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"Reassessing the Norm: Family, Gender Roles, Stereotypes, and Masculinity in *Two and a Half Men*"

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Men, men, men, men, manly men, men, men

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Introduction

Two and a Half Men is one of the most popular and most successful situation comedies of the last two decades. The show revolves around Charlie, a successful jingle writer and happy-go-lucky bachelor, his uptight and recently divorced brother, Alan, as well as his nephew Jake. This show depicts the life of an unlikely family unit, exclusively consisting of men, trying to live together, learn about themselves and grow (up) together. This thesis sets out to analyze whether *Two and a Half Men* represents the traditional views of the family and gender roles as promoted in the early days of the situation comedy, or whether it adequately represents the social and cultural changes in American society as a whole ever since the early days of network television. Furthermore, close attention will be paid to the use of stereotypes and which stereotypes in particular are alluded to in the show. Given the show's use of male characters in lead roles, this thesis investigates how these characters perform their respective masculinities and how these are challenged.

For this purpose this thesis follows a particular structure: The first section will build the theoretical foundation for the analysis of *Two and a Half Men*. This section analyzes selected works on the family unit, gender roles, gender stereotypes and the concept of masculinity. Chapter two discusses the success of *Two and a Half Men*, whether it deserves the label of quality television, and the lack of critical attention this long-running and popular show has received. The third chapter presents this thesis' original analysis of selected scenes and episodes from *Two and a Half Men* and how the events and characters represent the family unit, gender roles, the use of gender stereotypes and performance of masculinity. Moreover, this section tries to answer

the question whether this sitcom supports the traditional view of the family and gender roles or departs from such a portrayal. Finally, the conclusion offers a recap of the arguments of the analysis and whether *Two and a Half Men* is indeed a reevaluation of the norm.

1. Theoretical framework

This section concentrates on outlining the essential arguments and concepts reading family, gender roles, gender stereotypes, and masculinity in the media. These arguments serve as the foundation for my analysis of the sitcom series *Two and Half Men*.

1.1. Family and Gender Roles

As a structure that virtually every person in Western societies has grown up in, the family serves as the foundation of society acting as the scaffold for more elaborate and complex structures, organizations and institutions. Two individuals decide to build a family together, uniting their respective families, which at one point perhaps enters the same cycle. While it is a building block, the family is also considered one of the most complex products of society. Within the family exists a dense network of inextricably entangled relationships. Connell writes that there is no other complex in which "relationships [are] so extended in time, so intensive in contact, so dense in their interweaving of economic, emotion, power and resistance" (*Gender & Power* 121). Eventually, this network encompasses all of society, which simultaneously affects and is affected by it.

Families are part of society and the history of mankind. Over the course of the years, this social construct has attracted a flock of researchers, from fields such as anthropology and sociology, interested in its dynamics and functions. One of the

most extensively discussed formations in modern anthropology is that of the nuclear family. In defining the nuclear family, Murdock writes:

> The first and most basic, called herewith the *nuclear family,* consists typically of a married man and woman with their offspring, although in individual cases one or more additional persons may reside with them. The nuclear family will be familiar to the reader as the type of family recognized to the exclusion of all others by our own society. (1) [original emphasis]

The name is derived from the Latin word *nucleus*. In case of the nuclear family it can be roughly translated as the core family. As shown in the quote above, the nuclear family refers to two adults, usually a female as the mother and a male as the father, and their children. This construct is a stark contrast to other family types such as the single-parent family or largely extended family networks. Such an extensive network, however, is built on a large number of nuclear families.

In an examination of the historical development of households and family constellations in the United States from the time of Murdock's work to modern society, some interesting observations can be made in regards to the changes these familial structures have undergone. In the 1960s married couples inhabited 75% of the households in the US (*Census of Population: 1960* 210). Nuclear family households, married couples with their own children, accounted for approximately half of the households in the United States at that time (ibid. 211). Given that every other household was the home to a nuclear family, it is safe to say that this family configuration was the standard some fifty years ago.

From the 1960s to the modern day United States, these figures have changed significantly. While the number of households has more than doubled from 53 million to more than 116 million within this time span, the percentage of traditional, nuclear family households has decreased. The percentage of married couple households

declined from 75% to slightly more than 48%. An even more noticeable decline

occurred in the ratio of households of married couples with children. While almost

half the households in the 1960s were nuclear family households, the 2010 Census

revealed that the percentage has shrunk to roughly one fifth (Lofquist et al. 8). This

harsh decline is noteworthy, since it equaled a factual decrease in the number of

households of roughly two million. In the case of the childless married couple

household, this percentage may have diminished, since there are over fifteen million

more homes in the United States today than there were five decades ago. Another

interesting development was the percentage of children living with their parents. Sam

Roberts of *The New York Times* points out that the number of children living with

their parents has only changed slightly ever since the 1960s, from 85% to 70%, with

the biggest changes occurring between 1970 and 1990 ("Most Children Still Live in

Two-Parent Homes, Census Bureau Reports"). These figures can be seen as an

indicator that founding a family may not be priority in modern American society and

that the nuclear family does not have the value it used to have. Therefore, the

question arises whether the nuclear family is an outdated family configuration.

Within the nuclear family, each member fulfills a certain set of roles and

functions. These roles have been repeatedly examined by a large group of

researchers and scholars. Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales published one of the

earliest and still highly regarded accounts in 1955. In their work, they differentiate

between the "expressive" and "instrumental" role within the family (Parsons and

Bales 47). The expressive role can be seen as the more family-internal role. This

role revolves around maintenance of the family structure, such as tending to the

needs of each family member. In the nuclear family, this role is generally the role of

the mother. As the expressive member of the family, the mother looks after the

children, manages the household through a variety of tasks, and tries to subdue any potential sources of conflict. To fulfill this role to the full extent, the mother is often confined to the realm of the family home and does not have many relationships and responsibilities beyond its borders. Instrumental leadership in the nuclear family is vested in the husband and father. In his instrumental role, he is employed outside the home to provide his family with financial and economic support. While the main focus of the man is to provide for his family, he is free to pursue his interests, i.e. political or economical, outside the home while his wife sees after the maintenance of the household and the family unit. Generally, the man's role of the breadwinner is the more prestigious role and grants more authority than the role of the homemaker that the woman inhabits (Eagly 22). The role of the breadwinner is also allocated on the basis of the man's physical superiority making him more fit for the demands of the tasks outside the home (Parsons and Bales 314).

While this is one of the best known and earliest definitions of gender roles, it is important to bear in mind, that the term gender roles, or sex roles in some fields and literature, can refer to various concepts. In anthropology, the term denotes normative expectations that members of a culture and/or social group maintain about the positions men and women are supposed to occupy. When applied in this context, gender roles bear implications for the division of labor between the male and female members and their respective tasks within society. From a sociological perspective, gender roles refer to relationships. In this sense, a relationship is used to refer to the act of role taking and emphasizes socialization of members into larger groups by adopting its norms and ideologies. In the field of psychology, this term is commonly used to distinguish the defining characteristics of men and women. Such

characteristics include differences in personal preferences, personality, skills, and behavior (Spence and Helmreich 13).

From Alfermann's point of view, gender roles are prescriptive categories that contain normative expectations about the characteristics and actions of men and women (31). She argues that the term "role" presupposes the existence of a person that has to live up to (role) expectations. These roles are either acquired over the course of time, or ascribed. Furthermore, gender roles are universal and exist at any given time. The degree to which they are noticeable, however, is always dependent on the context. Especially within heterogeneous groups, in this case mixed gender groups, the discrepancy is easily detectable. In exclusively male or female groups the different gender role expectations are not as obvious as in mixed setups (ibid. 31-2). Therefore, one person's gender role is easiest to observe in contrast to a person of the opposite sex, i.e. the expressive mother role is easiest to define against the instrumental role of the father.

The division of labor, as briefly touched upon in the discussion of Parsons and Bales' definition, is one of the key elements for role theorists. Normative expectations concerning the division of labor between men and women draw from historical developments. Women have been denied access to male-dominated occupations in the public sphere, which are generally well-paid and prestigious positions. Historically the labor force, upon women's access to it during industrialization, has exhibited a segregation based on gender, with the female occupations yielding low status and salary. Although women started to gain access to what are considered male occupations, i.e. lawyers or doctors, they still drew lower salaries and were not promoted as often as males. While there were more opportunities for women to become a part of the work force, they were still primarily

tasked with the maintenance of domestic order and thus confined to their home and child rearing. In American society this began to change in the 1970s and 1980s when society began to slowly adopt a more egalitarian perspective. Women were granted equal opportunities in education and the labor market, while they were more likely to share household responsibilities with men (Spence et al. 150-3).

