit anymore. Your head is so far up your own ass, and you don't even know it.”¹⁷⁶ In other words, Karen refuses to continue her relationship with Hank because of his inability to contribute to their relationship and their family. Thus a balancing of co-dependence and individual space emerges as crucial in their attempts to form a stable family, whereas a lack thereof combined with individualist agendas in its part contributes to the dysfunctionality of the family in the show. In this respect, then, it seems that a rejection of overt reliance in patriarchy in favor of individualism is written into the ideology of the family in the show and also that feminist aspects underlie the narrative.

Fourth, I would argue that *Californication* depicts its liberal approach towards sexual politics and sexual behaviour as challenging the stability of family ideology. Linked with the fact that “both formal and informal analyses suggest that spousal relations have become more explicitly sexual,”¹⁷⁷ not to mention what I would largely see as a result of the changes in what is considered taboo in society and acceptable to be shown on television, sex is portrayed as central to all of the characters in the show. Sex seems to act as a measuring pole for the state of one's life: for instance, in the pilot episode of *Californication*, Karen describes Hank's lack of direction in life as “drowning in a sea of pointless pussy”, an expression Hank later on uses to describe his situation himself as a

¹⁷⁶ “California Son” 8.

¹⁷⁷ Douglas, 100. The centrality of sexual encounters in the show follows the contemporary trend of family as built around a romantic couple and their relationship as discussed above, which I would argue distinguishes the show and other contemporary television portrayals of family from the trends of previous decades during which the romantic relationship between the parents was not emphasised to a similar extent (cf. *Father Knows Best* or *The Cosby Show*).

voice-over narration in episode 4.¹⁷⁸ As a result, as noted before, the show can be characterised as borderlining on soft-core porn in its displays of sex and nudity. The ideological battle, then, lies in Douglas' argument that whilst sexuality between spouses has gained attention in public imagery, spousal relations have become “less able to contain persons' sexual expressiveness.”¹⁷⁹ In other words, as sexuality is more openly presented, dissatisfaction with one's sex life with their partner has gained more attention as a source for conflict and drama. This is detectable in *Californication* as well as infidelity can be seen as one of the main reasons for the trouble within the family in the show: Karen ends up sleeping with Hank in episode 8, and an air of pleasure over commitment lures behind Charlie and Marcy as well, which leads to their attempts to find satisfaction in Charlie's secretary Dani. Whereas Marcy explains her affair in episode 10 as noted in section 3.1., as bored people “looking for some strange”, Charlie explains his actions to Hank when caught red-handed in his office with Dani as simply getting “a little carried away”, and taking advantage of the opportunity: “I don't even know what happened, man. One minute, I am sailing along, I'm being the guy who would never, ever cheat on his wife. The next second, I'm spanking the bare, naked ass of a 22-year-old.”¹⁸⁰

It appears, then, that sexuality and temptation set against commitment and wedding vows dictate much of the events in the first season of the show, serving as a valuable source for ideological struggle and conflict in the narrative. The centrality of sexual encounters to the characters' lives appears at its best as a seal for the relationship in the show (interestingly even more so than wedding vows): in the case of Hank and Karen, the pair discuss their past sex life as being very satisfactory, as Hank notes to Karen in the proposal scene in the pilot episode: “As I recall, our

178 “The Whore of Babylon” 3. As noted previously, however, despite the fact that Hank is portrayed as having the largest number of sexual partners in the show, he does so only after he has lost Karen – his sexual desires do not threaten his ability to be monogamous to Karen. Rather, it is Karen, Marcy and Charlie whose infidelity cause trouble with their spouses.

179 Douglas, 159.

180 “Fear and Loathing at the Fundraiser” 4.

problems did not extend to the bedroom.”¹⁸¹ Contrastively, Karen's vague notion about her sex life with Bill as simply “different” when confronted by Marcy in episode 2, and later on describing sex as a “grunt-fest” in episode 10, implies Hank's superiority over Bill as a lover, drawing a parallel between sexual performance and the quality of companionship.¹⁸² At the extreme, then, the shift from commitment and monogamy leads to an ideology of individualism and hedonism free of responsibility – as Marcy summarises her take on her relationship with Charlie after finding out about his affair with Dani:

I know about everything. I know about the 's' and the 'm' and the light 'b' and 'd'. And I'm not mad. I'm just kind of sad. And sexually awakened. I think we should go out there and fuck all the people we never fucked. Let's just rock out with our cocks out! Carpe motherfucking diem, baby!¹⁸³

In short, freedom of choice and individualism extends to sexual relations as well, and this aspect serves to compromise family stability in the show.

Fifth, I find that in *Californication*, the family and its dysfunctionality are presented as largely intertwined with the modern day L.A. setting of the show. A connection between the decline of morals and the L.A. location is implied already in the show title, which is a blend of the words “California” and “fornication”. In addition, the title includes an intertextual reference to the Red Hot Chili Peppers album of 1999 and its hit single by the same name, the lyrics of which are very critical of Hollywood's entertainment industry and its obsession with fame and beauty.¹⁸⁴ The show's criticism of Hollywood becomes palpable through Hank. To begin with, Hank's novel titled “God Hates Us All” which he wrote in New York, is implied to be a respected piece of literature in the show, but during the process of Hank and Karen moving to Hollywood and Todd Carr making a

181 “Pilot” 1.

182 “Hell-A Woman” 2, “The Devil's Threesome” 10.

183 “Filthy Lucre” 9.

184 Tony Pierce, “*Californication* Sued by The Red Hot Chili Peppers,” *Laist* 19 Nov. 1997, 9 Dec 2009.

<http://laist.com/2007/11/19/californication.php>. The intertextual reference is obvious to the extent that the members of Red Hot Chili Peppers decided to issue a complaint against the creator, writer and executive producer of the show Tom Kapinos, Twilight Time Films Inc., Aggressive Mediocrity Inc. and Showtime Networks Inc. for unfair competition and dilution on November 19th 2007. In addition to the show title, the band accused the plaintiffs for using the name “Dani” in the show, seeing a reference to the character of “Dani California” who features as a tragic fictional character in their lyrics in the albums *Californication* (1999), *By the Way* (2002) and *Stadium Arcadium* (2006). The matter remains unresolved.

screen version of the novel, the story is turned and twisted so that Hank can no longer recognise his own work and therefore describes Carr's film as a “craPtastic crowd-pleaser also known as 'Crazy Little Thing Called Love'.”¹⁸⁵ Taking place in the heart of Hollywood's dream production, the show depicts the location and the entertainment industry of L.A. as a threat to language, literature and most importantly real communication, which, as already noted above, is a matter emphasised as crucial in family relationships in the show. As Hank summarises his thoughts to host Henry Rollins in a radio show interview about his blog for Hell-A magazine:

Hank: Just the fact that people seem to be getting dumber and dumber. I mean, we have all this amazing technology, and yet computers have turned into basically four-figure wank machines. . . . People, they don't write anymore. They blog. . . . No punctuation, no grammar, LOL this and IMFAO that. It just seems to me that it's just a bunch of stupid people pseudo-communicating with a bunch of other stupid people in a protolanguage that resembles more what cavemen used to speak than the king's English.

Rollins: Yet you're a part of the problem. You're blogging with the best of them.

Hank: Hence my self-loathing.¹⁸⁶

Hank continues to express his resentment for Los Angeles throughout the season, and draws a parallel between the city and his sense of failure in life. In episode 2, in a dream/memory sequence with Karen in the car, Hank tells her how much he “absolutely fucking loathe[s] the city”, and blames the city for not being able to write. During the fight in episode 8, after Karen blames Hank for being self-centered, Hank expresses his will to salvage the family from the corruption of L.A. and take them back to the haven that for him is New York. Karen, however, disagrees and the situation escalates:

Hank: Okay, here's the plan. As soon as I finish the movie, we jam the car and go back to New York.

Karen: How can you be so self-absorbed?

Hank: What?

Karen: We came here for you, right? I had nothing here. And now that I've started to make things work for me and I'm earning a living, it just means nothing to you.

Hank: You redesign houses for assholes.

Karen: How is that any different from redesigning scripts for assholes?

Hank: It's not. That's my point. We gotta get out of here before the city destroys us both.

Karen: You know, it's really not the city.¹⁸⁷

185 “The Whore of Babylon” 3.

186 “LOL” 5.

187 “California Son” 8.

Even though Karen objects to Hank's view of the city, the dominance of Hank's voice and perspective in the narrative, along with Becca's ongoing wishes for her parents to spend time together and eventually reunite the family, “work out their shit and . . . move back to New York,”¹⁸⁸ can be argued to lead to that the locations are perceived as against each other in an ideological battle in an Althusserian sense. The narrative presents the cities as opposites, portraying L.A. as inherently bad and morally corrupt, producing popular culture of easy profit yet of low intellectual value such as Hank's film, pornography, his blog or Dani's nude pictures on the internet. In comparison, New York appears as a haven for intellect and culture, exemplified by the fact that Hank, a respected and critically acclaimed writer, can only write in New York. Consequently, it is implied that issues that Hollywood and L.A. represent and are associated with both in the show and in society are damaging to the modern family ideology of the happy nuclear family unit.

Indeed, it appears that the L.A. of *Californication* is criticised as a dream factory producing certain ideologies to the public that are in the reality of the characters, and especially that of Hank, empty of all real essence. Despite their success and wealth, the lives of the characters are to a large extent characterised by disappointment, unhappiness and conflict despite their ironically close connection with the American dream factory of Hollywood. This setting seems to imply that L.A. is nothing but a producer of fake dreams and appearances, which I would argue resembles the trend of troubled lives bubbling underneath a polished surface evident in for instance *Desperate Housewives* or the soap opera genre as a whole. As Sonja, Karen's friend and guest at a dinner party in episode 2, summarises her marriage (and also brings to the table the mediated craze among celebrities of exploring their faith and converting to different religions most likely in order to find meaning in life):

Sonja: I wish I could tell an interesting story about me and my ex, but it's really just L.A. cliché number 4b. He was sleeping with his assistant. . . .His name was Ted.
Hank: Your husband?

188 “Hell-A Woman” 2.

Sonja: His assistant.

Hank: Could be worse.

Sonja: Really? How so?

Hank: Well, instead of finding out that your husband was gay, you could've found out that he was a... Scientologist or something like that.

Sonja: I'm a Scientologist, Hank.¹⁸⁹

Thus instead of offering the characters the American dream of success, love and happiness, Hollywood only provides them with worthless clichés. In contrast, New York is offered as a location where the American dream is still attainable by the dream couple of Hank and Karen.

It can be argued, then, that the dominance of capitalism and commercialisation in Hollywood in their part serve to compromise the family unit and family values in the show. As Hank puts it in the opening scene of episode 3 at a public discussion of his novel in a bookstore in L.A., the success in Hollywood requires him to give up his personal dignity in his work and who he is as a person:

Once upon a time, I wrote a book. People seemed to dig it, so I wrote another and one after that. That's when Hollywood came knocking at my back door. As soon as I cashed that check, I wrapped my lips around the mighty erection that is the film industry and sucked hard, just like a good whore should. Unfortunately, I had to be taught not to orphan the balls.¹⁹⁰

His “whoring” to the film industry leads to that he compromises his family to the point that Karen ends up having an affair with Bill; but equally, Bill compromises his time with Karen and their reconstituted family in order to achieve and maintain the wealth and success idealised as the core of the American dream. Furthermore, the producing of the Hollywood ideology that presents everything from sex, beauty and religion to the grand romance narrative of one's life as available for purchase, twists these matters of life and experience to mere products that hold a false promise of fulfillment in a sense that could arguably be seen as border-lining on promoting false consciousness upon its audience in Marxist terms.¹⁹¹ In the L.A. of *Californication*, men pursue the American dream but find that happiness is not included in the pot of gold at the end of the Hollywood

189 “Hell-A Woman” 2.

190 “The Whore of Babylon” 3.

191 Cf. section 2.1.

rainbow; women have careers but are subjected to a number of limitations concerning their physical appearance from hair removal to breast implants and vaginal rejuvenation. It seems, then, that the central lesson of the season for the characters, especially of the male sex, is that although everything else is for sale in Hollywood, family and happiness are not.

All in all, the contrast between the reality and the fakeness of Hollywood can be identified as a crucial source for ideological battle between values and dreams and the means that are required to achieve those dreams. Despite the entertainment business being the characters' primary source of income and a means to secure their standard of living, the show implies that it is precisely the thoroughly commercialised Hollywood atmosphere that serves to the characters sense of being lost and detached from both their morals and their families. It appears that the very industry producing a versions of the ideology of the American dream – mixes of heterosexual romance, love and wealth all played by beautiful people – serves to compromise the higher end of culture, and most importantly, the real families in *Californication*. The individualism of the postmodern era, further reinforced by the Hollywood ideals of success and beauty – of the right kind, to be more exact – is in danger of producing individuals border-lining on narcissism that are consequently unable to contribute to the family in a way that is needed to form a stable family unit in the new millennium. Thus the dysfunctionality of the family is explained by both issues springing from within the family and family relations, and the culture of a morally corrupt L.A. that surrounds it. The show also attempts to exceed the limitations that the nuclear family formation sets upon its members by bringing to the table the idea of a more confluent love as noted by Giddens on postmodern culture. The case of reconstituted families and openness to new family forms, however, does not remain without its problems in the show. After all, despite the fact that Bill and Karen marry in the season finale, their reconstituted family is in the end discarded by Karen and reconciliation is provided in the season finale by a return to the original family unit of Hank, Karen and Becca, portrayed as a happy, and arguably, functional version of the unit in the final scene of the episode. Ironically, then,

despite being critical of the Hollywood dream factory, the show itself can be deemed guilty and analysed as a product of the same factory it seeks to criticise. This, I find, can be explained by the importance of genre and norms in television narratives, which is a matter I will discuss in the next section.