While the normative nature of gender roles and the division of labor are two of the central features, the large body of literature on gender roles, or sex roles in some fields and literature, has identified several other features. Another common feature is the distinction between a person and the social position he or she occupies, meaning that gender roles vary, to some extent based on personal traits and socio-economic circumstances. These positions bring along a certain set of actions and behaviors required to conform to gender role expectations. For instance, women are supposed to be nurturing and caring in their role as mothers, while men should be goal-oriented and driven to be able to provide for their family. Not complying with the expectations, however, results in sanctions. While such sanctions may not (always) be legal, i.e. imprisonment, they affect the person's life often forcing him or her to the margins of society. Deviant behaviors that would call for sanctions are homosexuality, prostitution, transvestism and marital violence (Connell *Gender & Power* 47-52).

1.1.1. Television's Portrayal of Families and Gender Roles

With the family as the building block of society, the representation of families and gender roles in the media, especially on television screens, has been of interest to researchers over the years. Several researchers have stressed the importance of

television in shaping people's perception of reality, and thus television can be seen as a historical record of family configurations, gender roles and how they have been seen within society (Olson and Douglas 409). Given the historical developments discussed above, it should not come as a surprise that families on television have changed just like families have in American society.

Over the years many families have entered the American home via the television screen through a plethora of shows across the genres, such as the Ewing family in the soap opera *Dallas,* the Bradys and the Huxtables on the sitcoms *The Brady Bunch* and *The Cosby Show* respectively, and drama show families such as *The Sopranos*. With the Harper family of *Two and a Half Men* as the subject of this thesis, this section will exclusively focus on the families in situation comedies and how they are depicted in these shows.

The situation comedy is one of television's oldest and most popular genres. In fact, the history of sitcoms began before the television screens began to appear in American households. Starting out on American radio stations in the 1920s, the sitcom swiftly became a popular genre among listeners and managed to consistently draw large audiences. Shows like *Amos 'n' Henry* appealed to a broad spectrum of listeners and made such formats very lucrative for radio networks (Feasey *Masculinity & Television* 20). Situation comedies remained successful well into the 1940s and 1950s when they began to transfer onto television screens. Becoming a staple on television schedules early on, the sitcom continued to be popular and remains a dominant force in today's television landscape (Mills 57).

The reasons for the success of the sitcom are manifold. Arguably the biggest contributor to the popularity of this genre is its setting. The majority of all soap operas and situation comedies takes place in the domestic sphere. As a result, the

plot often revolves around families, typically a family consisting of parents and children, and the daily trials and tribulations in its members' lives (Abercrombie 18). During the typical thirty-minute run of an episode, the majority of the scenes transpires in the family's home. Furthermore, humor is a major component of sitcoms, which are often performed in front of a live studio audience that makes its presence known through laughter (Bignell 122; Mills 25). Another key characteristic is the aspect of continuity and room for forgetting. In the world of sitcoms, the relationships among characters mostly remain the same over the course of a show's run (Schuyler 477). Usually, an episode of the domestic sitcom begins in a state of equilibrium. This state is disrupted through some form of event that creates tension among the characters, typically the members of the show's family. However, these conflicts are only temporary and usually resolved at the end of the episode and the characters return to a harmonious state (Fiske *Television Culture* 180). This structure sets the stage for the next episode that will follow the same pattern. This repetitiveness and the self-contained narratives are typical for the series format and enable the audience to follow the plotline/s of an episode even if they were unable to watch the preceding one; whereas other genres, such as drama, often employ the serials format with the narrative spanning across multiple episodes and sometimes across an entire season (Bignell 114).

In the situation comedy's early history, its characters typically conformed to society's beliefs about how women and men are supposed to act both as parents and spouses (Cantor "Continuity & Change" 283). The most popular shows in this early era were *The Goldbergs* (1949-1956), *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960), *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963), and *The Donna Reed Show* (1958-1966). All of these shows revolved around nuclear families. The fathers were employed outside the

home and served as the breadwinners of the family. At the same time, the women in these families were confined to their homes, acting as loving nurturing mothers to their children and managing the household without being employed outside of it. *Leave it to Beaver* can be seen as the ideal domestic sitcom. June Cleaver has become the prototype of the 1950s housewife due to her warm and understanding nature. While women were granted better opportunities to enter the labor force and managed to balance career and home, television depicted them as solely tending to their families' needs (Cantor "Goldberg to Cosby" 207). These representations underpinned the cultural belief of the existence of a male and a female sphere. According to this belief women are predisposed to be affectionate mothers and household managers who have to find fulfillment in their duties as a wife and mother (Coltrane and Adams 327). Television served as an instrument to enforce this belief by only showing women inside their homes. Nevertheless, even in the female realm men continued to be portrayed as dominant leaders, commonly giving orders to the other family members (Turow 139).

After the early days of the sitcom and the promotion of the traditional family image, the following years began to promote other family constellations. The single parent family began to enter television screens more frequently in the 1960s. In several cases the single parent was male and had to manage the household as well as act as the provider for his children, sometimes not even his biological children. *Bachelor Father* (1957-1962) was the first representative of this era in the history of the American situation comedy. Other popular and successful shows during this time included *Family Affair* (1966-1971), *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-1968), and *My Three Sons* (1960-1972) all featuring male single parents in the lead role (Cantor "Goldberg to Cosby" 212). The humor in these shows often stemmed from the father

struggling with the challenges of what was considered the female role. At times, the struggling fathers would call for help from females, such as a female relative as shown in *The Andy Griffith Show*.

The emergence of single mothers on American television screens came about towards the end of the 1960s and early 1970s: *Julia* (1968-1971), also the first show to star a black woman in a lead role, *One Day at a Time* (1975-1984), a show about a divorced mother of two girls, and *Kate & Allie* (1984-1989) a series about two divorced women (Cantor "Continuity & Change" 281). While still following the typical narratives of domestic comedies, these shows were among the earliest and most popular series not featuring a nuclear family at the epicenter of events. Shows such as *Julia* and *One Day at a Time* are also representative of another development within the American television landscape. Although the most common role for women on television was the full-time housewife, the number of female professionals, not purely portrayed tending to their families but also outside their home supporting their families by drawing a salary from their job, increased as well. As a result, three in ten women on television were full-time housewives whereas every fifth woman was a professional (Busby 114). Social critics have claimed that these shows in the late 1960s and 1970s have contributed to the steady decline of the nuclear family (Skill et al. "Family Settings" 129). According to their arguments television presents models for life, which people adopt in real life. Therefore, while the nuclear family was promoted in the early days of television and was considered the norm within society, these shows promoted non-traditional family formations, which people began to see as alternatives for themselves. This phenomenon is interesting insofar that early network television in the 1950s was used to legitimize

new social and economic developments (Lipsitz 43). However, critics accused television of destabilizing the traditional family and, therefore, the scaffold of society.

Concerning the representation of families and its members, the situation comedy is one of the most egalitarian genres on television along with the soap opera. The following quote describes how the equality between genders is achieved on television shows:

> By playing down men's domination over women (and children) through their roles of father and husband, the soaps and the game shows make the family palatable. On daytime TV, a family is not a hierarchy, starting with the father and ending with the youngest girl, but an intimate group of people, connected to each other equally through ties of love and kinship. The television family may not allow any of its members to become real adults, but it also does not let any one member dominate any other in the ways in which we have become most wary. (Lopate 81)

While there certainly is a lot of validity in Lopate's observation, there are certainly some exceptions as previously stated. However, while women are commonly underrepresented on television, the situation comedy has the most favorable female-male ratio in comparison to other television formats (Signorielli "Past, Present, Future" 343). This fact comes as little surprise to other scholars given the domestic setting of sitcoms (Signorielli "Marital Status" 589; Lauzen and Dozier 202).

In opposition to the view that television is a mirror of the changes in society, as maintained by scholars like Olson and Douglas, other critics state that television does not accurately represent the changing family dynamics in America. With American society becoming increasingly ethnically diverse, television maintained to predominantly portray white nuclear families (Cantor "Goldberg to Cosby" 207). Furthermore, the middle class has been traditionally over-represented on situation comedies, and often television programs as a whole. As early as the 1970s, only four

percent of television's families belonged to the working class, while blue-collar families accounted for 45% of American society (Butsch 403), meaning that television failed to justly represent the pillar of American society.

Notable exceptions are the Kramdens on *The Honeymooners* (1955-1956) and the Bunker family in *All in the Family* (1971-1979). Ralph Kramden is a bus driver and married to Alice who is in charge of maintaining their worn-down apartment in Brooklyn. The show's episodes portray Ralph's attempts to become wealthy, which usually result in utter failure and cause conflicts with Alice. His level-headed wife typically rebukes him for his ludicrous schemes and foolishness. In the sitcom's long history, this show was one of the first that started the trend of the "beauty and the beast" sitcoms (Walsh et al. 125). In these shows, the audience often wonders what Alice and her counterparts see in their husbands and what compelled them to marry them in the first place. Such odd couples, which are often comprised of understanding and attractive women and lazy, immature, out of shape husbands, continued to appear throughout television's history up to the modern era in shows like *The King of Queens* (1998-2007), yet again featuring a working-class family. *All in the Family* takes place in Queens and is best known for its outspoken, prejudiced bigot protagonist Archie Bunker. In similar fashion to Alice, his wife Edith would often act as the voice of reason and scold Archie for being overly judgmental. In both families, the wife acts as the voice of reason and the strong, smart and loving spouse despite her husband's flaws. However, Edith is not confined solely to her house. Moreover, the Bunkers, especially Archie, portray higher upward mobility, which he eventually achieves in later episodes. While the Kramdens can be considered as the prototypical working-class family, Archie Bunker is arguably the

most popular working-class father in television's history due to his simple ways, often appearing to be a dimwit (Cantor "Continuity & Change" 278).

Another iconic working-class sitcom character is Roseanne Connor, protagonist of *Roseanne* (1988-1997). Roseanne and her husband Dan Connor live in a fictional Illinois town. Working a variety of pink-collar jobs outside her home, and known for her sarcasm and wit, Roseanne is a stark contrast to the majority of women in sitcoms. One of the most common sights on the show is Roseanne and Dan's messy home. Anybody addressing the state of her home is met with a scalding remark. Due to the show's success, its representation of autonomous womanhood, and Roseanne's indifference to society's expectations about female appearance, has earned her the "domestic goddess" moniker (Lee 470-2). In comparison to Dan, who at times is unemployed, the outspoken and active Roseanne takes the role as the dominant partner. However, they accept each other and are both lovers and friends that try to deal with their working-class status through humor (Cantor "Goldberg to Cosby" 278). Unlike the former examples of working-class families, they are not preoccupied with ascending the social ladder. Additionally neither Roseanne nor Dan comply with the role expectations of society.

Following the more non-traditional family depictions in the late 1960s and 1970s, and with some exceptions like *Roseanne* even in the later years, television sitcoms would return to a more conservative portrayal of families. In fact, Skill et al. established in an analysis of the television season 1984-85 that two thirds of television's families were traditional, nuclear families ("Portrayal of Families" 398). At the same time, however, the actual number of traditional family configurations declined in society, while single-parent households accounted for more than a quarter of households in the US (Skill et al. "Portrayal of Families" 360). The most

popular television families of this time were featured on *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992) and on *Home Improvement* (1991-1999). The former, in particular, is often considered as the instigator of the more traditional family portrayals in the following years (Olson and Douglas 413).

While the family configurations of these shows were similar to one another, their respective cast members' roles differed. Heathcliff and Claire were the husband and wife of *The Cosby Show's* Huxtable family, an upper middle-class African American family. Living in Brooklyn with their five children, they were the most popular television family of the 1980s. Both parents were employed in high-paying positions with Heathcliff being an obstetrician and Claire working as an attorney, even though they are commonly seen in their home. In addition to Claire pursuing a professional career outside their Brooklyn home, they do share household responsibilities. Heathcliff is often seen cooking meals such as his special pasta sauce, while Claire is frequently seen in the kitchen without doing any kitchen-related chores (Cantor *Goldberg to Cosby* 207).

Tim Taylor, his wife Jill and their three sons are the protagonists of *Home Improvement*. The Taylors are a middle-class family living in the Detroit area. In a time when the nuclear family was reported to lose its appeal, the Taylor family was considered a positive role model, as it embraced the changes in society. Tim, a bumbling but committed father, is the star of his own TV show, *Tool Time*, and acts as the sole breadwinner in the early days of *Home Improvement* while his wife, Jill, is a full-time housewife, rarely seen outside her house. This distribution of roles changed over the course of the show's run as Jill, a loving, understanding and smart mother, decided to pursue a degree in psychology. Jill's ambition is the cause of arguments with Tim who is reluctant to accept that his wife is not satisfied with the

domestic role and that he is no longer the family's only breadwinner. However, Tim realizes that his wife has a right to self-fulfillment and slowly comes to terms with the changes in his family, which reflects the changes in society as a whole (Dechert 284-7). This portrayal of Jill as a strong and fiery woman as well as a loving mother and loyal, forgiving companion to her husband has been received positively by both television and social critic's (Hanke "Mock-Macho" 81). Interestingly enough, while the Taylor family departs from the conservative, traditional representation of the nuclear family over its run, Jill is still the one who is mostly in charge of the housework. This development confirms the findings of sociologists that women are still predominantly tasked with the majority of work and the division of labor within the domestic realm remains the same (Demo and Acock 330).

In recent years television has witnessed the emergence of more non-traditional families, and sitcoms are no exception to this development. The drama-comedy *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007), the sitcoms *Modern Family* (since 2009) and *Two and a Half Men* are among the most popular shows. From the all-female Gilmores, over the multi-layered, multi-generational and interrelated Pritchett family to the all-male Harper family, these shows exemplify the changes society has experienced ever since the mid-twentieth century. Formerly the norm, the nuclear family may not have faded into oblivion, but has become one configuration among many. Consequently, television has begun to portray this development more accurately.

1.2. Gender Stereotypes

The border between gender roles and stereotypes is relatively blurry. In fact, the term is often used interchangeably due to the distinction being unclear. In an attempt to clarify the distinction, Alfermann claims that gender stereotypes outline typical characteristics of men and women and predict how they will behave, whereas gender roles also encompass the previously stated normative dimension (Alfermann 31). In other words, gender stereotypes are (predominantly) *descriptive* while gender roles are *prescriptive* in nature. Psychologists Alice Eagly and Valerie Steffen examined this interrelation of gender stereotypes and gender roles. Their study revealed that the distribution of men and women in social and occupational roles affects the stereotypes maintained about them in society (Eagly and Steffen 744). According to their line of argumentation this statement means, that since women commonly used to fulfill the role of the full-time stay-at-home mother, a traditional female stereotype is that they are considered to be nurturing and affectionate due to the fact that they had to tend to the needs of their children. At the same time, due to their restriction to the domestic sphere and not being employed outside their homes like their husbands, female gender stereotypes frequently describe them as dependent.

A frequently cited characterization of gender stereotypes comes from Ashmore and Del Boca, who define gender stereotypes as "the structured sets of beliefs about the personal attributes of women and of men" (222). These beliefs are commonly maintained in clusters as opposed to lists. Furthermore, these clusters are often organized into oppositions (Alfermann 10-1). Examples of such clusters would be strength/weakness, care/neglect or dependence/independence. Perhaps the

most obvious cluster of organization, though, is masculine/feminine. Traditionally,

men represent the desired norm against which women are judged, thus placing them

in the role of the Other as posited in Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work *The*

Second Sex (6).[1] Moreover, this statement also applies to the network of gender

stereotypes. Once again, men are considered the ideal and women are relegated to

a secondary, relational role, perpetuating their status as men's Other (Lauzen et al.

201).

One of the most important aspects of gender stereotypes is their

pervasiveness and universality. Studies across the globe have revealed that gender

stereotypes transcend cultural and linguistic borders. Furthermore, the content of

gender stereotypes remains virtually the same throughout the world, be it in the

United States, India, Japan, England or Australia. As a result, there is no complete

subversion of a gender stereotype, meaning that no stereotype associated with

women in one culture is associated with men in another and vice versa (Alfermann

13-4).