3.3. “The Ballad of Hank and Karen” – The Hegemony of Genre, Narrative and the Ideology of True Love

As exemplified in 3.1. and 3.2., the (white middle-class) American family in *Californication* can be characterised as a troubled and somewhat threatened affair with multiple options that are on one hand marked with instability, hybridity, change and conflict characteristic of postmodern times. On the other hand, however, I argue that the representation of the family remains within a certain framework in the show: the norm of the two-parent family, which has dominated the ideology of the family and family discourse for decades, not to mention replicated in numerous television shows and Hollywood-produced romantic comedies, appears to be present in *Californication* too. Thus in order to understand the framework of the American family underlying the grand narrative in *Californication*, I will approach the ideology as something built into the narrative in which aspects on the family are communicated both implicitly and explicitly in the show.¹⁹²

As noted in section 2.1., Althusser sees ideology as something that requires all subjects within an ideology to position themselves in relation to it. Ideology is inescapable and provides the frame within which subjects operate, make sense of and evaluate their experience of what they perceive as reality. In the case of *Californication*, this is relevant in relation to both the characters and the viewers of the show. As stated in 3.1., the narrative and the characters are largely constructed around the issues of family ideology. In addition, the audience are faced with television

¹⁹² Within the boundaries of this thesis, I will not be able to provide a full narrative analysis which would require detailed analysis of all the episodes both individually and as a continuum; rather, I will focus on the generic narrative pattern of the show.

representation which can be characterised as an ideology within ideology. The fact that television functions according to certain dominant rules, has its limitations and operates in recognisable patterns means that it can be identified as an ideology in itself, and in order to be successful, television production must take into account the restrictions and work within the boundaries the medium sets for its narratives. Furthermore, the structures and conventions of narrative are significant in the equation. As Kaminsky and Mahan note, television is a very restricted medium with a limited set of options:

In television, conventions of format and formula are very important. . . . There is only so much attention that the home audience will give to narrative information. . . . The shows are written in a kind of shorthand which requires, to a great extent, that the audience understand the cultural context in which the information is given. The assumption is that the audience recognizes certain types and patterns and appreciates the repetition of these story patterns, myths, and character types that recur.¹⁹³

Despite Kaminsky and Mahan's argument dating two decades back, Purvis and Thornham's work appears to be along the same lines, hence making their point of view still relevant. Purvis and Thornham note that conventions lead to a politics of narrative, in which “some subjects are excluded, either by intention or by convention, from the narration of events. The lives of some are narrated more than the lives of others.”¹⁹⁴ Kozloff goes as far as to saying that “American television is as saturated in narrative as a sponge in a swimming pool.”¹⁹⁵ Thus in television narratives, certain issues are given the limelight whilst others remain in the dark, making television broadcasting and television shows an ideological project in which “familiar narrative, visual, or generic structures orient our understanding of what we see and how they naturalize the events and stories on television.”¹⁹⁶

In his analysis of television's “hegemonic project”, Gitlin lists matters of “format and formula, genre, setting and character type, slant and solution” as aspects of media representation

193 Stuart M. Kaminsky and Jeffrey H. Mahan, American Television Genres (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1985) 33-34.

194 Purvis and Thornham, 31-2.

195 Sarah Kozloff, “Narrative Theory,” Channels of Discourse, Reassembled, 68.

196 White 173.

and entertainment “in which ideological hegemony is embedded.”¹⁹⁷ These aspects, I find, are crucial in *Californication* as well. As noted in 3.1., the setting in the show can be defined as postmodern yet relying on familial relations to provide both a storyline and the solution in the season finale “The Last Waltz”. In this section I will focus on the ideology of the family in terms of genre, slant and characters of the show; character types will be further discussed with special emphasis on feminist criticism and gender studies in section 4.

First of all, *Californication* can be defined as a hybrid television show that in terms of format combines elements of multiple genres. In the case of *Californication*, I find that the relevant genres are the romantic comedy, self-contained sitcom and television drama or “serial”,¹⁹⁸ albeit all covered with a sprinkle of soft-core porn and adult-only content. Turner sees that hybrid television shows routinely rely on a continuing storyline as a major carrier of motifs whilst the self-contained minor storylines, which in *Californication* rely on comic sequences and witty dialogue concerning mostly work, friendship, sex and dating, bring viewer satisfaction on the level of individual episodes. When the continuing narrative of the show is analysed, as stated in 3.1., it remains clear that family is in the core of the narrative in *Californication*, providing explanation for the characters' behaviour and describing their pursuits to either escape, transcend, mold or return to and embrace the ideology. In other words, the characters are largely defined and become subjects in relation to the ideology of the family, which as already noted in 2.1., is an aspect in line with Althusser's notions on the nature of ideology: “...the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects.”¹⁹⁹

In relation to genre, I find that as a product of the entertainment industry, *Californication* cannot escape its need to conform to certain limitations in order to achieve an audience.

197 Gitlin, 519.

198 Graeme Turner, “Genre, Hybridity and Mutations,” *The Television Genre Book*, ed. Glen Creeber (London: BFI Publishing, 2001) 6.

199 Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971) 160.

Particularly, I would argue that in terms of narrative pattern, *Californication* belongs to the category of the romance narrative. Initially discarded as an anti-feminist, “monolithically pernicious and disabling ideology,”²⁰⁰ by the likes of de Beauvoir, Firestone and Millet, more recent research on the matter of the romance narrative has differing undertones. For instance, in their works Tania Modleski and Janice Radway both discuss the romance as presented in different forms in relation to their meanings and positions for their audience.²⁰¹ Despite having been used over and over again, as “one of the most compelling discourses by which any one of us is inscribed, . . .”²⁰² the romance continues to fascinate audiences.

Jeffers McDonald records David Shumway's summary of the typicalities of the genre as follows: “The basic plot of all mainstream romantic comedies is boy meets, loses, regains, girl.”²⁰³ This locates *Californication* into the category of romance with ease. Shumway's pattern of the genre becomes most evident, in Gitlin's terms, in the solution of the season in which Hank, Karen and Becca are reunited in a happy ending, driving away from Karen's wedding. In the finale, then, it seems that the postmodern family condition and hybrid families are discarded as inferior to the nuclear family unit as Hank's “fall from grace” is reconciled, and the family unit is brought back together. The leading couple – attractive, heterosexual and successful, as typical of the genre²⁰⁴ – is reunited and drive into the sunset whilst Hank's rival Bill and his teenage daughter Mia, who has expressed she has feelings for Hank, watch them go.

The only twist in the ending can be found in that conventionally, as Wexman notes,

²⁰⁰ Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey, “The Heart of the Matter: Feminists Revisit Romance,” *Romance Revisited* (New York: New York University Press, 1995) 13.

²⁰¹ For instance, see Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008) xvii; Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984). Modleski sees that the narratives considered female such as the romantic comedy or the soap opera offer a plurality of experiences for their consumers such as pleasure and feelings of self-worth, which speak of the complexity embedded in the attraction to the genre. Radway's work is along the same lines in her classic study in which she interviewed a number of women reading romance novels and the discussion around them. Within the boundaries of this thesis, I will not be able to explore further Modleski's or Radway's takes on audience pleasure and the multiplicity of potential readings of the romance narrative.

²⁰² Pearce and Stacey, 12.

²⁰³ Jeffers McDonald, 12.

²⁰⁴ Jeffers McDonald, 13.

“Hollywood romantic comedy films grapple with the tension between unruly passion and permanent monogamy by ending the narrative at the moment of marriage, which ensures that romantic passion is fused with monogamy as an eternal state of being.”²⁰⁵ In the case of *Californication*, it is not Hank and Karen's wedding that finishes the season, but that of Karen and Bill's. But, as Hank puts it in the pilot episode, marriage in their case is a “bullshit technicality.”²⁰⁶ Interestingly, however, Jeffers McDonald suggests that romance and marriage have opposing goals, which leads to that romantic comedies have to end before the couple embarks on married life.²⁰⁷ In this respect, it could be argued that *Californication* is remarkably true to the tropes of the genre as Hank and Karen are not married at any point and can therefore possess the status of the leading couple as noted above on Shumway – it can be questioned, even, whether they would have been able to reunite had they been married in the past and consequently divorced at the time when Bill arrived in the picture. The season finale, then, implies that Hank and Karen are exceptional in that they have the best of both worlds within the rules of the genre and mediated family representations: the romance and passion of the unmarried couple and the bliss of family life. In other words, the structure of the first season of *Californication* does not exceed the limits of the romantic narrative, but uses romance quite clearly as an underlying motif. Consequently, it can be argued that the romantic comedy narrative defines the boundaries within which the family discourse need remain in the show in order that a familiar pattern is achieved and audience recognition and pleasure is assured.

The fact that the show relies on the romantic narrative has consequences in terms of the show's slant towards a pro-family discourse. The reconciliation scene of the show requires a narrative logic in the major storyline that supports the reunion of the family, and thus the show finishes at a conventional note despite its partly critical attitude towards the modern family. As

205 V.W. Wexman, *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 8.

206 “Pilot” 1.

207 Jeffers McDonald, 13.

noted in 3.2., the morally corrupt environment of Hollywood that the show is set in can hardly be identified as pro-family or encouraging of commitment. In the light of the romance narrative, however, the surrounding moral corruption can also be read as a contrasting tool which emphasises the ideological battle between the anti- and pro-family discourses detectable in *Californication*.

I see that the most important factor contributing to the slant of the show is the attitude that the characters show towards family, love and commitment. The positive attitude towards family is most palpable in Hank. It is made clear that Hank has made mistakes in the past, but that at present his dream is to be reunited with Karen and Becca. Throughout the first season, Hank is largely occupied with changing to be a better father, emphasising their familial relations by continuously referring to Becca as “daughter”, and seeking the company of Karen and Becca, to spend time with them “man, woman and child.”²⁰⁸ In episode 10, in which Charlie moves in with Hank after Marcy's lesbian affair, Hank states that he sees his split up with Karen as a fall from grace rather than an opportunity for freedom:

Most people go their whole life and never really find someone they love. They say they do because everybody's the star of their own little romantic comedy, but they're full of shit. You and me, we had women that loved us for who we were. Really loved us for who we were. And we fucked it up. For what? Some stupid piece of ass we forgot about 10 minutes later?²⁰⁹

Thus his take on the family is strongly associated with (true) romantic love that he has for Karen, which is in line with the centrality of spousal relations in television family representations as noted on Douglas in 3.2., as well as with Jeffers McDonald's takes on the genre: “The basic ideology the romantic comedy genre supports is the primary importance of the couple.”²¹⁰ In one of the scenes where Hank pursues Karen, he summarises his beliefs on what they had done wrong:

I would say we loved each other too much. Too much. And I think we made the mistake of getting it right the first time, and that put an insane amount of pressure on us to keep it going. And... we buckled. You know what I miss most about it? . . . Your smell. . . . I think that's why I go in for the kiss all the time. I know, yeah. I think I'm going for another hit.²¹¹

208 “Girls Interrupted” 7.

209 “The Devil's Threesome” 10.

210 Jeffers McDonald, 13.

211 “Absinthe Makes the Heart Grow Fonder” 6.

It could be said, then, that in Hank's view, the ideology of the family becomes an ideology of love, which can be seen as a product of late modernity and a replacement for the historical takes on the family as a functional unit that is not necessarily based on emotional bonds. As Chambers elaborates: "As a central part of the rise of individualism in late modernity, love has come to be the crucial way of finding meaning in life and yet it has become more fragile and more precarious."²¹² According to Jeffers McDonald, the centrality of love can be said to be at the heart of the contemporary romantic comedy genre as well: "a romantic comedy is a film which has as its central narrative motor a quest for love, which portrays the quest in a light-hearted way and almost always to a successful conclusion."²¹³ Love and family serve as central motifs for Hank, and his whole life seems to be at a standstill when he is away from his family. He states that "I'm disgusted with my life and myself,"²¹⁴ and, in addition, he is unable to write anything for years until he has sex with Karen and subsequently manages to write an entire novel in episode 9: "I think you [Karen] knocked something loose down there, tiger. I wrote something. . . . I got pages here, honey. Many pages. It's rough, but it's something."²¹⁵ Hank evidently does not function without Karen, as he already states in the first proposal scene in the pilot episode as quoted in section 3.1. Thus the ideology of the family comes to mean not only love, but fulfillment and a necessity in life for Hank, which serves to idealise the family as based on mutual support, companionship, love and blood-related offspring. In addition, it could be said that romantic love becomes "central to the project of the self" for Hank, which Chambers sees as typical of the romantic comedies of the postmodern era.²¹⁶ Indeed, Hank appears to be "the star of his own little romantic comedy," as he is determined to believe in happy endings in the age of cynicism and instability. This becomes evident in the first scene of episode 7, in which Hank and Becca discuss a poem by Robert Frost:

Becca: "Nothing gold can stay". . . . Well, it's basically about how nothing good ever lasts.

²¹² Chambers, 25.

²¹³ Jeffers McDonald, 9.

²¹⁴ "Pilot" 1.

²¹⁵ "Filthy Lucre" 9.

²¹⁶ Chambers, 134.

How, no matter what you do, it all just turns into shit in the end... you know, like you and mom.

Hank: Trenchant if profane literary criticism. It's an interesting take. . . . but don't ever think that, honey. Just because something is bleak doesn't necessarily make it true . . . Happy endings may get a bad rap, but they do happen. And when they do, they're just as true as the unhappy ones.

Becca: So you're saying it's possible one day you and mom could get back together?

Hank: Of course. Anything's possible.

Hank's idealising of the family unit is emphasised further in the dream sequences that occur throughout the show as takes on either Hank's memories of past or his dreams of what his past life had been like with Karen and Becca. The sequences are shot from his perspective and imitate the style of a worn down, blurry and yellowish amateur video. In the pilot episode, the family is gathered around Becca's drawing inside in a living room, happy and smiling, and in episode 3 they play with a dog on the beach, and the imagery is supported by Hank's blog entry for Hell-A magazine. The tone of the entry, I find, is one of despair and refers to his lost happiness and pursuit to change and become a better father:

Good morning, Hell-A. In the land of the lotus-eaters, time plays tricks on you. One day you're dreaming. The next, your dream has become your reality. It was the best of times. If only someone had told me. Mistakes were made, hearts were broken, harsh lessons learned. My family goes on without me, while I drown in a sea of pointless pussy. I don't know how I got here. But here I am, rotting away in the warm California sun. There are things I need to figure out, for her [Becca] sake, at least. The clock is ticking. The gap is widening. She won't always love me "no matter what."

I would argue that the dream sequences are significant precisely because they imitate the style of home videos or family photography, which communicate a glorification of the family and memories past; indeed, the routine every-day life events within a family are almost turned into a spectacle-like experience in Hank's eyes. In Althusserian terms, the dream sequences also exemplify the ideology as an issue concerned with nostalgia, hope and motivation and crucial to one's relation to their real conditions of existence as noted in 2.1. Although he is "drowning in a sea of pointless pussy" – he participates in at least one sex scene in each episode apart from the season finale – through his actions towards Karen and Becca, as well as his dream sequences, Hank's character produces a

thoroughly positive attitude towards the family ideology and thus contributes to the shows pro-family slant.

Whilst agreeing with Hank that love is central to the family, Karen blames him for being unrealistic and wanting a relationship for the wrong reasons: “You're not in love with me, you're in love with the idea... the idea of love.”²¹⁷ She has left the relationship because it could not offer what she wished for, which could be seen as a feminist take on the relationship.²¹⁸ Karen refuses to participate in Hank's writing process as his “fucking sounding-board-cum-security blanket”, which could be seen to imply another downfall in their relationship in which Karen feels she has been used without getting anything in return.²¹⁹ However, this can also be seen as a signifier of another trope of romantic comedy as noted by Jeffers McDonald – that is, the idea of personal growth and the need to deserve love:

The myth of perfect love appeals to both sexes, and the narratives of romantic comedy films themselves demonstrate that both women and men have to change and adapt to deserve love: if, annoyingly, in the masquerade plot which occurs as such a regular trope in this genre it is usually the man who is conning the woman, such films as *Pillow Talk*, *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* and *Lover Come Back* (1961) do demonstrate that, once the woman has discovered his deceit, the man has to change his ways in order to deserve her love again.²²⁰

As Karen notes to Hank on their past life in which Hank did not want to marry her: “You never asked. You didn't wanna be that guy. You didn't wanna join the herd. That's what I dug about you. Imagine my fucking disappointment when you turned out to be the biggest cliché of all, sitting there googling yourself.”²²¹ Thus the transformation from a narcissistic writer googling himself into a man who does want to marry her is needed for Karen to consider Hank worthy of her love.