Finally, the question about the acquisition of gender stereotypes needs to be

answered. As stated above, stereotypes stem from the distribution of gender roles in

society. Every person acquires stereotypes over the course of his or her life

beginning in childhood. Children begin to acquire gender stereotypes as early as the

age of two and three years. As soon as they know about the distinction between

man/boy and woman/girl, in the biological sense, they exhibit stereotypical beliefs

about them (Fagot et al. 228). Once they reach the age of five, their stereotypes

resemble those of their parents (Alfermann 13). These stereotypes are fully

developed once children reach the age of ten, coinciding with the end of their time in

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[1] For another marquee work on the "Other", see Said's *Orientalism*.

elementary school and remain stable for virtually the rest of their lives (Spence et al. 156). Therefore, stereotypes and their acquisition constitute an integral part of a child's socialization.

In addition to their parents, television is another medium that provides children with a model about gender stereotypes. A study conducted by Nancy Signorielli and Margaret Lears revealed that children who spent more time watching television are likely to maintain gender stereotypes that are closely related to traditional gender role expectations. The children of this study state that girls are supposed to do women's chores, i.e. tending to the household, while boys are supposed to do the chores associated with men, such as acting as a provider and breadwinner (168). Children's stereotypes about men and women also extend to the professional realm. Heavy viewers, people spending a large amount of time in front of the television screen, are likely to hold stereotypes about what they consider to be male and female professions,. To a large extent, children who spend even more time in front of their television sets than heavy viewers have a rather limited range of careers in mind. The children that spend a majority of their free time in front of the television screen want to pursue a stereotypical career. The boys of this study, for instance, commonly named policeman or professional athlete as their desired career choice (Beuf 143-4). Other studies have further confirmed that heavy viewers are more likely to hold stereotyped views on men and women. Interestingly enough, stereotypical perceptions of males appear to decline as viewers grow older. On the other hand, stereotypes about females seem to be more pervasive and maintained over the course of a person's life (McGhee and Frueh 185).[2]

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[2] The impact of television on people's perception of the world is also discussed in Gerbner and Gross' works on cultivation theory.

The essential question that remains is what characteristics and traits are considered masculine and feminine. In a study among twenty-five participants, Alfermann listed the following characteristics that have been considered to be representative for men and women respectively:

Stereotypical Male Characteristics		Stereotypical Female Characteristics	
Traits Listed by Twenty-Four Participants:			
adventurous	autocratic	affectionate	feeling
aggressive	strong	empathetic	sentimental
masculine	bold	feminine	submissive
dominant	unyielding		dreamful
rugged	independent		
Other Common Listings:			
lazy	active	dependent	weak
ambitious	rational	attractive	talkative
egoistic	thinks logically	emotional	

Table 1: Stereotypical Traits of Men and Women (adapted from Alfermann)

Male stereotypes are more elaborate and detailed than those of women and portray men as strong and active. Furthermore, gender stereotypes about women characterize them as weak in comparison to men, which leads to them being considered to get sick more often and require more care and support. In return, one male stereotype is that of the helper and savior, which stems from the characterizations of males as heroes. This characterization encompasses men protecting the weak and defenseless, respecting the honor of women, and striving for honor and glory, drawing from the image of the knight (Alfermann 125-130).

Fiske adds to this list by presenting more oppositions that represent the hierarchy between men and women that illustrate patriarchal ideology within society such as masculine/feminine, success/failure, superior/inferior and subject/object (*Television Culture* 203). He further elaborates on this list claiming that society over time has agreed upon male superiority and consequently male characteristics are desirable, whereas female traits are considered weak and inferior (204). This dominance stems from the distribution of power in public and official discourse. In virtually all cultures men are considered the dominant group. This male dominance also extends into the private domestic realm in which women are subordinates as well. While there are cultures that promote equal partnerships between men and women, there is no culture in which men subordinate themselves to women. Consequently, women remain responsible for childcare across cultures (Alfermann 20). This gender hierarchy affects society's stereotypes about men and women and also confirms Eagly and Steffen's claim that social roles impact the perception of the sexes.

1.2.1. Representing Gender Stereotypes on the Television Screen

Initially cast into the typical role of the full-time housewife, loving mother and supportive wife, the range of roles for female television characters has gotten wider over the course of time. However, the professions of these characters are incredibly stereotyped. For instance, when male characters are portrayed in high-paying and prestigious professions like doctors, lawyers, women are shown to work as nurses or secretaries. Furthermore, television's female professionals often struggle to balance

the demands of their responsibilities both outside their home and within it (Signorielli and Lears 158).

Sitcoms in general are known to rely very heavily on stereotypes (Gymnich 15). Due to the limited timeframe, characters, especially minor and supporting characters, have to be recognized swiftly. One of the easiest ways to ensure that the audience is capable to identify the traits of such characters is the use of pervasive and commonly known stereotypes. From this point of view, it appears as if creativity is not necessarily essential to a show's success since stereotypes are neither original nor multi-dimensional. They cater more to the audience's experience and their emotions rather than their wit (Signorielli "Past, Present, Future" 343). Furthermore, gender stereotypes are used to contribute to the sitcom's humor. The incongruity theory in particular is one way to enhance a show's comedic value. According to this theory, humor is the result of the disparity between the audience's expectations and how events on the screen actually transpire (Mills 83). For example, if a character has an impressive physique and appears to be a stereotypical butch macho, the audience will find it humorous if this character has an affinity for shoe shopping or is able to solve highly complex equations.

As a genre that heavily focuses on the representation of domestic life, the sitcom's portrayal of the family has been highly stereotypical in comparison to other genres. Given the popularity of the nuclear family in domestic comedies, the characters on these shows conform to the role expectations and stereotypes of society. Consequently, the husbands are generally portrayed as the instrumental member, being goal-oriented and tough-loving, while the wives fulfill the expressive role, being empathic, nurturing and concerned with the well-being of the other family members (Skill et al. 137).

Situation comedies represent females more positively than the majority of genres (Lemon 75). This aspect again is linked to the domestic setting in which these shows often take place. In this setting they perform their role as mothers and wives and are portrayed in a stereotypical and positive manner. Furthermore, this genre does not present females that are subordinated to men as often as other genres. In fact, the sitcom is a genre where women often take the dominant role in comparison to men. An example would be the previously mentioned *Roseanne* that features a female lead character that does not conform to the stereotyped view of women. Overall, however, female characters on television are less likely than their male counterparts to issue directives and orders, a privilege generally associated with men (Turow 139).

In recent years studies about the representation of women on American television shows have discussed the emergence of the "new woman" (Zurawik "Power Suits Her"). The new woman is the subversion of the stereotypical woman. Instead of relying on her looks or a strong male at her side, she is intelligent, competent and independent. Nevertheless, this type of female character has to be seen as the exception. Her influence on the future of female portrayals on television and in the mass media should not be exaggerated (Lauzen et al.210). Furthermore, this exception does not make up for the fact that women are grossly underrepresented in the television landscape and are frequently cast into roles that rely heavily on gender stereotypes (Luther et al. 163). While the incongruity theory may provide a logical explanation why the female characters in sitcoms are depicted in a stereotypical manner, stereotyped portrayals of women are common across all of television's genres.

Similar to the representation of women on television, the portrayal of male characters, too, relies heavily on stereotypes. As a result, men are the stereotypical foil to the equally stereotyped women and vice versa. The range of roles in which male characters are frequently seen on television is relatively limited. Common professions for male characters on television include law enforcement employee, manager and lawyer (Glascock 95). In these professions stereotypically male behavior contributes to their success in their career. Men in law enforcement, be it an officer patrolling the streets or higher on the hierarchical ladder defending justice and order from the office, rely on their strength and bravery in their fight against crime in order to guarantee justice and safety. In managing positions goal-oriented men generate profits for their companies and are often portrayed as being successful, whereas their ambitiousness and rationality enables them to represent their clients to the best of their abilities in legal matters.

There are a few roles, in which men are often casted on situation comedies and that appear regularly due to their popularity among the audience. One of these roles on *Two and a Half Men*, as well as on other shows, is the sex-addict. His main interest is sexual pleasure and to achieve this goal he relies on his looks, wit and charisma. Such characters are often seen to boast about their sexual prowess among their peers since success with women is a common topic of discussion on sitcoms among male characters. Another common role is the inept and bumbling male, commonly in the role of the father. In these roles they are often portrayed as committed and driven fathers that want to provide for their families and act as role models, but sometimes behave like children themselves (Luther et al. 166).