Despite Hank and Karen not marrying, marriage seems to be a central theme for the characters' understanding of family. The show recognises the modern family setting where a

217 “Absinthe Makes the Heart Grow Fonder” 6.

218 I find Karen's decision to be feminist as she thereby undermines the patriarchal order of the male-headed family by being the deciding body in the equation; it is also noteworthy that she takes Becca with her, which frees her from the accusations towards feminism as compromising women's willingness to mother their children.

219 “Filthy Lucre” 9.

220 Jeffers McDonald, 17.

221 “Pilot” 1.

married heterosexual couple is the core of the familial unit for better and for worse, as exemplified by Hank's parents. The significance of marriage in romantic comedies is, according to Jeffers McDonald, that the implications of monogamy and “sex, and settled, secure, within-a-relationship sex at that” it entails, communicate a rather ideological message that she sees “exist to dress up the naked fact that Western, capitalist society has traditionally relied on monogamy for its stability, as well as on procreation for its continuance.”²²² It should be noted that Bill has proposed to Karen, and she justifies her agreement to marry him to Marcy as follows: “I love him, he loves me, he's great with Becca. I mean, what else is there?”²²³ Within the logic of the romantic comedy, however, Bill's main purpose is to create a dramatic twist where the lead couple is threatened and Karen is at risk of choosing the wrong man and along with him, the life of a married woman rather than the romance with Hank.

It could be argued, then, that the institution of marriage is not accepted as a given in *Californication*, but the characters can be seen to represent different aspects towards its significance. Charlie and Marcy are married and thus form a typical heterosexual unit, but that does not signify that the relationship is stable or unbreakable – after all, they both end up having an extramarital affair with Dani. Hank and Karen's relationship is characterised by their decision to not get married, which first represents an obstacle and provides the downfall for them (or, within the logic of the genre, a possibility for a love story). In a back-flash scene in episode 8 where Hank finds out that Karen is sleeping with Bill, after a loud argument Becca asks Hank what will happen next:

Becca: Are you going to get a divorce?

Hank: I think that's the good thing about never being married. It's impossible to divorce.

Becca: You know what I mean.

Hank: I know what you mean, and I'm doing the best I can!²²⁴

In my view, the scene signifies that family is no longer necessarily based on the institution of

222 Jeffers McDonald, 14.

223 “Hell-A Woman” 2.

224 “California Son” 8.

marriage, but in Hank's words, on the members' ability and will to work at the relationship to which they are committed and stay monogamous in spite of the show's somewhat liberal takes on sexuality. This also links the romance narrative in *Californication* with what Pearce and Stacey identify as the potential transformations within the narrative. Identifying the romance as an ideology in an Althusserian sense, they see that it persists due to its ability to change, for instance, to include ideas such as Giddens' confluent love as discussed in 3.2.²²⁵ During the fight Karen justifies her affair with Bill with Hank's absence and inability to provide companionship and support. After Hank and Karen's relationship fails, Karen's decision to marry Bill represents a practical solution to form a family unit in which she constructs her own ideal. In Hank's words, "I mean, talk about being the architect of your very own '...happy ending!'"²²⁶ From this perspective, Karen is granted power within the romance narrative, implying a feminist perspective of the woman as the active subject in the process.

However, even though she appears to have the possibility to choose between Bill and Hank, she does not consider options outside of the nuclear family paradigm but seems to be mostly occupied with deciding which of the two men can best provide her with a "happy ending". For most of the season, she "do[es] believe in happy endings, just not when it comes to the ballad of Hank and Karen."²²⁷ Her decision to reunite with Hank, nevertheless, serves to that she is willing to join in on Hank's romantic ideal in the end, which turns a dream, or Hank's imaginary relation to his state of existence, their reality in an Althusserian sense. This becomes literal in the season finale, which opens with Hank having a dream on the morning of Karen's wedding. In the dream, he interrupts the priest during the ceremony:

Priest: If anyone knows of a reason why this couple should not wed, speak now or forever hold your peace.

Hank: Wait, hold on. One minute. Time out. Since you are bringing it up, there is something I would like to express. I just want to put it on the table. I've got a car... there's more. Just say

²²⁵ Pearce and Stacey, 28, 35.

²²⁶ "Hell-A Woman" 2. In the scene, Becca narrates the story of Hank and Karen, which is followed by Hank's ironic narration of how Bill and Karen got together, which Mia finishes with the comment on a "Happy ending".

²²⁷ "Girls Interrupted" 7.

the word, and I'll pull it around front. You get in, you grab the Becca, off we go. [To Bill] I'm sorry, you're not invited. Doesn't have much of a back seat. What do you say, Karen? It's not too late. It's never too late.²²⁸

And indeed, at the end of the episode which exemplifies the reconciliation for the entire season, this dream comes true as the family drives into the sunset.

In other words, it can be argued that *Californication* supports Chambers' notions of the condition of love in the postmodern era. Chambers argues that whilst familial meanings are reassessed and an air of “disenchantment of discovering that love objects are unstable entities that gradually metamorphose to something else” she sees that in public and popular representations,

the search for fulfillment through love is still so strong that individuals are willing to go through the process again and again. So Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) seem to be right in their claim that love is the obsession of the postmodern era that replaces religion as a kind of faith.²²⁹

This matter is further emphasised by Mia's outbreak at Karen and Bill's wedding ceremony in the season finale. Drunk and revengeful towards his father for not allowing her to publish a sexually laden novel (which is actually Hank's writing which Mia has stolen), she speaks her mind:

Priest: And if anyone knows any reason why these two should not be wed, please speak now or forever hold your peace.

Mia: Over here! . . . Excuse me, I was told to speak now or forever hold my peace. Was it just bullshit or can I file my grievance? . . . Karen, all due respect, give me a fucking break. You're still in love with Hank, and you know what? You should be. He's obviously the guy for you. . . [to Bill] I want you to be happy. I do. You totally deserve it. You got a bum deal. You loved someone with your whole heart, I know you did, and they up and died on you. That sucks. But you gotta get real, you can't just play house. . . . If you marry Karen, you will always be staring down the barrel of Hank. Simple as that.²³⁰

Thus also in Mia's beliefs, the idea of romantic true love transgresses lawfully and artificially built agreements of companionship. In the true fashion of a romantic comedy, which Jeffer McDonald characterises as “the ideology of 'one man for one woman'” that underlies in the narrative “in order to assure stability in Western, capitalist society,”²³¹ Mia believes that there is one true love and and

228 “The Last Waltz” 12.

229 Chambers, 137-8.

230 “The Last Waltz” 12.

231 Jeffers McDonald, 13-14.

one true family for both Karen and Bill, but that is not the one that they are entering with their VOWS.

It can be concluded, then, that the ideology of the family, entwined with and communicated through the typicalities of romantic comedy as a genre, largely determines the slant and solution in *Californication*. Issues of commitment, responsibility and individualism are referred to in relation to the family in the show, and the show emphasises emotion, true love and companionship as central in building a family, and central to its survival in the battle against the threats and competing ideologies discussed in 3.2. Furthermore, even though the show appears as restricted by the genre, it does not mean that the show necessarily promotes a patriarchal agenda, but speaks of a transformation as noted by Pearce and Stacey. After all, as noted above, Marcy is happy to go and “fuck all those people we didn't fuck before,”²³² Hank is to prove his personal growth and devotion to the project of the family, and Karen is, at least in theory, free to choose for herself (if not seen as forced to the decision by the genre). Along the lines of conventions of family representation, through its romantic narrative the show nevertheless promotes heteronormativity dominant in contemporary media depictions of the family as noted in 3.1. Therefore in the next section, I will move on to discussing the dynamics of gender in order to see what the ideology of the family as communicated in *Californication* signifies in terms of gender politics, feminist family studies and, most importantly, for the gendered subjects in the show.

232 “Filthy Lucre” 9.

4. The Gendered Subject in *Californication*: Representation, Responsibility and Parenting

As noted in section 2.2., historically the American family and the gender dynamics within it have been largely dominated by a patriarchal order which has reflected itself on (and arguably, continues to do so at least to an extent) television shows concerning the family. Shows such as *Happy Days* and *The Waltons*, for instance, serve as examples of shows in which the model of the white, middle-class, modern patriarchal family is easiest detected. However, beginning from the second wave of feminism, the modern setting of the American family has been subjected to increasing criticism from the more subtle takes on the matter from Rubin and Chodorow, for instance, to the radicalist thinkers such as Firestone and Millet, who in their time rooted for the demolition of the modern family order and the oppressing childbearing role of women altogether. What the critics agree on, however, is that gender is primarily a social construction rather than a biological fact. As MacKinnon notes: “For many academic writers, gender is a matter of power relations, a system that categorises people as distinct groups, male and female. They believe that gender, being a power relation, has to be negotiated and renegotiated, rather than accepted passively as if it were a human trait.”²³³ And, in relation to the family, the power relations of genders in both the public and private spheres have been a defining factor in producing inequality within the family and in family relations.

In this section, my aim is to look at the gender representation of the American family in *Californication* to see to what extent the show can be seen to be reflective of changes in gender politics within the family and the state of public debate in society. Moreover, I aim to detect how, and with which consequences, the two genders, roles and sexuality are presented in the show. I find that a closer look into the ideological battles concerning gender issues and the internal family order

²³³ MacKinnon, 4.

in *Californication* provides crucial information on the state of the American family in society and as presented in the show and other contemporary television shows. In section 4.1., I will begin by discussing family, subject positions and familial relations from the perspective of the men and masculinity in the show; in 4.2., I will focus on the women of *Californication*; and in 4.3., I will look into the issues of reproduction and parenting in the show.

4.1. Men, Hegemonic Masculinity and the “New Man”

Unlike femininity and women's rights, masculinity was left largely unexamined and perceived as unproblematic in society and the academia until the end of the 20th century. As Gill summarises:

Studies of gender and media were transformed throughout the 1990s by the new interest in masculinity, or, better, masculinities. This development in the West is a direct result of feminism's sustained interrogation and critique of masculinity. Prior to that, male experience had often been treated unproblematically as human experience, and, historically, most of what passes as history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, literature has been by and about men. What made the late twentieth-century interest in masculinity different was that it made men visible as a *gendered* group.²³⁴

Since the rise of studies in masculinity as noted by Gill, scholars in gender and media studies have largely agreed on that traditionally, the imagery of men and masculinity has been haunted by a rather straight-forward and consequently, extremely simplifying and restricting list of masculinity tropes. As MacKinnon notes, “being hard, physically powerful and mentally strong, competitive, aggressive, dominant, rational, unemotional and objective are often advanced as typical indexical markers of the masculine.”²³⁵ In reality, however, MacInnes notes that “at best lists of such traits represent tendencies and possibilities that individuals have more or less access to at different points in time, and coexist in an uneasy and messy alliance.”²³⁶ Masculinity, as such, is in reality “not a coherent object about which a generalising science can be produced.”²³⁷

234 Gill, 30.

235 MacKinnon, 56.

236 MacInnes, *The End of Masculinity: The Confusion of Sexual Genesis and Sexual Difference in Modern Society* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998) 14-15.

237 MacInnes, 61.

In this respect, masculinity can be understood as an ideology in an Althusserian sense as images of preferred types of masculinity proliferate in media representations even though masculinity is in reality hard to underpin or clearly define as an object of study. Ideological state apparatuses such as television, then, contribute to providing different types of constructions of masculinity in public imagery at different times and places. As MacKinnon notes: “Masculinity is constructed and represented in various guises throughout the mass media . . . popular media representations (in film, television and pop music in particular) provide highly crafted, alluring and accessible role models for boys and young men.”²³⁸ The mediated images of Mike Brady of the *Brady Bunch*, Charles Ingalls of *The Little House on the Prairie*, or, most importantly, Hank Moody of *Californication*, can and should then be seen as historical suggestions on the ways to be a man even though they are not grounded on reality, but on the ideology of manhood and masculinity of their time.

R.W. Connell, a noted scholar in the field of masculinity studies, provides a useful theoretical ideological tool that can be used to explain the incoherence between reality and the imagined: the idea (or ideology) of hegemonic masculinity. In short, Carrigan, Connell et. al. use the term to argue that rather than there being one single “real” masculinity, there are multiple masculinities.²³⁹ These different realisations of masculinities are positioned in relation to the imaginary, yet dominating and socially valued, culturally idealised and circulated, form of masculine character, which is used as a point of reference compared to which all other masculinities are evaluated and recognised.²⁴⁰ In this field of masculinity, some forms are privileged and more powerful than others. For instance, as MacKinnon notes, “Particularly excluded from hegemonic masculinity, or by means of it, are black and working-class men, as well as homosexual men.”²⁴¹

238 MacKinnon, 64.

239 Tim Carrigan, R.W. Connell and John Lee, “Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity” *Theory and Society* 14 (1985) 587-590.

240 R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender and Society* 19 (2005) 838.

241 MacKinnon, 9.

However, this does not mean that subordinated masculinities are exempt from being scrutinised as they lie in the shadow of hegemonic masculinity – rather, in an Althusserian sense, it forces all subjects to position themselves in relation to the ideology which serves as a measuring pole that defines a subject's relation to, and arguably also their personal understanding of, their own masculinity and position in the gender system. Consequently, everyone falls victim to the hegemonic order.

In addition, Connell sees that “part of the struggle for hegemony in the gender order is the use of culture for such disciplinary purposes; setting standards, claiming popular assent and discrediting those who fall short. The production of exemplary masculinities is thus integral to the politics of hegemonic masculinity.”²⁴² The men in *Californication*, then, can be seen to be representatives of a gender system in which certain tropes and characteristics are presented as more desirable than others, and form a field of masculinity within the logic of the show. Therefore it is not arbitrary who it is that falls short in relation to whom and by which grounds in the show, and also, who is left out altogether within the system of masculinities as subjects and family members in *Californication*.