1.3. Masculinity

What does it mean to be a man? How does a man (have to) behave? What are typical characteristics of men? These questions are all subsumed in the concept of masculinity.

In her[3] seminal work *Masculinities*, Connell states that masculinity – and of course femininity as well – is similar to gender roles and stereotypes, which are social constructs that are not fixed entities, but are subject to change and created through discourse (Connell *Masculinities* 5-6). Such a view on masculinity, supports the claim of earlier academic research that distinguishes between *sex*, referring to the biological differences between men and women, and *gender* to define what society associates with men and women (Craig 2).

This view opposes the traditional view that gender and sex can be used synonymously. From the traditional perspective, a biological male learns the behavior that society perceives as male naturally during his socialization (Showalter 2). However, to think of masculinity as innate is problematic. In her seminal work *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that gender is not innate or natural but a performance. She writes: "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized*

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[3] I use the feminine pronoun to refer to Connell who has completed her transition and whose recent works are published under Raewyn Connell, despite the first edition of *Masculinities* being published under R.W. Connell.

repetition of acts" [original emphasis] (Butler 191).[4] To speak of a true man or a real

man is therefore highly problematic.

While the concept of gender can be traced in almost all societies across the

globe, masculinity is not as pervasive. However, if it does exist it is usually in relation

to femininity, revealing the relational nature of masculinity (Connell *Masculinities*

67-8). Connell goes on to state that normative, prescriptive definitions of masculinity

characterize it as the cultural expectations for men and how they ought to behave

(70). For example, in modern American society men are expected to maintain

patriarchal structures, which convey masculinity as the norm, and conform to the

social expectations about men. In order to fulfill this role, men in patriarchal societies

subordinate women. However, not only women but also men who are unable or

unwilling to conform to the expectations of masculinity are suppressed in patriarchal

society (Craig 3).

1.3.1. The Hierarchy of Masculinities

As already indicated above, there is not one uniform, undisputed concept of

masculinity but a vast variety. In the hierarchy of masculinities, *hegemonic*

masculinity is found at the top. The concept of hegemonic masculinity was first

introduced by Connell, drawing from Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony in the

latter's discussion of classes and power structures in Italy. A hegemonic male

embodies the "currently accepted" image of masculinity against which all men are

judged and which they try to model themselves after, even though only a few

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[4] Butler discusses gender performativity in some of her other works such as *Bodies That Matter*.

individuals actually achieve it (Connell *Masculinities* 77). Such a hegemonic male is white, heterosexual, and ambitious. These characteristics enable him to dominate the professional realm and the public sphere. In summary, he is "a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power" (Kimmel 184; cited in Feasey "Spray More" 358). These men exert their dominance over the moral and cultural norms of a society as well as the financial landscape (Connell *Masculinities* 77). Consequently, hegemonic males can be seen as the embodiment and sustainer of patriarchal ideology.

Hegemonic masculinity, however, is not an absolute, unchallenged set of beliefs but is subject to change over time. The concept can be challenged by and adapted to the developments within society, be they social, economical or cultural. Hegemonic masculinity is best understood as the currently accepted configuration of masculinity (Connell *Masculinities* 77). For instance, in former times, i.e. the Middle Ages, this privileged form of masculinity may have had a bigger focus on physical strength and brute force. In today's society this form of masculinity is, as the name suggests, closely related to Gramsci's notion of hegemony, meaning social ascendancy is achieved through a power play of social forces that have implications for cultural processes and private life and its organization. In other words: while force is still involved in ascension to a privileged position in modern society, it is not necessarily physical force, i.e. violence, but economic and social force (Connell *Gender & Power* 184).

Not all men, in fact only a few men, conform to the set of beliefs denoted as hegemonic masculinity. This type of masculinity is ranked at the top within gender relations. While it is not to be mistaken as *the* man role, it works through the subordination of women and other men like young, effeminate and homosexual men

(Hanke "Redesigning Men" 190). In order to impose their domination on subordinated masculinities, especially homosexual masculinity, hegemonic males rely on a variety of derogatory terms like "cream puff," "candy ass," and "fruit basket" (Connell *Masculinities* 79).

1.3.2. Masculinity and the Media

Feminist theorists have examined the depiction of females in the media, especially on television, in a large variety of studies. Due to the focus of their research, the portrayal of men has long been overlooked and failed to attract members of the scientific community. As a result of the lack of work on this subject, the representation of men, masculinity and heterosexuality has long been considered the norm and unproblematic (Feasey "Spray More" 358). This development is similar to the early stages of the investigation of the concept of masculinity in general, which (feminist) theory had long considered clear and undisputed (Showalter 6). Katz has described the shortage of studies on men and masculinities as a typical phenomenon, since dominant groups and ideologies often receive little attention (Katz 133; in Macnamara 17).

Masculinity in American culture is often related to maturation. Boys are encouraged to grow up and become men. This transition phase is often at the center of media representation and narratives about men on television (Fiske *Television Culture* 200). Consequently, men and fatherhood are almost inextricably entwined in the media landscape. Men passing on their beliefs to their children are just as common as fathers that are absent during their children's formative years (Macnamara 114-6). Dedicated, hard-working, and loving fathers are contrasted with

men that fail to be there for their children in a crucial stage of their development. Both these images have tremendous impact on audiences and their beliefs about men.

The images of masculinity promoted by the media have often been criticized as unhealthy (Good et al. 419). The most frequently presented variety on television is a white, heterosexual, middle-class masculinity (Fejes 12). Men are often portrayed as incredibly goal-oriented and incapable of forming relationships, especially with other men. If men, however, form bonds with one another, they are usually not concerned with the needs of such relationships, but perceive them as another way to achieve their goal (Fiske *Television Culture* 213). Furthermore, men are often shown to act strictly rational, suppressing any emotions that may influence their actions. Moreover, they hardly ever disclose information to others be they male or female (Gunter 3). The need for sharing with other people and self-disclosure are commonly portrayed as feminine characteristics and portrayed as undesirable and unfitting for men. As a result, men are often seen to talk about trivial things such as the latest results in sporting events with their peers, keeping their exchanges basic and simple (Feasey *Masculinity & Television* 23). Men behave this way in order to not display any vulnerability and destroy their image as self-sufficient individuals that provide others with support rather than needing support themselves.

In the hierarchy of masculinities, homosexual men rank the lowest. Various researchers have investigated the portrayal of homosexual men over the years. Initially, television presented them as soft and overly effeminate characters, traits that are associated with the derogatory term "sissy", describing men who do not conform to the traditional male role and its associated stereotypes (Feasey *Masculinity & Television* 28). Furthermore, major homosexual lead characters are

almost nonexistent, with *Will & Grace* (1998-2006) being the most popular exception. In fact, only two percent of major characters in sitcoms are homosexual (Fouts and Inch 35). The exclusion of homosexual men and women on television has been labeled "symbolic annihilation" and serves in legitimizing hegemonic ideology and subordinating deviant masculinities and women (Hanke "Redesigning Men 194). Consequently, television can be seen as an instrument that preserves and legitimizes the power of patriarchy.

The case of the successful "gaycom" *Will & Grace* is representative of the more varied and accurate depiction of homosexuality on television in recent times (Feasey *Masculinity & Television* 29). Interestingly enough, in comparison to heterosexual characters, homosexuals are more likely to make comments about their sexuality, emphasizing stereotypes that stress the differences between homosexual and heterosexual instead of similarities (Fouts and Inch 41). Moreover, television's characters often reinforce the negative stereotype that homosexuality is a fleeting phase of experimentation by claiming that they have tried the homosexual lifestyle during college (Feasey *Masculinity & Television* 26-7). Homosexuality is often used to contribute to the comic value of shows, causing laughter among audiences when heterosexual characters subvert the audience's expectations by exhibiting what is considered homosexual behavior.