To begin with, as already noted in 3.1., heteronormativity is a central underlying issue in the show. However, it is not only a matter of securing the continuance of the (white) American nation; it can also be seen as a realisation of the masculine ideal and a reinforcer of gender, as well as familial, relations. Donaldson notes on the link between hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality:

Heterosexuality and homophobia are the bedrock of hegemonic masculinity and any understanding of its nature and meaning is predicated on the feminist insight that in general the relationship of men to women is oppressive. . . . A fundamental element of hegemonic masculinity, then, is that women exist as potential sexual objects for men while men are negated as sexual objects for men.²⁴³

Donaldson's argument, which intersects with the concept of heteronormativity, becomes clear in

242 R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 215.

243 Mike Donaldson, “What is Hegemonic Masculinity?” *Theory and Society* 22 (1993) 645.

Californication in a comparison of two scenes in episodes 7 and 10. In episode 7, “Girls Interrupted”, Dani, Marcy and Charlie agree to have sex with each other in a threesome. They begin with Charlie watching the two women kiss, which is stated to be Marcy's fantasy rather than an act upon Charlie's request.²⁴⁴ In contrast, in episode 10, “The Devil's Threesome”, Hank agrees to join in on a threesome with Charlie and a woman they meet at a gym only after the men have agreed on the rules:

Hank: Okay. I'll do it. First, let's set some guidelines. . . First, I don't want to see your cock anywhere near me.

Charlie: Why would I want my cock anywhere near you?

Hank: Why would you wanna be involved in a threesome with me?

Charlie: I don't. My client does.

Hank: This client doesn't.

Charlie: That client, the new client. Do you want to do this?

Hank: No. But I will. For you. Anything for you, my love. Go agent the deal. I'll freshen up.²⁴⁵

Stating that attraction or homosexual desire between Hank and Charlie is out of the question, the scene reinforces their heterosexuality as well as their positioning of the woman in question as a sexual object. In addition, it implies that at least in the case of Charlie and Hank, a setting similar to that of episode 7 in which Charlie watch the women kiss, would not be possible with reversed gender roles. Rather, the scene depicts to the full the idea of homosociality, or male companionship as a basis for the dominance of men over women, a matter Kimmel identifies as central to hegemonic masculinity – provided that the threat of homosexuality is avoided as in the dialogue between Hank and Charlie above quite literally. Similar restrictions do not however apply to Marcy and Dani, who are portrayed as embracing their homosexual desires without the danger of stigma.

Other references to homosexuality in the show are offered in the form of banter or insults between men, further serving to the idea of homosexuality as inferior and subordinate compared to the hegemonic heterosexual ideal. Hank is especially keen on questioning Bill's sexuality undoubtedly in order to threaten his masculinity and abilities as Karen's partner:

244 “Girls Interrupted” 7.

245 “The Devil's Threesome” 10.

Hank: The homo says what?

Bill: What?

Hank: Gotcha.²⁴⁶

Thus despite the somewhat liberal view on sexuality and the excess of sexual encounters in the show, the borders of heterosexuality are not transcended by any of the men in the show. In comparison, Marcy openly states her momentary desire with Dani to Charlie as follows: “The morning after our ill-fated threesome, I woke up, and the only thing I wanted to do was call Dani. Now, I don't know if that makes me a fucking rug-muncher, but that sweet, little Goth nutjob makes this girl want to put her finger in the dyke.”²⁴⁷ A different set of norms for sexuality, then, appears to exist for the two genders in the show with men being more restricted by the hegemonic ideal in terms of gender lines and their objects of desire, thereby presenting the men in the show as potential fathers and heads of a patriarchal heterosexual family order.

Indeed, Plummer records the psychoanalytic theorist Ethel Person's (1980) notions of the link between the masculine gender and sexuality: ““there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that in this culture, genital sexual activity is a prominent feature in the maintenance of masculine gender, while it is a variable feature in feminine gender. . . . In men, gender appears to lean on sexuality.”²⁴⁸ Despite being a rather old notion, it appears as still relevant in the show as Hank's character can be seen as strongly relying on his sexuality in his construction and understanding of himself. If sexuality and sexual ability are taken as measures, Hank can actually be identified as the culmination of a desired type of masculinity in *Californication*. After all, he is the heterosexual white leading male whose story into a happy ending is depicted in the show. Hank is the one who gets the girl in the end, not to mention a number of other girls along the way, and assists Charlie in his pursuit to have sex with the girl from the gym by agreeing on the threesome as noted above. Indeed, he is implied to be a superior lover, exemplified for instance by the second scene of the

246 “Hell-A Woman” 2.

247 “Filthy Lucre” 9.

248 Ken Plummer, “Male Sexualities,” *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinity*, ed. R.W. Connell, Jeff Hearn and Michael S. Kimmel (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005) 179-80.

pilot episode in which he is in bed with a married woman whose husband is unable to satisfy her:

Woman: My husband, he's never given me an orgasm. . . .ever.

Hank: Does he, you know, go downtown? Toward the south land?

Woman: Never. . . .Well, it's not true, yes, he has. But he made me take a shower first. Then, he spent 45 minutes trying to find my clit.

Hank: How did he do?

Woman: I'm pretty sure he thinks it's in the bottom.

Hank: Near the vaganus? That's weird. I can take a hint. . . . [sounds of a car arriving] What the fuck is that?

Woman: That would be my husband.

Hank: Okay. Maybe I should hide under you clit, he'd never find me there.

[Hank leaves, the husband arrives and runs after Hank]

Husband: Motherfucker! Yeah, you! You got to be kidding me! What are you, like 60 years or something, bro!

Hank: Yo, K-Fed, the little man in the boat? He's up here, that's where he is! [licks between his index and middle finger shaped in the form of a 'V' and drives away]²⁴⁹

His (exclusively hetero)sexual activeness throughout the show, combined with his appearance that is largely in line with the dominant ideal of the male body, places Hank in the category of a rather typical hegemonic male quite easily. He is of good height and weight, muscular with thick hair, confident and witty, not to mention equipped with the ability to attract nearly all the women in the show as well as satisfy them sexually. In comparison, Bill is balding with implications of his inferiority as a lover and Charlie is short, bald and of a thicker build. In light of these facts, it cannot be argued to be a coincidence that it is Hank with the aforementioned characteristics who is in the leading role.

Connell sees that homosexuality is taken as an inferior trope in society because it challenges the hierarchical and oppressive nature of male heterosexuality with its egalitarian and transitive nature that lies in the logic of “my lover's lover can also be my lover.”²⁵⁰ Springing from this heteronormative logic, the idea of ownership and the male as superior to woman can be detected in the ideology of the family in *Californication*. After all, Bill and Hank are not by any means presented as potential lovers, but as rival males in pursuit of Karen as the object of their desire. Most of their disrespect to each other is expressed through banter as noted above. In episode 3,

249 “Pilot” 1. “The little man in the boat” is a euphemism for the clitoris.

250 R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987) 116.

however, a violent confrontation, often understood as a typically masculine expression, between the two takes place. In the episode, Hank is jailed after a fight in a book shop with Todd Carr, whom Hank blames for ruining his book with the screen version, and whose wife he has slept with in revenge. The opening scene depicts a rather patriarchal approach with an implication of women as possession:

Carr: I'm sick of you talking shit about me in the press.

Hank: That's why you're here? I thought you came after finding out I fucked your wife in almost every room of your house. Every room of your house. And I'm sorry about the rug. I didn't realize the old lady was a squirter.

In reaction to Hank's comments, Carr is depicted as attacking Hank in the store in front of Hank's fans, thereby contributing to the link between masculinity and violence.²⁵¹ In the scene that follows, Bill is depicted as having bailed Hank out as a favour for Karen. The men quarrel until Hank again makes a homosexual implication through which he threatens Bill's masculinity. Consequently, Bill hits Hank so hard Hank falls to the ground holding his stomach:

Hank: I didn't ask you to fucking come bail me out. I didn't ask for a fucking job. Who the fuck do you think you are?

Bill: You think I love to be in business with you? Some rude, disrespectful jackass who can't get out of his own way?

Hank: You looking for a dick punch?

Bill: Do you want to punch me in the dick?

Hank: I kind of do, but standing here talking about it is beginning to sound kind of gay.

Bill: Go ahead, take a shot. But think, would you want Becca to see this?

Hank: I'll settle for a titty twister.

Bill: God, you're 11. [Hank pinches Bill's chest, Bill punches him in the stomach, Hank falls down]

Hank [on the ground]: Fuck...

Bill: Keep the job, Hank. Get back on your feet. Get on with your life. And forget about the woman you didn't want to marry.

Hank [ironically, still lying on the ground]: Don't make me get up and kick your ass all over again, Bill!

Despite the rise of confluent love and the women being presented as being able to choose as noted in 3.2., the men's ways of speaking about their family and referring to them in each other's

²⁵¹ In my view, despite the violence in the scene referred to here, from the little that we see of Todd Carr, he is not depicted as differing from the ideals of masculinity the white characters are subjected to in the show. In other words, the norms of masculinity appear the same for both ethnicities depicted in the show. Carr appears as a successful Hollywood director who, like any other character in the show, is experiencing troubles in his marriage and at times resorts to violence to protect his honour.

presence reveals a discourse of ownership over the female characters in the show. Indeed, it appears that Hank is most eager to get his family back once he has already lost Karen to Bill. In addition, he communicates his take on Bill as an inferior character not worthy of Karen and thereby not qualified to take his place in the family, by referring to him as “the jolly green giant,”²⁵² “a fucking dial tone . . . everything you [Karen] said you never wanted,”²⁵³ and “Bilbo Baggins.”²⁵⁴ In the pilot episode, Hank goes as far as to implying that he should have some power over Karen's decision: “I may be fucked up right now but I can see it, he's not the guy for you. I can see that. . . . Don't I get some say in this? Are you sure? Because it seems like I should, maybe.”²⁵⁵ Hank and Bill seem to agree on that Karen is to choose one of the men rather than looking outside the frames of the two-parent family or the heterosexual relationship sealed in marriage; already early in the season, their pursuit for Karen turns into almost a quest-like endeavor that is resolved in the season finale. After Hank's visit to Karen and Bill's dinner party, the purpose of which appears to be the establishing of the new blended family form discussed in 3.1., Hank rejects his place in the family form and declares his decision to fight for Karen:

Bill: Thanks for coming.

Hank: Thanks for having me.

Bill: It's my pleasure.

Hank: The pleasure is all mine.

Bill: I think this is an important step we're taking here.

Hank: Really? What step is that? The one where I sit back and watch as you try to steal my family out from under me? It's not gonna happen. Game on, broheme.²⁵⁶

Thus in the show, family becomes the grand prize for the best man to receive at the end of the season.

It appears, however, that despite the violent and patriarchal undertones in the show the hegemonic, or, desired masculinity that both Kimmel and Connell define as “successful ways of

252 “California Sun” 8.

253 “Pilot” 1.

254 “Filthy Lucre” 9.

255 “Pilot” 1.

256 “Hell-A Woman” 2.

being a man in particular places at a specific time,²⁵⁷ proves a shift from the patriarchal breadwinner model with an authoritative father and caring mother with clear gender-defined tasks in the family evident in television shows of the past. Beynon, along with many other scholars in the field of gender studies, records the rise of a “generalized new man-ism” since the 1970s and gaining more “credibility and strength throughout the 1980s,” which seeks to portray “men as more caring, sensitive, domesticated and expressive,” and as such “responding to the changing roles and responsibilities of men in the consumer society.”²⁵⁸ MacInnes goes as far as to saying that in society, the new man is the desired type of masculinity and “whereas [traditional] masculine qualities were once seen as normal and good they are now seen as politically and morally wrong, as perhaps in crisis, and as damaging for all concerned.”²⁵⁹ Beynon sees the idea of a masculinity-in-crisis as “variously attributed to feminism, changes in the labour market, economic restructuring, globalization and the global economy, technological innovation, the gay movement and consumerism.”²⁶⁰ Whilst Beynon notes that the notion of crisis requires more research on whether it is experienced as a real personal crisis by men in real life or rather records the impossibility to reduce their personal experience and growth into the restricting categories of 'masculinity' or 'manhood', in *Californication*, an air of crisis of masculine tropes is evident and expressed by Hank in the pilot episode: “I think we can all agree, by and large, that men are assholes.”²⁶¹ As they say, admitting the problem is the first step towards recovery, and Hank, disgusted with his life, can be seen as being in crisis and in need of change from the self-centered novelist who failed his wife and daughter in the process.

Indeed, whilst still portraying men as working and non-domesticated individuals, an air of caring and emotionality can be detected in what is arguably offered as the desired way to be a man in *Californication*. In contrast, I would argue that the model of the straight-forward modern

257 Beynon, 16.

258 Beynon 17, 101, 119.

259 MacInnes, 14-15.

260 Beynon, 95.

261 “Pilot” 1.

patriarch is rejected in the show through the characters of Bill and Al. After all, both men fit quite easily into the somewhat dated category: they are depicted as breadwinners detached from their family and as such men whose performance as fathers and husbands is mediocre. Hank is bitter and disrespectful towards his father, and Bill's daughter Mia, although keeping up appearances, appears lost, lonely and experienced with drugs and sex with older men despite being only 16 years old. Hank, then, can be seen to represent the patriarch evolved, which is a development also Beynon recognises in contemporary public imagery of men and masculinity more generally. While acknowledging the increasing plurality and complexity of postmodern masculinities, he summarises the essence of the new man in comparison to the old patriarch: "The . . . defining feature we can point to with any degree of certainty is that he [the new man] is certainly not 'old man', his father."²⁶² Quite to the point, in episode 9 Karen comforts Hank with the exact words: "Hank, you are not your father."²⁶³ Thus a clear distinction is made between Al's generation and that of Hank's, with the latter being able to learn from their mistakes and become less selfish.

As noted in 3.3., the narrative of the romantic comedy often relies on the idea of personal growth and the leading male or female in need of being worthy of their loved one's love. In *Californication*, this pattern can be detected in Hank's project of the self that serves as the underlying motif on which his character and a large part of the first season is built. As Hank notes in his Hell-A blog entry in episode 3: "I don't know how I got here, but here I am, rotting away in the warm California sun. There are things I need to figure out, for her sake, at least. The clock is ticking. The gap is widening. She won't always love me 'no matter what'."²⁶⁴ Guilty of ignoring Karen and Becca in the past, in order to regain his family Hank attempts to become more considerate, expressive and reliable, thereby incorporating aspects of the new man into his behaviour. In Althusserian terms, then, the ideology of hegemonic masculinity is portrayed as developing and incorporating new aspects which is crucial to the survival of the ideology. In the

262 Beynon, 120.

263 "Filthy Lucre" 9.

264 "The Whore of Babylon" 3.

light of other characteristics of Hank that are in line with the typicalities of idealised masculinity discussed in this section, hegemonic masculinity should not be seen as compromising its power but rather proving to its durability and ability to change in order to sustain hegemony in the show. As McKinnon notes:

Put simply, if hegemonic masculinity is a means for certain men to dominate women and other men, then as these latter categories change so must the former category. . . . Historical change among the subordinated seems to demand change in the dominant if the dominance is not to be radically destabilized. . . . This softening of masculinity may have little to do with female emancipation or empowerment. The most cynical interpretation would be that, in order for masculinity to remain hegemonic, it must admit the feminine at certain historical moments.²⁶⁵

Indeed, whereas Hank's behaviour in the past life before the breaking of the family unit is deemed as dysfunctional and undesirable, true to the narrative pattern of the romantic comedy, the “new” Hank who has learned his lesson is granted the grand prize in the season finale.

In summary, in the case of *Californication*, the “right” type of masculinity appears to take the position of the heterosexual head-of-family man who represents hegemonic masculinity in terms of appearance, ethnicity, male pride, patriarchy, sexuality, and sexual performance. In addition, homosocial behaviour in the form of rivalry and friendship still serves as a cornerstone for the construction of masculinity as masculinity-in-relation which Connell sees as central to the ideology of hegemonic masculinity. It should not be ignored, however, that the character of Hank nevertheless speaks for a masculinity that has incorporated aspects of the traditionally feminine traits as exemplified by the image of the new man. It appears, then, that Hank's character is a premium exemplar of yet another ideological struggle in the show, built from the sum of men and masculinities of the past and into the present. In other words, Gitlin's notion on the nature of ideological struggle as a process in which competing aspects are slowly incorporated into the dominant ideology, applies yet again. Whether this is a matter that serves to the decline of masculinity as hegemonic in relation to femininity remains nevertheless unanswered. As

265 MacKinnon, 10, 15.

MacKinnon formulates: ““A sizeable proportion of gender critics see it as largely as means to hold on to male power. Masculinity . . . becomes less hegemonic in order to stay hegemonic!”²⁶⁶

4.2. The Liberated “Second Sex”? Contradictions in the Representations of Women

Just as depictions of masculinity have changed and proliferated, E. Ann Kaplan notes that recent decades have witnessed a range of changes in how femininity and women are portrayed on television: “Representations appear to gather up all of the past images as well as introducing new ones.”²⁶⁷ In other words, despite incorporating new aspects into gender representations, past images still matter in the equation. For instance, one could assume that media would have let go of the somewhat dated prefeminist image of the subordinate housewife of the 1950s and 1960's sitcoms discussed in 2.2., whose responsibility it was to care for the house and children and be partner to the patriarchal breadwinner male evident in *Happy Days* or *Father Knows Best*, on which Press and Strathman note:

Rarely (if ever) were early television women shown to be mature, independent individuals. Extremes, particularly of women, were closely bound up with, and by, others in their family group, mainly their male partners. Family women on early television were pictured almost exclusively in the domestic, or private, realm; rarely did they legitimately venture into the male, public, world of work. Unlike the men in these shows, early television women were often depicted in inextricable solidarity with one another.²⁶⁸

The pattern, however, is not forgotten, but reused in contemporary shows such as *Desperate Housewives* for instance, albeit with unprecedented twists that seek to undermine the modern family formation in favour of egalitarian and female-empowering causes. In a similar vein, Press and Strathman see that despite the patriarchal order evident in prefeminist television, the shows did frequently feature “a subtext of resistance”²⁶⁹ which served to a vision of women protesting against the limits of their feminine role already at the height of the patriarchal family bliss. Beginning from

²⁶⁶ MacKinnon, 73.

²⁶⁷ E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1992) 181.

²⁶⁸ Andrea Press and Terry Strathman, “Work, Family, and Social Class in Television Images of Women: Prime-time Television and the Construction of Postfeminism,” *Women and Language* 16.2 (1993) 7.

²⁶⁹ Press and Strathman, 8.

the second wave of feminism as noted in section 2.2., however, a different approach to womanhood arised in the media to a completely different extent, and the likes of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Maude* showed the path towards independent womanhood, or, as Lotz titles it, the “new woman”, disconnected from the submissiveness of the patriarchal order and dominance of male characters.²⁷⁰ Lotz credits liberal feminists, which the likes of Betty Friedan and Gayle Rubin can be identified as, for the development, as they actively worked to integrate women “into the public sphere and actively sought legal equality with men.”²⁷¹ Radical feminism, then, according to Lotz, developed into cultural feminism that emphasises sameness between women and all-female societies as the solution to gender oppression, examples of which can be seen as transferred into television representations in shows such as *Kate and Allie* or *The L-Word*.²⁷²

The development since the second wave, however, has not been straightforwardly progressive on television portrayals of women, and patriarchal imagery did not by any means disappear from the variety of media representations on women and femininity after the second wave of feminism. Following in the footsteps of the feminists of the second wave, Heywood and Drake see that at present, “third wave feminists take cultural production and sexual politics as key sites of struggle, seeking to use desire and pleasure as well as anger to fuel struggles for justice.”²⁷³ Meyers recognises the struggle for feminism at the level of television representation by noting that media representations of women have become more fractured: “The images and messages are inconsistent and contradictory, torn and traditional, misogynistic notions about women and their roles on the one hand, and feminist ideals of equality for women on the other.”²⁷⁴ Thereby it is easy to see that yet again, an Althusserian notion on ideology applies as womanhood and femininity remains contested,

270 Amanda D. Lotz, Redesigning Women: Television after the Network Era (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006) 8.

271 Amanda D. Lotz, “Communicating Third-Wave Feminism and New Social Movements: Challenges for the Next Century of Feminist Endeavor,” Women and Language 26.1 (2003) 3.

272 Lotz, “Communicating Third-Wave Feminism and New Social Movements,” 3.

273 Jennifer Drake and Leslie Heywood, Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 4.

274 Marian Meyers, “Introduction,” Mediated Women: Representations in Popular Culture, ed. Marian Meyers (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 1999) 12.

argued, some versions undermined whereas others are reinforced, resulting in a complex and contradictory system of meanings that compete for hegemony in cultural consensus. Family, romantic love and looking for “Mr. Right” continue to have a hold on the seemingly independent women of *Lipstick Jungle* or *Sex and the City*, the latter of which Press describes as “both a paean to traditional romantic feminine values and a diatribe against them.”²⁷⁵ Alternative discourses do exist, and shows such as *The L-Word* about the lives of lesbians and *Desperate Housewives* with its depictions of the troubles of choosing between a career and family as exemplified by the character of Lynette Scavo (played by Felicity Huffman) contribute to the increasing variety in public imagery.²⁷⁶ Despite the progress evident in these shows, Meyers problematises the issue by claiming that “mediated gender equality . . . [is] often predicated on male values and / or a lack of integrity and sense of self.”²⁷⁷ For instance, she sees that “coming out” as a lesbian is applauded in the media, but only if the person is the “right kind’ of lesbian,”²⁷⁸ as in the case of *Ellen*. Furthermore, access to success on television too often requires physical appearance bordering on anorexic, an image which both Meyers and Press rightfully deem as contradictory and potentially harmful for girls and women. For instance, in the case of *The L-Word*, Press elaborates: “While at one level, it is transgressive to portray a group of lesbians . . . every woman featured in the show could be considered glamorous – thin and beautiful in conventional terms.”²⁷⁹

In *Californication*, whilst it supports some of the aspects brought to the table originally by second-wave feminists as noted in 2.2., other issues of femininity and womanhood remain problematic and contradictory just as Meyers notes. First of all, as noted in section 3.1., the show is rather exclusively concerned with the lives of white middle-class characters, thereby ignoring what

275 Andrea Press, “Gender and Family in Television’s Golden Age and Beyond,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 625 (2009) 148.

276 Press, “Gender and Family in Television’s Golden Age and Beyond,” 146-7.

277 Meyers, 13.

278 Meyers, 13. “The right kind of lesbian” refers to Amy Villajero’s article “We Are Your Neighbors’: Serving in Silence and the Simulated Lesbian” in Meyers’ book, in which lesbians are depicted as concerned with “universal” issues of love, dating, family conflicts and community in a manner that emphasises their likeness with heterosexuals rather than implying difference or otherness.

279 Press, 146.

Heywood and Drake see as key to third-wave feminism, as they list issues of “multicultural exchange, fusion, and conflict, lives that combine blackness, whiteness, brownness, gayness, bisexuality, straightness” as central to the cause.²⁸⁰ Indeed, it appears that the show mainly pays homage to the work of second-wave feminists, as well as the power of market capitalism and post-industrialism during the latter half of the 20th century, rather than dealing with issues of the third wave. In other words, I find that in *Californication*, an attempt to speak for the cause of (white) women's liberation from the patriarchal order as called for by Friedan, Rubin and Chodorow, is evident. At first glance, the stay-at-home subordinate mother/wife appears as discarded as the women have professions: Marcy owns her own salon, Karen is an architect, Meredith, whom Hank dates in four of the episodes, is a divorce lawyer, and women appear in occupational positions at Charlie's agency as high-end producers with power within the entertainment industry.²⁸¹ Thus glimpses of the category of the new woman, characterised by Lotz as “independent, strong and feminist . . . single [and] in pursuit of work outside the home” as portrayed in *Sex and the City* and *Ally McBeal*, for instance, can be detected in the show.²⁸²

As noted in section 3.2, women have some access to power in relationships as well, and the idea of confluent love is presented as available to both male and female characters of the show. Granted financial freedom of their spouse due to their status and wealth as middle-class white professionals, the women are depicted as free to choose their partners and, at least to an extent, explore beyond the boundaries of the heterosexual relationship and nuclear family as Marcy does with Dani, thus subtly speaking for a third-wave feminist perspective on sexual plurality. In addition, sexuality is no longer a privilege of the male gender: women are portrayed as talking about sex, enjoying it without expectations of consequence or a relationship with the partner just as

280 Drake and Heywood, 13.

281 “Turn the Page” 11. In the episode, Bill's daughter Mia attempts to launch her career as a writer by pretending to be the author of the novel “Fucking and Punching”, even though it is in reality Hank's work. A meeting is organised in Charlie's office, and the female characters are depicted as the deciding bodies whereas Charlie is merely the messenger.

282 Lotz, 89.

well as the men in the show are. James Messerschmidt argues that “normative heterosexuality is constructed as a practice that helps to reproduce the subordination of young women and to produce age specific heterosexual styles of masculinity, a masculinity centering on an uncontrollable and unlimited sexual appetite.”²⁸³ In the case of *Californication*, this aspect is true of Hank in his rather active sexual life, but the aspect can nevertheless be deemed somewhat dated in that both genders seem to have access to Messerschmidt's masculine position. This becomes clear in the relationship between Hank and Mia, Bill's daughter. In the pilot episode, Hank meets Mia in a book store, and Hank not knowing her age or who her father is, they end up in bed together. In the scene that displays their sexual encounter, Mia is shown to be on top of Hank in a dominating position. She ends the act by punching him in the face, after which she climaxes and gets up, leaving Hank lying on the bed unsatisfied and with a black eye.²⁸⁴ Later on, the incident inspires Hank to write the novel “Fucking and Punching”, which Mia tries to steal and describes to Dani as follows: “A 16-year-old girl fucks a much older man and finds herself both spiritually and sexually awakened. It's Nabokov meets Judy Blume with lots of fucking and punching.”²⁸⁵ Thus, the tropes that feminists and cultural critique commonly connect with male sexuality, which Plummer describes as “prone to violence, pressure, coercion and objectification abound” and as such “a major device through which men maintain their positions of power and keep women under constant threat,”²⁸⁶ are depicted as used by Mia in the scene rather than Hank. Whilst leaving untouched the active/passive dichotomy that heterosexual encounters are often understood by, the scene serves to portray a sexually active and empowered female taking the active and dominant position traditionally understood as occupied by the male.

There is, however, a less rosy aspect to the female empowerment present in *Californication* through Mia as noted above. Connected with the rise of individualism in postmodern society as

283 Plummer, 184.

284 “Pilot” 1.

285 “The Devil's Threesome” 10.

286 Plummer 182.

noted in section 3.2., Chambers records a double standard in public imagery. She sees that women are condemned for desiring equality as individuals in the exploration of postmodern familial diversity:

The whole notion of individualisation seems to hinge on the specific idea that it is women who are being disruptive by demanding some kind of freedom and equality as citizens. Men's rights to freedom, as husbands and fathers, are taken for granted in this kind of argument as part of an essentially patriarchal enlightenment project, but women's search for freedom and individuality is marked and problematised because it is female emancipation that is blamed for the breakdown of modern family values, thus denying the patriarchal nature of those values. In this way, traditional, patriarchal modern family-values discourse remains intact within a grudging acceptance of the existence of a postmodern rupture.²⁸⁷

Moreover, Chambers links this notion with the rise of “female laddishness”, which she records critics such as Phillips identify as the core of the problem in the fall of marriage and families as “the conventions of commitment, fidelity, and duty which once restrained the sexual appetites of women have broken down. Women feel licensed to behave with the sexual opportunism that was once considered the particular characteristic of men. The family gamekeeper has turned poacher.”²⁸⁸ In the light of this argument, female emancipation and the character of Mia can also be seen as an exemplar not of a liberated young woman, but alternatively as a sign of moral panic surrounding the new generation embarking on an adult life in the postmodern era, especially as the character is under-age. In addition, Mia is portrayed as lost, lonely and caught up in drinking, drugs and sex with older men at an early age, not to mention stealing Hank's work, which serves to undermine her as an example of an empowered young woman.

Whilst the focus on sexual encounters and multiplicity of extramarital affairs can partly be explained by the implied lack of morals of L.A. as discussed in 3.2., it appears that women's sexual liberation has not granted women with an equal position to that of men in society in *Californication*. After all, the location is presented as a centre for the sex industry and home to porn stars and prostitutes. This becomes clear in episode 2, “Hell-A Woman”, in which Hank almost sleeps with a porn star, and in episode 8 in which he meets a prostitute called Trixie at the bar, sleeps with her in

²⁸⁷ Chambers, 129.

²⁸⁸ Chambers, 130.

the hotel room and only after her pimp arrives to collect his fee realises she is really a prostitute and not just joking about it. Whilst the question of whether prostitution and porn are to be deemed as undignified and morally corrupt professional fields will remain unanswered here, within the logic of the show the women in question are presented as providers of the opportunity to view the naked female body outside a committed relationship or, in the case of Trixie, have an affair. In relation to their rights and dignity of self, the women can be interpreted as victims to the system, and as such subjected to objectification. The porn star discusses her need for breast enlargement and vaginal rejuvenation, and Trixie is working for a male pimp who acts violently towards Hank as he cannot pay for Trixie's services straight away. Further, it seems that the demands and overt focus on appearance is not restricted to the aforementioned women, but to all women of L.A. in the show. As Hank notes in his first blog entry for Hell-A Magazine in episode 2 "Hell-A Woman", although he seems happy to enjoy the company of the sexually active women around him, he detects something thoroughly wrong and unliberating in the equation:

Hell-A Magazine blog number one. Hank hates you all. A few things I've learned in my travels through this crazy little thing called life. One: a morning of awkwardness is far better than a night of loneliness. Two: I probably won't go down in history, but I will go down on your sister. And three: while I'm down there, it might be nice to see a hint of pubis. I'm not talking about a huge 70s playboy bush or anything, just something that reminds me that I'm performing cunnilingus on an adult. But I guess the larger question is: why is the city of angels so hell-bent on destroying its female population?²⁸⁹

Through Hank's encounter with the porn star and the extract above, I find that the show communicates a moral tone that deems too liberal an approach as harmful to the women of *Californication*. In addition, even though the parallel that is drawn in the entry between the fashions of the female body and pedophilia in the style of a humorous blog is undoubtedly intended to provoke, in my view it cannot be ignored that the parallel also communicates an idea of the status of women as the victimised sex, and as such bodies that are subjected to a number of restrictions and demands that reduce their freedom to even look like women rather than children. In other words, the

289 "Hell-A Woman" 2.