2. Why Study Two and Half Men?

In the rapidly changing world of television, continuity is a rare occurrence. New shows replace former fan favorites that have fallen out of grace or did not meet network owners' expectations for virtually every television season. There are, however, shows that have significantly longer life spans in comparison to others due to the ratings they garner. One of these shows is Chuck Lorre's and Lee Aronsohn's sitcom *Two and a Half Men*. Entering homes in the 2003/4 television season, *Two and a Half Men* has managed to become a staple of the American television landscape for 262 episodes over the course of twelve seasons. From September 2003 until February 2015 this show has attracted millions of viewers making it one of the most successful shows within the last two decades. Consistently drawing audiences ranging from an average of 10.6 million for the eleventh season ("Full 2013-2014 TV Season Series Rankings") to 16.2 million viewers during the show's second season ("US Jahrescharts 2004/2005). Consequently, *Two and a Half Men* ranked among the ten most watched programs in its sixth and tenth season at its highest ("Full 2012-2013 TV Season Series Rankings") and twenty-seventh place at its lowest during the penultimate season ("Full 2013-2014 TV Season Series Rankings").

A debate that has been central in television studies is that on "Quality Television". To make the distinction between regular and quality television more apparent, Robert J. Thompson lists twelve criteria in his marquee work *Television's Second Golden Age* (13-6). Some of these features include its self-conscious and self-referential nature, a large cast and several plotlines, an aspiration to realism,

and critical acclaim. While *Two and a Half Men* does not meet all twelve criteria laid out by Thompson, the show does conform to what others have defined as characteristics of quality television:

> A quality series enlightens, enriches, challenges, involves, and confronts. It dares to take risks, it's honest and illuminating, it appeals to the intellect and touches the emotions. It requires concentration and attention, and it provokes thought. Characterization is explored. And usually a quality comedy will touch the funny bone and the heart. (Swanson; cited in Thompson 13).

Furthermore, *Two and a Half Men* has received critical acclaim, resulting in a variety of nominations and awards over the course of the show's run ("Two and a Half Men: Awards"). These awards and nominations acknowledged excellence by both the actors portraying the characters on screen and the writers and crew working behind the camera. Therefore, *Two and a Half Men* is worthy to be labeled quality television.

Two and a Half Men, in the first eight seasons, revolves around the Harpers, an unlikely family unit exclusively consisting of men. Being forced into this new situation Charlie (portrayed by Charlie Sheen), his brother Alan (John Cryer) and the latter's son, Jake (Angus T. Jones) try to live together in Charlie's Malibu beach house, learn about themselves and grow (up) together. Given that this unusual family constellation does not comply with the traditional nuclear family, formerly the unchallenged norm, this thesis will examine how the previously outlined roles of the traditional family unit are distributed among the members of the Harper family. Within the nuclear family every member fulfills a certain role, some of them defined solely on the ground of their gender. In the rather unconventional constellation like the Harper family, it is worthwhile to examine what roles in the family each member fulfills and whether they conform or subvert gender roles and assume roles usually

associated with the female members of a family. In other words, who, if anyone, assumes the female role in this family?

Moreover, this thesis will not only limit its scope to the exclusively male Harper family, but also on Charlie and Alan's relationship with their mother, Evelyn. Having outlived several husbands and being highly sexually active, she is independent, confident, and incredibly successful on her own. She is, in her own right, the epitome of the subversion of the traditional household woman. Therefore, the confirmation and challenge, or even subversion of gender roles and stereotypes will be a key component of this thesis.

With the infamous exit of Charlie Sheen and his character on the show, the on-screen family underwent another change for its ninth season. Walden Schmidt (Ashton Kutcher), a character who is not related to Alan and Jake, forms a new family unit with them. As a stark contrast to the Charlie Harper character, he represents a new kind of man. Especially his relationship to Alan will be a significant part of this thesis' analysis due to developments in the final season. Furthermore, it will be interesting to see how the Harper and Harper-Schmidt families fit into the long history of sitcom families.

Given the show's title, the concept of masculinity will be closely examined. The following questions form the crux of this analysis: How do the male protagonists perform their masculinity? How do these performances differ among the characters? Is one character's masculinity superior to that of the others? In what ways are their masculinities challenged? Having long been neglected, masculinity has garnered more attention from scholars in recent years, and their works will be consulted in the analysis of the male characters.

Despite the popularity and success there are only a few papers on *Two and a Half Men*. Therefore, this thesis sets out to add to that body of work and enhance the relatively narrow scope of the previous studies, which have focused exclusively on Charlie and Alan and the first eleven episodes of the show respectively. Consequently, this thesis serves to contribute to the collection of television program analyses of family, gender roles, stereotypes and masculinity through a close reading of one of the most successful situation comedies, and shows in general, in television's recent history, *Two and a Half Men*.

3. Analysis: Reassessing the Norm

This section investigates how the family, gender roles, stereotypes and masculinity are represented in *Two and a Half* Men by building on the theoretical framework above. It sets out to analyze whether the show's plot and characters conform to the traditional views of family and gender or whether they are an exception in the long line of television's situation comedies. For this purpose, all 262 episodes have been watched and taken into consideration. Due to the length limitations of this thesis, only a selected few scenes can be included in this analysis in an attempt to adequately represent *Two and a Half Men* in its entirety.

3.1. Charlie Harper and Hegemonic Masculinity

Charlie Harper is a happy-go-lucky, hedonistic bachelor who lives in a huge beach house in Malibu, California. Working as a successful jingle writer, Charlie is able to do as he pleases which generally revolves around dating beautiful women and satisfying his sexual desires. Consequently, it comes as little surprise that the show's very first scene introduces him to the audience in his bedroom with a woman, preparing for his favorite recreational activity.

This ideal scenario for Charlie, however, is quickly disrupted when his estranged brother Alan shows up at his house, after his soon-to-be ex-wife, Judith, kicked the latter out of his house. The following dialogue is a result of their estranged relationship and provides an insight into Charlie's life:

<div>

    Alan: No, no, wait. I mean, we hardly ever talk to each other.

    Charlie: What do you want to talk about, Alan?

    Alan: I don't know. I was named Chiropractor of the Year by the San Fernando Valley Chiropractic Association.

    Charlie: Okay, then. Good night.

    Alan: No. Charlie, what about you? What's going on with you?

    Charlie: Well, Alan, there's not much to say. I make a lot of money for doing very little work. I sleep with beautiful women who don't ask about my feelings. I drive a Jag, I live at the beach and sometimes in the middle of the day, for no reason at all, I like to make myself a big pitcher of margaritas and take a nap out on the sundeck. (S01E01)

</div>

Charlie obviously has everything a man could strive for. He is financially wealthy, enjoys economic security, successful with women and able to pursue any interest outside his home if he wanted to. Thus, the very first episode portrays Charlie as a hegemonic male. Furthermore, this early scene already draws upon gender stereotypes. In this case Charlie addresses the emotional and affectionate behavior of women who are interested in what their partner does, whereas he does not feel the need to express his feelings or to divulge, which is considered a typical male characteristic (Scheunemann 113-4). Men are not supposed to show emotions and vulnerability to others in order to conform to the expectations of society, a concept that is laid down in the beliefs about gender roles. Much rather, he is shown to be interested in superficial bonding activities with other man, such as playing poker while smoking cigars and drinking liquor (S01E01; S04E18). Moreover, this (planned) casual sexual encounter in the first episode is representative of Charlie's view of women and the traditional family. While he goes to great lengths to maintain his desirability to women, an indicator that he successfully performs his masculinity (Hatfield 536), he does it solely for short-term sexual gratification rather than building

a long-term relationship established on commitment and trust that might end with him founding his own family. Consequently, this particular depiction of Charlie in the very first episode already sheds light on the use of gender stereotypes, masculinity, as well as a comment on the traditional family structure.

The dominant position of Charlie's masculinity is clearly visible whenever he is in a group of men. For instance, upon a fight with his long-term girlfriend and fiancé Chelsea, he has Herb, the second husband of his brother Alan's wife, and Jerome, his neighbor and a former professional football player, over for an impromptu men's night (S06E19). During the group conversation they begin to reflect on their various first sexual experiences. Charlie suggests the topics of discussion and draws the laughs from the audience due to his superior expertise and earlier achievement of sexual milestones in comparison to the other men in the group. As a result he is able to assert his dominant position in the masculine hierarchy through the use of "markers of manhood", in this case his sexual success with women (Kimmel 186; in Feasey *Maculinity & Television* 23). Other such markers are physical prowess, financial wealth, social status and professional success, all of which rank him at the top of the masculine networks he finds himself in.