Hollywood of *Californication* continues to oppress women, but it no longer necessarily takes place within a patriarchal family.

In 1994, Van Zoonen recorded an imbalance in the representations of women on television, noting that they were as a rule portrayed views on gender as young and pretty and often in relation to their husband, father, son, boss and other men as “passive, indecisive, submissive, etc.”²⁹⁰ Dating 15 years back, it seems that Van Zoonen's observations, while dated in shows such as *The L-Word*, *Judging Amy* or *Ellen*, still bear relevance in *Californication*. Whilst granted power in relationships as noted previously, the women in the show are nevertheless, in every scene they feature in, exclusively focused on their relationships with the men in the show and do not discuss matters outside the family unit. The women, and most importantly Karen and Marcy, are portrayed as choosing to discuss Hank and Charlie when the men are not present, thus reproducing their subject position as in-relation-to themselves, creating a pseudo-liberated feminist discourse in which men still hold the dominant position and occupy the women's thoughts more than any other possible issue in their lives. In relation to the late 20th century new woman discourse of *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and the City*, Lotz notes critics go as far as to arguing that

Paradoxically, 1990s characters discuss their search for [the ideal heterosexual] partner more openly than those in the late 1970s through the 1980s. The return of discussion about finding or desiring romantic partnership has led those maintaining the role-model framework of analysis to assert that the recent depictions suggest a return to pre-second-wave consciousness.²⁹¹

Linked with the increasingly fracturing world of the postmodern era, it seems that the romance has experienced a revival as a source for continuity and stability.

The return of the centrality of the perfect partner can be detected in *Californication*, for instance, in a scene in episode 10 in which Marcy and Karen spend a night out together. At that point in the season, Marcy and Charlie are temporarily separated due to Charlie's infidelity, and Marcy reveals to Karen that Hank has bought her a ring despite the fact that Karen is marrying Bill:

290 Van Zoonen 17.

291 Lotz, *Redesigning Women*, 95.

Marcy: I miss my fucking life. I know it's incredibly anti-feminist of me to admit it, but I miss that sexy little bulldog. I fucked up. He fucked up! I just... I wanna go back to the way things were.

Karen: Marsupial...

Marcy: Karenina...

Karen: Did he really buy me a ring?

Marcy: This comes as a shock to you? Look, I know Hank can be a douchebag on wheels sometimes, but he loves the shit out of you. His sun rises and sets on you, baby.

Marcy's choice of words is particularly revealing – feminism is in her phrasing acknowledged, but arguably discarded as of secondary importance and unuseful in her relationship to her husband, a view Heywood and Drake record as common in the new generation. Their experiences of “facing classrooms of young women and men who are trained by the caricature of 'feminazis' who see feminism as an enemy or say 'feminist' things prefaced by 'I'm not a feminist, but...'”²⁹² continue to emphasise the lack of understanding present in public notions on feminism.

One could even argue that Karen and Marcy represent the new woman grown old. After all, they can be seen as a mix of professional desires and education, the life of young adults without responsibilities in the style of *Friends* or *Seinfeld* (which becomes evident in the same scene in episode 10 as Marcy and Karen reminiscence on their carefree past life), and finally, adults at the point of marriage and family, which is arguably given as a rather natural continuum in their lives and especially that of Karen's. Their lives have taken them to where they are at present, seemingly independent and empowered, yet still young-looking, healthy, slim and pretty as required by present media norms, discussing the men when they are not around.

Another contradictory typicality in gender representation in *Californication* can be detected in the character of Karen. Lotz records that “for comedic dramas and their new-woman characters, it is crucial that the characters have careers, but the actual depiction of them engaged in work is often minimal.”²⁹³ Despite portraying Karen as a successful architect, her work does not feature in any of the episodes of the show, whereas Hank and Bill's occupations are referred to rather continuously. Only in episode 7 does her passion for her profession emerge as a central theme, but

292 Drake and Heywood, 4.

293 Lotz, *Redesigning Women*, 95-6.

only because Hank has organised a visit to Todd Carr's house, which is presented as the work of Karen's favourite architect. Consequently, Hank helps Karen get a contract to remodel some of Carr's house, a project which is however then forgotten for the rest of the season. Thus the scene brings to the surface yet again the centrality of the male position: it is Hank who is the active body in the scene, organising Karen's work for her – in fact, already the episode blurb on the DVD-cover reveals this: “Hank attempts to disprove Becca's theory about the non-existence of happy endings by landing Karen a job and setting up an intimate dinner for the three of them.”²⁹⁴ Otherwise, Karen continuously occupies the home, admittedly sometimes holding a laptop, but nevertheless in the position of the domestic woman or stay-at-home mother always available and caring for the family and family home, thus challenging the gender order of neither the patriarchal family nor the workplace.

Karen's position bears resemblance to what Dow titles as postfeminist television, in which home life is idealised with the assumption that “feminist goals have been achieved, for the most part, by women's access to the public sphere, and that families need not change to accommodate working wives and mothers.” Dow argues that real issues and problems of combining motherhood and a career are ignored to the extent that “postfeminist television glorifies and supports a status quo oppressive for women.”²⁹⁵ The postfeminist discourse follows the legacy of the 1950s nuclear family depictions in what Kaplan titles the “Self-Fulfilled mother”, who finds motherhood not as a duty, but fulfilling in itself.²⁹⁶ Falling into a category of “new traditionalism”, it encourages women to buy into the old categories of “‘mothers', 'kids' , 'love', and even 'life' [which] are presented as immutable truths which only those feminist 'changelies' would not choose.”²⁹⁷ This image of the self-fulfilled mother is curtailed, according to Elspeth Probyn, in an ideology of “choiceoisie”, “the

294 *Californication: The First Season* (Showtime Networks Inc., 2007) disc 2.

295 Dow, 14.

296 Kaplan, 194.

297 Elspeth Probyn, “New Traditionalism and Post-Feminism: TV Does the Home,” *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader*, ed. Charlotte Brunson, Julie D'Acci and Lynn Spigel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 130.

possibility of choosing between the home or the career, the family or the successful job.”²⁹⁸ This choice, however, is portrayed free of political and social consequence or class issues, and thus inadequate to promote equality in the family discourse. Probyn provides *thirtysomething* as an example of such shows, as it portrays home as a haven for women from the troubles of the working world. In *Californication*, the choice and possible consequences experienced by women in pursuit of careers in reality is avoided rather conveniently by a profession that locates Karen in the domestic sphere both as mother and professional maker of homes.

On the other hand, the character of Dani could be argued to support the aspect of the liberated and empowered woman in the show. She can be seen as shaking the paradigm of how one should behave as a woman even further than Mia's momentary power. It could even be argued that the new woman discourse is taken to new levels in the show by Dani. She starts her career as Charlie's assistant, but playing her cards right, is granted the status of Charlie's trainee producer: she first embarks in sexual relations with Charlie first in episode 3 descriptively titled “The Whore of Babylon”, and later on uses that against Charlie to make progress in her career with threats of a law suit. She is single and openly sexual, portrayed as publishing erotic pictures, which initiate her sexual relationship with Charlie, of herself on the Internet in episode 3; she is willing to participate in a threesome with Marcy and Charlie in episode 7 “Girls Interrupted”, has sex with both men and women, and also, joins Charlie in dominance&bondage sessions in his office. She appears aware of her power in a battle against Charlie, thereby turning her initially submissive position in their sexual encounters and in the work setting, to her own advantage:

Dani: You got a minute, boss?

Charlie: “Boss”? I thought you were moving on. When is your two weeks' notice up, anyway?

Dani: That's what I wanted to talk to you about. Things have gotten a little weird.

Charlie: Oh, really? They weren't always a little weird?

Dani: You didn't do anything wrong. I went after something I wanted. I started it.

Charlie: That's right. That's... you started it.

Dani: And that's where free will comes in. Choices were made, boss.

Charlie: I get your point. So what's your choice?

298 Probyn, 131.

Dani: I want to stay. I want to learn from you.

Charlie: I see. So, first, you systematically destroy my marriage, and now you want me to help with your career. Well, fuck you and fuck off!

Dani: OK, fair enough. I guess I'll just have to look elsewhere for career guidance. Maybe I'll start with HR. I bet they'd love to help, especially when I tell them what I went through on your desk. The spanking, the crawling on the floor, the sexual humiliation...

Charlie: Seems you've got the makings of an excellent agent. . . . You start by going through that slush pile over there. Find me some great material. Something I can sell.²⁹⁹

Dani, then, does not fit the paradigm of the woman as object, but transcends the power relation by using the subordinate position for her own gain.

However, as Dani operates as Mia's accomplice in her attempts to publish “Fucking and Punching” in Mia's name – admittedly believing it is Mia's work – along with her need to resort to extreme measures of blackmail and lying in order to make progress on her professional path with Charlie, a rather unsympathetic view of the character is eventually communicated in the show. In fact, it could be seen as rather questionable that the one character who is presented as breaking boundaries sexually is also the deviant and unruly one, threatening Hank's work with Mia and resorting to dishonest measures to succeed in life. It is also noteworthy that in the end, it is Bill, a patriarchal figure, who puts an end to Mia's attempts to publish the book, thereby putting the two back in their place as daughter and assistant rather than author and her publisher. In terms of physical appearance, in comparison to the other women in the show, Dani is also “marked”, different: she has a number of tattoos and piercings and heavy make up, and is referred to as “Goth”³⁰⁰ by Marcy, thereby offering a subculture as an explaining factor for her behaviour. Thus even though Dani in some respects represents female empowerment in the show, through the course of events in the first season as well as marking her in physical appearance in relation to other women in the show, she could be seen as reduced to an exception to the rule, the other, or even, a modern day *femme fatale*, whom Elisabeth Bronfen characterises as the “dark lady, the spider woman, the evil seductress who tempts man and brings about his destruction,” and as such a

299 “The Devil's Threesome” 10.

300 “Filthy Lucre” 9.

“symptom of patriarchal anxiety about feminism.”³⁰¹ Despite being a character who “successfully undermines the hegemonic morality of family values . . .”³⁰² the *femme fatale* is deemed to be punished through death in the end; or, in the case of *Californication*, through failure, in order to preserve the status quo. Consequently, Dani's character is left without any further discussion and thereby denied of any character development, whereas the couple she initially threatened, Charlie and Marcy, are depicted as reunited in the season finale.

In sum, the representations of women in *Californication* include an aspect of empowerment and female emancipation through individual freedom, sexual activeness and professional credit. However, connected with the questionable Hollywood setting as discussed in 3.2., women are presented as increasingly conforming to altered and polished versions of the female body, and thus the liberation of women into career-driven ambitious women is intertwined with demands to look a certain way in *Californication* as well as present-day society. Moreover, within the boundaries of the family, it appears that the character of Karen conforms to the role of stay-at-home mother to a large extent. Entwined with Probyn's idea of “choiceoisie”, the questions of work, domesticity and gender is avoided as Karen is conveniently placed in the home as the prime caretaker. In other respects, women in the show still occupy the position of the subordinate in the L.A. setting in which female sexuality is for sale and the female body is under scrutiny and subjected to demands that exist on two levels: that of the real television representation, and also, for the characters in the show, as exemplified by the porn star considering plastic surgery in order to make herself more desirable and marketable for the industry. In addition, the women, most importantly Karen and Marcy, are presented in the position of in-relation-to the men in the show in the narrative of the show: if the men are not in their presence, they discuss them and their relationships with the male characters with each other. Furthermore, the hegemony of Hank's perspective suggests a male viewing position that produces an in-relation-to relationship to the women in the show from the viewer's perspective

301 Elisabeth Bronfen, “Femme Fatale – Negotiations of Tragic Desire,” *New Literary History* 3 (2004) 113, 115.
302 Bronfen, 113.

as well. A naked or near-naked female body is subjected to his gaze in almost every episode of the show, he provides his personal views on how they are to look to please him, and in episode 2, both gives a full review of Sonja's body, and comments on the porn star's appearance in relation to her sexual organs. Press characterises contemporary feminist causes as follows: “Current television presents a third-wave-influenced feminism that picks up where postfeminism left off, introducing important representations more varied in race, sexuality, and the choices women are seen to make between work and family.”³⁰³ In the light of Press' view, I find that despite a seemingly egalitarian approach towards male-female relationships, restricted by the romance narrative as noted in 3.3., as well as the anti-feminist aspects of contemporary representations of women, and focusing on a racially biased take on women, *Californication* cannot be seen as supporting a feminist agenda to the full.

4.3. Socialisation, Parental Relations and Family Responsibility – Towards Equal Parenting?

As noted in sections 4.1. and 4.2., the representations of men and women in *Californication* are largely in line with trends in public imagery as recorded by scholars in both gender and media studies. Most prominently, it seems, the ideas of the new man and the new woman seem to have gained emphasis in the medium, although the imagery is hardly uniform or without contradiction; rather, as Meyers notes on the imagery of women as quoted in 4.2., old and new meanings intertwine, which is an argument that could be applied to the imagery of men in television representation as well. In my view, the idea of hegemonic masculinity can be seen as supportive of this argument as it acknowledges the complexity of masculinities existing in relation to each other in representations, as well as in real life, in an Althusserian sense as a motivator and explaining factor for one's relationship to their real conditions of existence.

303 Press, 139.

In previous sections I have argued that despite its more decadent aspects, *Californication* provides a rather typically normative approach to the American family in the 21st century through its central characters. Heterosexual white married or married-to-be characters occupy the central positions in the show, and the two daughters, Becca and Mia, featuring in the show seem to be following in their parents' footsteps towards a heterosexual life of educated professionals. Furthermore, Becca can be seen as incorporating aspects of Chodorow's reproduction of mothering among the female members of the family as noted in section 2.2. For instance, in the pilot episode, she expresses caring towards Hank who has fallen asleep on the sofa: "I wish we could take him with us."³⁰⁴ Likewise, in the season finale when Karen and Bill's wedding is only days away, she announces her wish to live with her father. Karen takes the decision to be an expression of Hank's malice, or an act "to embarrass me. To score some big fucking victory over Bill,"³⁰⁵ but in episode 11 Becca reveals her real motifs for the decision to Mia:

Mia: Well, shit, I would be stoked 'cause your dad, I mean, he's a riot. He's totally awesome.
 Becca: I'm not going to live with my dad because it's fun. I'm going because I have to. I don't know if you've noticed, but your dad is about to marry my mom. . . So it's really happening. He can't pretend anymore that it's not. And whatever miraculous thing he thought would happen with the writing... You know, that thing [Fucking and Punching] he wrote back home in New York that would be the redemption of us all? Well, obviously, that's not happening, either.

Mia: Yeah, I guess not.

Becca: So it's official. Rock bottom. The death of hope. Can't leave him alone now. The man's got nothing.

Mia: Well, that's not entirely true. He's got you. We should all be so lucky.³⁰⁶

Although caring and mutual support are identified as central factors to all family members in the ideology of the family in the show as noted in section 3, one can nevertheless question whether the situation and dialogue would be the same if Becca, or Mia for that matter, were sons rather than daughters. After all, whereas Becca can be seen to resemble Karen in her actions in the sequences quoted above, her male counterpart would have, in Chodorow's logic, taken Hank as a role model, whose path from a narcissistic and individualist approach to life towards a more caring fatherhood

304 "Pilot" 1.

305 "Turn the Page" 11.

306 "Turn the Page" 11.

takes place remarkably later than Karen's path to motherhood.

Despite the conventions on the family identified in the previous sections, I would nevertheless see that while rooting for the centrality of the the romantic couple, the show does serve the American family to a new beginning most importantly in its takes on parenthood and shared parenting. In this respect, the second-wave feminist agenda as presented in the works of Friedan, Rubin and Chodorow, still proves to be of relevance in evaluating feminist aspects of contemporary media representations. As noted in 2.2., Chodorow argued already in the 1970s that the ways of parenting defined by the parent's gender is not only harmful and restrictive from the parent's perspective, but profoundly affects the children's understanding of gender relations and their sense of self as representatives of a certain gender. Furthermore, she argued that the setting can be seen as at worst producing men who deny their emotions and urges traditionally understood as feminine, whereas women's rights as equal individuals, and not simply occupying the private sphere through the categories of daughter/mother/wife, are at risk in the equation.

As noted in 4.2., in media representations, the shift initiated in society with the help of Chodorow and her contemporaries can be detected in what Kaplan describes as “the mother's decision to leave the family”³⁰⁷ in the 1970s, which she records resulted in a more affectionate father figure which consequentially lead to the rise of the new man as noted in 4.1. Kaplan offers the film *Kramer vs Kramer* (1979) as a premium exemplar of the phenomenon, pointing to a solid father-child relationship in comparison to a neglectful mother who leaves her family unexpectedly only to return to demand her rights as a mother to her child.³⁰⁸ In the case of *Californication*, the depiction of fatherhood is strongly in favour of Hank, thereby supporting the idea of both parents being present in the child's upbringing, together or individually, as the ideal case scenario. In comparison, the patriarchal detached father figure is not only deemed as dated and inferior to Hank,

307 Kaplan, 184.

308 Kaplan 184. Kaplan notes that the importance of the father-child relationship is very often communicated at the expense of the mother; mothers are presented as absent, either by choice or through death. This setting does not promote equal parenting, but often marks the mother as a bad parent whose position the father then takes.

but as such harmful to the child. Mia, being raised by Bill after her mother's death, is subjected to Bill's parenting which he himself describes to Hank as follows:

Bill: Trust me, as the father of a teenage daughter, just give her [Becca] some space. She'll come around.

Hank: Well, I appreciate the parenting advice, but maybe, just maybe, giving them too much space is not such a good idea. Maybe too much space is actually the root of the problem.

Bill: Hank, please... My daughter is sixteen, and she's an angel. Clearly I'm doing something right.

Hank: You poor bastard.

In reality, however, Bill, along with Hank in his past life as a screenwriter neglectful of his family, is a warning example of parenting in which individual gain and personal achievement is put first before children, as exemplified by Bill's decision not to allow Mia to publish "Fucking and Puncing" in the season finale: "Believe me or not, I'm fairly successful at what I do, and something called "Fucking and Punching" by my 16-year-old daughter might bring me some undesirable attention. . . . I'm in business with these publishers. I wanna make something go away, it goes away."³⁰⁹ As a result, Mia leads two lives: that of an angel in front of her father, and simultaneously, the life of an experimenting, drug-taking and smoking young woman desperately seeking the attention of older men and that of Hank's.

One could argue, then, that in her socialisation process, the lack of support on behalf of her parents, Mia is confused, insecure and dishonest, whereas Becca is stable, creative (she plays guitar and sings in a band) and intelligent, characterised by her teacher as "a delightful student, smart, inquisitive, full of life."³¹⁰ In addition, Becca can be seen as being somewhat rejective of the physical demands on other women in the show: she wears strong black-and-white make-up, dyes her hair black and often wears metal band t-shirts as an expression of her attraction to an alternative instead of the mainstream culture of Hollywood that Mia can be seen to represent. Mia, then, appears as on one hand wanting Hank to be a father figure for her, and on the other as increasingly in danger of drifting into being one of the "loose" women Hank criticises as having lost their

309 "The Last Waltz" 12.

310 "Pilot" 1.

dignity in the corrupted atmosphere of L.A. Thus, in line with pro-family conservative argumentation, a connection between the dysfunctional family, women's absence from the home and promiscuity can be detected in the show; but only after also the primary father figure for Mia, Bill, has failed her. Donaldson notes on hegemonic masculinity and fatherhood: "In hegemonic masculinity, fathers do not have the capacity or the skill or the need to care for children, especially babies and infants, while the relationship between female parents and young children are seen as crucial."³¹¹ In the light of Donaldson's argument, Bill can be identified as representative of pursuing a dated ideal of masculinity, which leads to his failure as a parent. In this respect, ideologically the American family can be seen potentially as much as a male project as it is female in the show.

Donaldson continues on the link between hegemonic masculinity and fatherhood, referring to Graeme Russell's work: "Russell has begun to explore the possibility that greater participation by men in parenting has led to substantial shifts in their ideas of masculinity."³¹² Since Russell's observations, *Californication* proves to that the image of the new man has followed the development he characterised in his work. Whereas Bill largely ignores Mia and leaves her in Karen's hands during his long business trips, Hank, during his personal growth which is identified as the central project in the romantic narrative of the show in 3.3., rediscovers his role as father with pride during a phone call with Becca in episode 4:

Becca: I called you because I had a feeling you couldn't sleep.

Hank: Right as usual, my beautiful, precocious daughter.

Becca: Remember what you used to do for me when I couldn't sleep?

Hank: Dose you with opiates?

Becca: No. You'd look at the ocean and count the mermaids.

Hank: I did do that. I'm a better father than I thought.

Becca: Maybe you should try that, and it will help.

Hank: Yeah. 1... 2... 3..., no that's a sea lion. 4... 5... 6... no, that's a bum. 7... 8... 9... no, that's Daryl Hannah. 10... 11... [they both fall asleep]³¹³

Also Karen acknowledges Hank's efforts as a parent, and relies on him for support. For instance, in the pilot episode, when hearing that Becca is at a party with Mia and may be in trouble

311 Donaldson, 650.

312 Graeme Russell (1983) as referred to by Donaldson, 650.

313 "Fear and Loathing at the Fundraiser" 4.

“somewhere in the Palisades,”³¹⁴ she calls Hank for help. In the scene that follows, they find Becca by a pool about to smoke something out of a water pipe. Hank simply picks her up on his shoulder, carries her into the car and drives the three of them back to Karen and Bill's house. Karen invites him in as Bill is out of town, and the couple discuss the situation:

Hank: You called me.

Karen: Yeah, your daughter was in trouble, I thought you should know.

Hank: Oh, bullshit. You were alone and you freaked out. You wanted me to handle it.

Karen: I want you in my life, I...

Hank: Because you're still in love with me, and you wanna have like 10 000 more of my babies.

Karen: No, it's because... what happens to Becca is our responsibility and like it or not, we're tied to each other for life.³¹⁵

It seems, then, that despite her individuality, Karen feels there are certain things she is unable to do for Becca, and so the father is not made redundant in the ideology of the American family in the show.

Furthermore, Karen appears to occasionally desire chivalry from the male characters, thus reinforcing the male gender as a provider of protection and support. In episode 4, Hank defends Karen at a fundraiser Bill has organised: in the episode, Karen bumps into a male guest, spilling her drink on him, to which the man reacts by saying “See you next Tuesday.”³¹⁶ To much of Karen's annoyance, Bill calms her down but does not confront the man. In contrast, when Hank hears of the incident when Karen and Hank see the man outside the party, he punches the man in the face and is consecutively rewarded with a smile from Karen. Therefore, one could argue that despite incorporating aspects of the new man in the character of Hank, in gender relations, the man is nevertheless represented as the active partner with physical strength and ability, while Karen largely dictates the expressive and communicative side in the equation.

This, I find, brings to the surface the heterosexual order present in the show, which Ingraham rightly criticises as follows: “The heterosexual imaginary is that way of thinking which

314 “Pilot” 1.

315 “Pilot” 1.

316 “Fear and Loathing at the Fundraiser” 4. “See you next Tuesday” is a colloquial expression meant as an insult. Its initial letters spell the word “cunt” as the word 'see' and the letter 'c' are pronounced the same.

conceals the operation of heterosexuality in structuring gender and closes off any critical analysis of heterosexuality as an organizing institution.”³¹⁷ This is further exemplified by an incident in the season finale, in which Becca has her period and Hank and Becca have to stop at a shop to get her tampons on their way to Karen and Bill's wedding. In the shop, Hank battles a middle-aged woman for the last box of tampons, which greatly annoys the woman's husband. When they realise the tampons are for Becca, they calm down and the husband apologises to Hank with words that could be argued to summarise the logic of the entire romantic pattern, as well as the heterosexual logic, of the show: “when it comes to the woman I love, I don't think, I just act.”³¹⁸ And, as Hank proves to act this way towards both Karen and Becca, he is awarded the prize of the family in the season finale, whereas Bill's character is depreciated as a calculating and selfish man and father. This falls within the typicalities, or ideals, of present-day television families, as Douglas notes: “parent-child relations continue to be defined by deep emotional closeness, mutual involvement, and mutual respect. Indeed, mutual love between parents and children is posited to be a staple in television families, including contemporary families.”³¹⁹ The heterosexual order, then, remains unquestioned and is celebrated at the end of the season.

Whereas Hank can be seen as being awarded at the end of the first season, it appears that Karen's character is awarded very little in the process, which can be seen as a take on the expectations that mothers are subjected to in present-day society in comparison to the fathers despite the idea of shared parenting gaining more ground. Even though Karen appears as constantly present at home and available to her daughter (whereas Hank, at times, fails at doing so), and not having much of a life outside motherhood, she expresses feelings of guilt for not being able to live up to the ideals of nuclear family life. First of all, she is clearly devastated when she hears about Becca's decision to live together with Hank, and is reluctant to step away from the role of the caring

317 Chrys Ingraham, “The Heterosexual Imaginary: Feminist Sociology and Theories of Gender,” *Sociological Theory* 12 (1994) 203-4.

318 “The Last Waltz” 12.

319 Douglas, 159-60.

mother: “You know, you [Becca] can always bring your stuff home, for me to wash on the weekends or whatever. . . 'cause your dad, you know, he'll probably just buy you new clothes when the old ones get dirty. That would be his solution...”³²⁰ Secondly, when Karen hears about Becca's period, Karen is presented as shocked in the scene in which she talks to Hank about the wedding just before the ceremony is about to start:

My God. How is she [Becca]? What did you do? . . . Jesus Christ, Hank! Fuck! It wasn't supposed to be like this. I wasn't supposed to be marrying some other guy, you weren't supposed to flush your fucking career down the toilet, and Becca wasn't supposed to start her period and some strange woman show her how to use a tampon for the first time. All those things weren't supposed to happen.³²¹

Whereas Hank can be seen as only just discovering his role as a good father, Karen expresses a more profound need to be close to Becca and provide her with a home, which emphasises her identity as closely connected with her subject position as a mother above all: “There's no one here. I'm all on my own in my big empty house, just like I will be when you [Hank] take my daughter away from me.”³²² What is more, episode 11 in which Becca moves out, finishes with Karen going into Hank's apartment to tuck Becca in bed, as the blurb summarises: “Becca moves in with Hank and Karen stops by later that night, feeling that maybe this is where she belongs.”³²³ In other words, as argued in public debate that women are favoured in custody battles as the more important parent, Karen's relationship to Becca is presented as more immediate and unconditional, and as such something inherent, whereas Hank has to learn to be a parent.

Chodorow argued in the late 1970s, “women as mothers are pivotal actors in the sphere of social reproduction.”³²⁴ Despite the developments in women's position in society, Karen's experiences as a mother prove to that Chodorow's view is not entirely dated. In fact, Kaplan observes that in media representations as well as public debate: “there *is* empirical evidence that

320 “Turn the Page” 11.

321 “The Last Waltz” 12.

322 “Turn the Page” 11.

323 *Californication: The First Season*, disc 2.

324 Chodorow, *Reproduction of Mothering*, 11.

mothers are still blamed far more than fathers for what goes wrong with children.”³²⁵ In the light of these arguments, it can be said that *Californication* attempts to depict a shift in who, in Chodorow's terms, can perform the act of “mothering” in the family.³²⁶ It appears as clear that the desired type of parenting cannot be offered by the authoritative patriarchal, emotionally detached father figure that Bill represents. In comparison, however, women are not necessarily presented as ideal carers in the show, either. Whereas in late 20th and early 21st century television shows present successful alternative depictions such as the lesbian mother (*The L-Word*), the working and/or single mother and family units not following the nuclear ideal (*Kate and Allie*), the case of the porn star in episode 2 of *Californication* appears to have a rather different perspective on the matter. As already mentioned in section 3.2., in the episode Hank meets yet another woman whose house he ends up at. The two start kissing, and she asks Hank to comment on her physical appearance as she wants to discuss her plans to have plastic surgery. Hank then finds out her profession, and they continue kissing until they hear a baby cry:

Hank: And who might that be?

Woman: My daughter.

Hank: Do you need to go... see to her?

Woman: It's okay. She'll quiet down. Don't worry about it.

Hank: Go be with your daughter.

In the scene, the setting is reversed so that it is not the woman who recognises her responsibility as a parent, but the situation requires that Hank refuses to stay in order that she tends to her daughter. Even though the scene serves to detach motherhood from the necessity of heterosexual coupling in reproduction, it simultaneously links single motherhood with the lack of morals of Hollywood discussed in 3.2. In this respect, the character of the porn star can be seen as deeply problematic from a feminist perspective. Firstly, the scene does not support the cause of single parenting or motherhood in the manner of shows such as *Amy's Law* or *Gilmore Girls*, to name only a few of

³²⁵ Kaplan, 188.