This position is further emphasized when Charlie's fiancé Chelsea is revealed to be richer than him (S07E10). This fact irritates him that he is not the "breadwinner" in the relationship and that she is not financially dependent. Charlie is visibly upset and wonders why Chelsea is with him since she did not choose him for his wealth, which used to guarantee him success with women and was a pillar of his masculinity. This unexpected role reversal leads Charlie to him questioning his identity as a male. The traditional male model from which he has modeled himself is no longer an absolute truth.

On several occasions Charlie is shown to purchase expensive jewelry such as necklaces and diamond earrings for the women he desires. Sometimes these gifts are mementos of the time spent together, meaning that they are one last gift before he ends his relationship with a woman, and at other times they are tokens of appreciation for his current love interest, as shown by this conversation between him and Jake:

> Jake: So did you buy this for your girlfriend because you're breaking up with her?
> Charlie: No, why would you think that?
> Jake: Because you always give jewelry to girls you're getting ready to dump.
> Charlie: Very observant.
> Jake: You watch, you learn.
> Charlie: Well, this isn't breakup jewelry, this is "I like you, stick around" jewelry.
> Jake: What's the difference?
> Charlie   About 1500 bucks. (S05E05)

Fiske points out that jewelry has yet another, more important meaning in the relationship between men and women. He argues that such expensive accessories are "the coins by which the female-as-patriarchal-commodity is bought," and that they signify a man's ownership of a woman and his socio-economic status (*Television Culture* 13). As pointed out by Fiske, Charlie aims at possessing the plethora of women in his life and realizes that jewelry serves as the instrument to claim possession of women in patriarchal societies.

However, there are times when his looks are not sufficient to guarantee him the affection of a woman he desires. For instance, Fernando, a young, attractive handyman whom Charlie hired to fix his termite-ridden balcony in his beach house, manages to attract the attention of one of Charlie's dates. Even though he was originally solely interested in immediate sexual gratification, he feels threatened

when his younger rival manages to seduce his lover. As a result, Charlie tries

everything he can to appear younger than himself by bleaching his teeth, getting a

spray-tan and dressing like the younger generation. Nevertheless, Fernando seems

to have the upper hand, which results in Charlie resorting to another main contributor

to his masculinity: his economic superiority over other men. This dialogue shows the

end in Charlie and Fernando's competition over the affection of a woman:

Fernando:	Oh Señor Harper, I was, how do you say…?
Charlie:	About to sleep with my girlfriend?
Fernando:	Okay, about to. I am so sorry. I would understand if you fired me.
Charlie:	Hey, it's no big deal, pal. This is the natural course of events. You're the next generation: young, vibrant, good-looking. You can buy Chloe expensive jewelry.
Fernando:	I cannot buy her expensive jewelry.
Charlie:	Oh, right, that's me. What do you say, Chloe? Wanna go shopping?
Chloe:	I'll go get my purse.
Charlie:	And, yeah, you're fired. (S04E23)

This scene shows that hegemonic masculinity is subject to change, can be

challenged and has to defend its position at the top of the hierarchy of masculinities.

As Berta and Alan point out, Fernando is a younger version of Charlie since he has

the looks, the smooth-talking charm, and a job to support himself and any potential

girlfriend or wife. However, he is a blue-collar worker, a position with relatively little

prestige that does not enable him to "buy" the affection of women like Charlie, whose

economic resources enable him to secure his dominant position in masculine

hierarchies. Furthermore, this exchange shows that hegemonic males try to defend

their superior position when challenged by other, subordinate masculinities.

    As previously mentioned, hegemonic masculinity can be challenged by men

who perform a subordinated masculinity in what may be considered a hierarchy-

internal struggle for dominance. In such instances, the hegemonic male, in this case Charlie, attempts to defend his dominance. However, the dominant position of hegemonic men, as well as the position of any other men, can be contested by women as well (Connell *Masculinities* 77). Such an instance occurs when Charlie's first long-term love interest on the show, Mia, tries to change his ways. She tries to deprive him of instant sexual gratification and wants them to delay their first sexual encounter as well as make him commit to a healthier diet, dressing more appropriately for his age, and quitting his beloved cigars and bourbon. Charlie, though reluctant, pretends to give in and meet Mia's requests in order to secure eventual sexual gratification. Nevertheless, as they enjoy a dinner date, Mia scolds him after finding out that he did not commit to actual change. Charlie responds, with the entire restaurant listening to him: "I'm a big old bourbon-soaked, cigar-huffing ass as God in his infinite wisdom meant me to be. As he meant all men to be" (S03E15). Hatfield identifies this scene as the moment where Charlie defines his "drinking, red meat-eating, cigar-smoking masculinity" (535). As Mia storms off another man in attendance applauds Charlie. This scene is interesting insofar as it shows the hegemonic male responding to a challenge of his dominant position as well as providing other men with a model to strive for. Moreover, with Mia ultimately forgiving him, this event also implies that women may be able to challenge the position of men, but that hegemonic masculinity can overcome these challenges and assert its dominance.

While this analysis may seem like a viable interpretation, there are other instances when Charlie's masculinity and sexual identity are questioned. Such an event occurs when Charlie receives a note from a former girlfriend, indicating that she wants to see him. While Alan is shocked that this girlfriend was the one that

actually ended their relationship five years ago, since Charlie is usually the one that ends them, Charlie goes to their meeting place hoping for another casual sexual encounter. Believing that his former girlfriend will not show up, he begins to talk to a man who sat down next to him a few moments earlier:

Charlie: Chicks, huh?

Bill: Maybe she's got a good reason.

Charlie: I tell you what, if it were any other woman I'd have been out of here an hour ago.

Bill: Really?

Charlie: Oh, yeah. This girl? This girl's something different.

Bill: How so?

Charlie: Well, did you ever go out with somebody who's not only great in bed but also like a really cool friend?

Bill: Yeah, once.

Charlie: In fact, now that I think about it the friendship was the best part of our relationship.

Bill: No kidding?

Charlie: Yeah. The sex was a little weird. We would like wrestle to get on top. She would actually get angry if she wasn't up there.

Bill: Maybe she had a good reason.

Charlie: Maybe.

Bill: Charlie, look at me

Charlie: How do you know my name?

Bill: It's me.

Charlie: Me who? (Pause) No. Jill?

Bill: Bill:

Charlie: No. (S01E18)

Charlie is obviously shocked and because of this revelation, orders several tequila shots and tries to avoid physical contact as Bill tries to talk to him. Bill confesses that he was unhappy as a woman and always felt like a man trapped in a woman's body.

Charlie responds that he should have eaten ice cream or went shopping, hinting at the emotionality of women and their drastic measures to deal with emotional turmoil. Charlie is still unable to process this shocking information and tries to leave the bar, before Bill is able to cut him off:

Bill: Charlie, how could I have explained it to you back then? I couldn't even explain it to myself.

Charlie: Okay, now you've explained. Thank you. Nice to see you again. [shakes Bill's hand] Good luck with the penis. (S01E18)

This dialogue reveals that Charlie views his penis as the essential component of his masculinity, and thus the core of all masculinities. His definition of what it means to be a man is tied first and foremost to the biological difference between men and women, or what is defined as sex, that enables him to satisfy both his and women's sexual desires. The importance of the penis in his concept of masculinity becomes even more apparent much later in the show's run. After Alan suffered a heart attack and is hospitalized, a deceased Charlie (portrayed by Kathy Bates) returns from hell and pays him a visit at the hospital. However, as punishment for his sins, he has to spend eternal damnation in the body of a woman (S09E22). His punishment is the lack of a penis, the integral aspect of his masculinity, preventing him from sexual satisfaction.

Returning to the Bill/Jill incident, the revelation of his former love interest causes a crisis for Charlie who questions his own sexuality and sexual identity and therefore his own masculinity. Bill meets Charlie's mother, whom he never met as Jill. Evelyn decides to show houses to Bill after flirting in front of Charlie and Alan. After Alan finds out that Bill used to be Jill and Charlie's lover, he wants to discuss the implications of the events and what effects they might have on their mother.

Charlie on the other hand takes the discussion into a completely different direction, pondering the implications for his own sexual identity:

Alan: Do you realize what this means?

Charlie: Yes. I slept with a woman who wanted to be a man. Or, I slept with a man in a woman's boy. Or, and this is my new favorite, and the title of my autobiography my mom and I slept with the same dude.