³²⁶ Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, 11, 218. Chodorow argues that the act of mothering, which includes the nurturing and socialization of the child, could ideally be taken as being performed by either parent despite their gender.

many. As noted in 2.2., Stacey identifies single motherhood as typical of the postmodern era and titles it “the family of woman.”³²⁷ Rather than granting credit for the woman, a tool for postindustrial capitalism in the porn industry, the scene contrasts Hank's near self-righteous chivalry towards the child in the scene and the woman's neglect of her daughter. In other words, the scene can be seen as attempting to combine the two female myths of the madonna and the whore; but upon doing so, the scene serves to argue that certain types of women are not equipped to be mothers despite their biological ability to reproduce as the two myths do not coexist in the character, but one is undermined by the other. Overt sexuality – which the porn star can be argued to represent through her profession – is marked incompatible with motherhood. In other words, yet again, the Hollywood industry combined with the lack of morals and absence of mothers are presented as harmful and threatening to the ideology of the family, and Hank takes the position of the father figure, rooting for the cause of family values in a manner borderlining on hypocrisy in his case.

In comparison to the porn star, as noted in 4.2., Karen represents the ideals for motherhood in the show. In relation to Hank, at first Karen appears as the sole mothering figure and as such the primary gatekeeper who possesses the deciding power in the family when it comes to Becca as exemplified by their living arrangements and Karen's attitude towards Hank at the beginning of the season. As noted in 3.1., she threatens Hank with custody issues, and also Becca questions Hank's abilities and commitment to fatherhood as pointed out in 3.2. In other words, Hank is presented as untrustworthy and irresponsible, feeding Becca takeaway food when she is visiting, and bribing her with a dog, a guitar and a mobile phone through the course of the season to make up for his absences despite Karen's objections.³²⁸ However, as the season progresses, through his attempts to change to meet the demands of the romance narrative structure discussed in 3.3., Hank is depicted as more reliable and attempting to change, which leads to Karen and Becca giving him more credit in the family unit. Consequently, Hank manages to prove himself as important in the family

³²⁷ Stacey, 51.

³²⁸ Becca receives a dog in episode 3 “The Whore of Babylon”, a mobile phone in episode 4 “Fear and Loathing at the Fundraiser”, and a guitar in episode 9 “Fifty Lucre”.

equation, as well as being able to put family values first, in stead of his individualist goals or professional achievement, which in contrast appear as of primary importance to Bill.

In summary, it can be said that whilst still depicting an imbalance between parental responsibilities in family roles and relations, *Californication* attempts to communicate an attitude of mutual responsibility and the potential of fathers in the family equation. While the mother is presented as the primary gatekeeper on the matter of children, the show implies that the situation need not necessarily be so, but the figure of the caring and nurturant father is a desirable expression of masculinity for the men in the show. Flax notes on Friedan: “Women have accepted an ideology, the feminine mystique, which claims their true vocation and only real fulfillment lie in the roles of wife and mother.”³²⁹ While this can be seen as true in the character of Karen, it can be seen as extending to Hank as well, who is deeply troubled and seeks to change just in order to return to the position of the father in the family. As Karen puts it in episode 7 after Hank has helped her save Mia from yet another older man, this time her high school English teacher high on cocaine: “You're a great dad. You have nothing to worry about. I mean, that's the sexiest thing about you.”³³⁰ The children in the show, both daughters, further communicate the power of fathers in their upbringing and implies that the state of present day L.A. may be a result of ignorant and dismissive parenting, as the character of Mia exemplifies. Thus in the end, Hank and Karen are depicted as rather equal as parents, both providing emotional support and affection to Becca and taking care of each other as well, which then serves to the motivational logic of the season finale where the family is reunited.

329 Flax, 225.

330 “Girls Interrupted” 7.

5. Conclusion

The aim of my thesis was to investigate the ideology of the American family as presented in the first season of the Showtime produced television show *Californication*. In my analysis, I focused on discussing the ideology of the family from an Althusserian perspective with support from more recent scholars in the field of media studies such as Mimi White and Todd Gitlin. In addition to detecting the family in the show at the level of ideology, I discussed the issues of gender politics and family responsibility, which makes my work relevant on a multidisciplinary field that touches upon gendered media and television studies, men and women's studies as well as feminist studies.

As noted in section 2, television is an important and powerful medium in the everyday lives of not only the American population, but the western world more widely. Moreover, as television can be identified as an ideological state apparatus in an Althusserian sense, its messages are not meaningless and ignorable pieces of narrative. Rather, they can arguably have a profound effect on how we perceive the world and social order within it – or, in the case of *Californication*, how we understand the family as a social formation and evaluate the family as experience. Naturally, the messages in the narratives are not straightforwardly accepted by audiences as each viewer evaluates and reads the text through their individual subject position, which can lead to very differing views and readings of the same narrative. This does not, however, demolish the fact that the patterns and norms of television representation, repeated and often also reinforced over and over again in different shows, direct our abilities to read and evaluate given material. Despite the recognising of patterns and typicalities in television narratives, we continue to consume the products and expect the patterns we have grown so familiar with. Television representation, even when under scholarly scrutiny, is not a straightforward matter, and may appeal to us on more levels than the simply conscious, critical view. Television, without doubt, continues to serve as an important source for

cultural ideals and our understanding of what is normal and natural, and, in contrast, what we deem questionable or abnormal. Thus, the representations that are on offer, matter.

In this study, in the first analysis chapter I focused on exploring the ideology of the American family as presented in the first season of *Californication*. Relying mainly on the works of Deborah Chambers, Ella Taylor and Estella Tincknell, I found that the show conformed to a number of tropes that origin from the traditions of family representations on television, namely in terms of its takes on class, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The show offers rather exclusively good-looking white middle-class professionals as its central characters, who do not defy the heteronormativity of television representation beyond the level of experimenting, which in part, conceals the power of heterosexuality as an organising institution in society as well as television representations. The theme of heteronormativity proved itself of special importance especially in relation to the male characters in the show, whereas the female characters were allowed more experimenting in relation to their sexuality, but only at the level of experiment, not as an issue of identity.

In line with the still prominent family-in-crisis discourse gaining ground ever since the 1970s, the show also attempts to depict family dysfunctionality and family forms alternative to the nuclear family unit, which can be seen as reflective of the postmodern era. The family appears as having become more fragile and unstable. Furthermore, the show links postmodernity with the ideology of individualism and the idea of confluent love as described in the works of sociologist Anthony Giddens. In this respect, the ideology of the (white middle-class nuclear) family as only possible scenario can be seen as partly challenged in the show. In relation to the realities of contemporary American families, the show can be seen as reflective of the high divorce rates and increasing number of blended families in present day America, even though it is limited in its reference to matters of ethnicity and class in the equation. Indeed, *Californication's* focus on white characters brings to the surface Richard Dyer's takes on whiteness as a non-marked ethnicity, and as such the one that is often perceived as representing non-raced humans in media representation as

well as in wider cultural understanding.

The exclusively white characters in the show, then, communicate an idea of America as a white nation, and offer its takes on the ideology of the family as a formation that potentially has alternatives, but those alternatives are depicted as inferior to the nuclear family form of blood-related members and headed by a mother and father. The blended family formation of Bill and Karen is discarded in the season finale; single motherhood and reproduction outside the heterosexual coupling frame is undermined through the character of the porn star; and, one could even argue, single fatherhood is rejected as a functional family form through Bill and Mia.

In terms of ideological battle in an Althusserian sense, the idealising of the white nuclear family formation in *Californication* takes place primarily through the character of Hank. The ideology of the family, as well as Hank, are depicted as falling victim to a morally corrupt setting of Hollywood, which serves as a central source for conflict in the narrative of the show. Issues of women's liberation and sexual freedom are depicted in the narrative, but their significance as feminist matters can be seen as partly undermined and problematised in favour of the ideology of the family. In my view, the depictions of overt sexuality and distinguishing women at the core of the industry from the ideal mother that Karen represents in the show, communicate a pro-family attitude further reinforced through Hank's dominant narrative voice in the show.

Throughout the season, the narrative presented from Hank's perspective clearly criticises Hollywood's dominance in film and television production – or, in an Althusserian sense, its production of ideology – and sees it as not only morally corrupt, but unable to produce quality that his novels “God Hates Us All” and “Fucking and Punching”, written in New York, represent. Interestingly, however, the show itself can be deemed as a product of the very same industry it seeks to criticise. Even though it can be characterised as a hybrid in terms of genre, I found that *Californication's* grand narrative relies heavily on that of the romantic comedy. Consequently, despite depicting the American family as troubled and in transformation from a commitment-for-life

to a confluent formation based on the relationship of the romantic couple, the show in the end conforms to the expectations and norms that the narrative pattern of the genre requires. That is, the original couple, Hank and Karen, are brought back together in the final scene of the season that I find strongly communicates reconciliation in favour of the nuclear family unit and a happily ever after -type of future, instead of celebrating the potential of the postmodern family condition as described by Judith Stacey and Deborah Chambers. Furthermore, in my view the ending implies an ideology of everlasting romantic love – avoiding the issue of marriage between Hank and Karen (as Karen is married to Bill), the family can be seen as an ideology in which both familial stability and passionate love can, and should, coexist. In relation to the ideology of the family, then, I find that alternatives to the ideology of the family are rendered as of secondary importance due to the centrality of the romantic narrative of *Californication*.³³¹

A noteworthy deviance from the norm of romantic comedy in *Californication* lies in that the genre has been widely typified as a female genre that portrays a woman as the central character. As Jeffers McDonald notes on the genre in films: “‘Romcoms’ are popularly supposed to be ‘chick flicks’ . . . Not only do romcoms usually present their stories from the perspective of their female lead character, detailing her feelings . . . but they are marketed to women . . .”³³² In my view, in terms of genre, *Californication* can be described as primarily a male-oriented version of romantic comedy, which speaks against the popular assumption as noted by Jeffers McDonald, and implies that the conventions of the romantic narrative appeal to both genders. As a male romantic comedy, I see *Californication* as one that offers both a normative narrative conclusion and visual viewing pleasure in which the woman is subjected to the male gaze in the show's numerous sexual depictions. This could serve as a fruitful topic for further research: evaluating of the depictions of gender in male-oriented romantic comedy narratives in comparison to the traditional “chick flick”

331 A potential topic for further study would be to analyse what happens to the ideology of the family in consecutive seasons of the show. At the time of finishing this study, the show is into its third season. From an ideological and narratological perspective, the second and third seasons potentially offer a vision into what happens after the romance narrative reaches its happy end – a point beyond which romantic comedy narratives do not typically go.

332 Jeffers McDonald, 16.

could open a new perspective on how the ideology of romance is perceived in public imagery as a male rather than female project.

From a feminist perspective, I find that the most remarkable changes in the ideology of the (white middle-class) American family as presented by *Californication* lie in the images of the new woman and new man as noted in section 4. To be more exact, I find that the show serves to communicate the importance of shared parenting and family responsibility as equal in relation to the parents' gender. A balancing of co-dependence and individual space emerged as crucial in the characters' attempts to form a stable family, whereas a lack thereof combined with individualist agendas in its part contributed to the dysfunctionality of the family in the show. Moreover, I found that the subject positions of the mother and father are, towards the end of the season, to an extent questioned and rendered somewhat dated especially in relation to that of the father, as shown most palpably in the characters of Bill and Al. Furthermore, even though mothering is central to Karen's character, it too is shown as something the responsibility for which also Hank is capable of taking – after his discovery of himself as primarily wanting to take the position of the parent – rather than that of the individualistic successful male. The union of shared parenting and gender representation, however, is not an entirely unproblematic one, but issues of masculine/feminine performance, active/passive dichotomy can be detected as underlining the show as exemplified by the male characters' attitude of women as possession to be exchanged between men as noted in section 3. Furthermore, in line with the double standard that has ruled gender and family politics historically, it appears that women are not only subjected to more restricted physical demands, but more importantly, stigmatised more in terms of their (hetero)sexual behaviour and ability to take responsibility as exemplified by the character of the porn star as noted in section 4. Also Dani, the “bisexual Goth”, even though presented as turning her position as a representative of the “weaker sex” to her own advantage, is in the end punished for her deviance from the norm as her character is denied of any development and linked with immorality and deception. Thus a certain imbalance,

along with public myths of women, persists between the genders in *Californication*.

Finally, it can be concluded that in addition to ignoring issues of class, ethnicity and heteronormativity, *Californication* can be seen as only seeking to refer to troubles and conflict that challenge the ideology of the (white middle-class nuclear) family and lead to its alleged crisis. Issues of individualism, equality, freedom of choice, as well as hedonism and desire are referred to, but in the end overpowered by the romance narrative. Rosalind Gill summarises her views on the present state of gender and media studies as follows:

“[The] shift to feminism being a part of media discourse itself produces many different interpretations, and debates about incorporation, recuperation and backlash. Have the media been transformed by feminism, become – in significant ways – more feminist? Or have they incorporated or recuperated feminist ideas, emptying them of their radical force and selling them back to us as sanitized products or lifestyles to consume? Is this a moment of backlash or retro-sexism? Or are the media now postfeminist?”³³³

In my view, the show partly succeeds in depicting a feminist agenda in terms of equality and gender roles within the family. These issues are in the end, however, undermined by the dominance of the conventions of the romantic comedy narrative, and packaged within the logic of the show as of secondary importance just as Gill notes. Thus in *Californication*, the ideology of the American family remains at the level of ideological struggle which in my view, does not seek to criticise the heterosexual family unit. Rather, the show can be taken as a story on what means and values are needed in contemporary society to achieve its ideals. Therefore, I find that *Californication* reinforces the status quo as to be expected by the norms set for it by the genre of the narrative.

333 Gill, 41.

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Appendix

| Title and number of episode | Director | Original air date in the U.S. |
|---|------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. "Pilot" | Stephen Hopkins | August 13, 2007 |
| 2. "Hell-A Woman" | Scott Winant | August 20, 2007 |
| 3. "The Whore of Babylon" | Scott Winant | August 27, 2007 |
| 4. "Fear and Loathing at the Fundraiser" | Michael Lembeck | September 3, 2007 |
| 5. "LOL" | Bart Freundlich | September 10, 2007 |
| 6. "Absinthe Makes the Heart Grow Fonder" | Ken Whittingham | September 17, 2007 |
| 7. "Girls, Interrupted" | Tucker Gates | September 24, 2007 |
| 8. "California Son" | Scott Winant | October 1, 2007 |
| 9. "Filthy Lucre" | Scott Burns | October 8, 2007 |
| 10. "The Devil's Threesome" | John Dahl | October 15, 2007 |
| 11. "Turn the Page" | David Von Ancken | October 29, 2007 |
| 12. "The Last Waltz" | Scott Winant | October 29, 2007 |

Source: *Californication* – Official Home Page, Showtime Networks Inc. 2010, 21 Jan. 2010
www.sho.com/site/californication/home.do.