Alan: Excuse me, could we just table that for now and discuss how this impacts on our mother?

Charlie: Why? The damage has been done. All that's left to do now is drink until the part of the brain that creates mental pictures is dead.

Alan: Charlie, stay with me.

Charlie: Do you think I'm gay?

Alan: For God's sake, Charlie, this is not about you.

Charlie: I like musical theater. Maybe all these years I've been pathologically chasing women because I've been overcompensating.

Alan: You know, I've often thought of that. (S01E18)

It is interesting that the thought of being homosexual causes Charlie to fall into a crisis on more than one occasion. At a later point, Charlie meets Greg, a member of Alan's single-parent support group. Curious as to what ended his marriage after sixteen years, he asks Greg for the reason to which the latter simply responds "gay" (S04E21). As a result, Charlie is visibly uncomfortable after accepting a cigar, an overtly phallic symbol, from Greg and asks whether he "didn't wanna try drinking or gambling" both essential pillars in Charlie's bachelor lifestyle. Charlie's choice of choosing drinking and gambling as potential alternatives can be seen as indicative that he is indeed overcompensating his insecurity about his sexual identity through his hedonistic lifestyle in order to suppress any potential of others perceiving him as anything but a "man's man". Throughout the episode Charlie is concerned with

asserting that he is indeed not homosexual even though he is seen doubting himself to some extent (S04E21).

Within the same episode, Charlie is seen complaining to Berta that she bought the wrong hair conditioner. Charlie's concern with toiletries shows that he is aware that he has to maintain his looks as they are key to his sexual prowess, the integral part of his sexual identity and pillar of his masculinity. Feasey argues that this concern with the maintenance of a person's appearance and grooming is typical for the modern metrosexual ("Spray More" 367). Furthermore, his meticulousness about his appearance, which leads him to check himself into a resort that offers plastic surgery and a spa (S08E04), makes him attractive to men and women alike. This attractiveness to both sexes, however, causes him great discomfort throughout the show's run as he defines his masculinity as strictly heterosexual.

Similar to the incident with Mia, Charlie's behavior and actions are often called into question throughout the show's run. While this episode revolved around his diet and lifestyle, others revolve around his excessive and irresponsible way of spending money (S01E14), and repeatedly about his relationships, or lack thereof, with women. However, even though other characters point out his reckless behavior and at times threaten him with the consequences, they typically go unpunished. In fact, some characters encourage and support his behavior as well as applaud him for his lifestyle and beliefs in front of others:

Berta: You know who knew relationships? Your brother.

Alan: Heh. Oh, please. His lasted an hour at a time. An hour and a half when he was drunk.

Berta: Exactly. He treated women like rental cars. You pay for them when you need them and it's someone else's job to empty the trunk and hose them down. (S10E14)

Moments like this exchange between Alan and Berta seem to indicate that the lifestyle of the hegemonic male and his actions are supported by society and do not yield any repercussions. This trend, however, is called into question with Charlie's (presumed) death at the end of season eight. After being caught in bed with another woman during his honeymoon in Paris with Rose, the latter pushes him in front of the metro. Charlie's death can be seen as a direct consequence of the hegemonic males behavior, which indicates that the time that such behavior would go unpunished has passed and that hegemonic masculinity must therefore undergo a change.

3.2. Alan Harper: Representing Effeminate Masculinity

Alan Harper is Charlie's younger brother who moves into his beach house after his wife threw him out of their house. Unlike his successful jingle-writing brother, Alan's chiropractor job is barely enough to cover his alimony payments to his ex-wife Judith. Consequently, he is always short on money, a state that is often ridiculed by other characters, such as his brother Charlie, his mother Evelyn, and even his son Jake. Alan is the only character that has appeared in every single episode and is the polar opposite of his brother's personality and hedonistic lifestyle. Alan's personality and the reason for his wife leaving him are revealed in one of the first scenes of the show:

Alan: Judith, I can change.
Judith: Oh please, Alan. You are the most rigid, inflexible, obsessive, anal-retentive man I've ever met.
Alan: Rigid and inflexible? Don't you think that's a little redundant? (S01E01)

While this scene reveals his neurotic and uptight nature, which results in the dissolution of his marriage, he still believes in the sanctity of marriage and the institution of the family. Alan desperately, yet unsuccessfully, tries to salvage the situation. At the same time he tries to be there for his son Jake, which therefore places him into television's long history of depicting committed and, at times, bumbling fathers. Unlike many fathers who spend less time with their children once they are no longer infants, he tries to be as involved as possible during Jake's formative years and prepare him for the challenges of life by relaying his concept of masculinity to his son (Kaufman 454). Due to his financial situation and the divorce from Judith, Alan is often seen trying to fulfill the role of the loving, nurturing parent and listening ear for his son, a role that is commonly acted out by women in the traditional nuclear family in society and on the television screen.

Throughout the show, Alan often has to deal with the rejection of women, both from his mother and Berta as well as potential love interests. While a few of these women reject him because of his financial conundrum, the majority of women do so due to his performance of effeminate masculinity and respond more positively to his brother's masculinity. The first time that his effeminate masculinity works out in his favor occurs when he starts dating Kandi, a stunningly beautiful 22-year-old (S03E19). While she is incredibly attractive, Kandi is also incredibly dim-witted which often makes her the center of jokes from the other characters and draws laughter from the audience, since she is the embodiment of the stereotypical ditzy girl. Due to her nature, she often displays childish behavior, causing Alan to act more as a parent than a lover. His loving nature and ability to fulfill the expressive role that Kandi often requires is the key to a successful relationship with her. At Charlie's

planned wedding with Mia, the two discuss their relationship, revealing what Kandi sees in Alan:

> Kandi: This is so romantic. When I was a little girl, I used to love playing bride.
> Alan: Me too. I mean, I was the groom. Most of the time.
> Kandi: You think you'll ever get married again?
> Alan: I don't know. I hope so.
> Kandi: You should, because you'd make a good husband. You're kind, considerate, dependable, and you're cuter than a duck wearing a hat. (S03E24)

As this sequence shows, Alan is clearly a provider of stability and care, offering support to any potential significant other. Surprisingly, Alan indicates that he often dreamt of his own wedding, often with him playing the role of the bride, which further emphasizes his effeminate masculinity. While Charlie and Mia do not proceed to get married, Alan decides to marry Kandi upon her revelation about why she is with him. However, even though he embodies the qualities Kandi deems desirable, their marriage only lasts for a short amount of time and they officially get a divorce shortly afterwards (S04E18). This circumstance appears to indicate that these characteristics are not enough to successfully maintain a relationship as Alan's second marriage crumbles just like his first, raising the question whether the appeal of effeminate masculinity is only temporary.

Nevertheless, Alan continues to cling to the notion of the traditional family and the sanctity of marriage as he tries to build a steady, committed, long-term relationship with women even after his second divorce. Whenever he enters another relationship, other characters frequently point out that they do not know what his girlfriend sees in Alan. This reaction refers to the common "beauty and the beast" setup discussed in the theory section of this thesis.

During his ongoing pursuit of the stability of a lasting relationship, Alan continues to perform his effeminate masculinity in trying to find his ideal partner. Some of the essential aspects of Alan's performance are his genuine interest in potential love interests, his preference of long-term dedication over the instant gratification of casual sexual encounters and his emotional, communicative nature, which are considered feminine traits. All these features combined, as well as his mannerisms and behavior, lead other characters to believing him as homosexual, including several of his dates:

> Alan: If you will accompany me to the boudoir, I will convert an ordinary pull-out couch into a magic carpet for two.
>
> Beverly: Are you sure you're not gay?
>
> Alan: I'm literate and urbane. You're not the first one to be confused. (S04E15)

Alan met Beverly through an online dating service. In his profile he boasts about his Malibu beach house and successful career, all of which actually belong to Charlie. As he crumbles under this charade, he confesses that he is indeed only a houseguest in his brother's beach house and merely a chiropractor who struggles to make his alimony payments. Having experienced several failed relationships, Beverly is willing to forgive him for trying to fool her. However, when he is "just Alan", her biggest fear is that he is a closet homosexual. Without Charlie's belongings, Alan is unable to successfully represent the traditional (heterosexual) masculine image. This scene is merely one in a long line, which revolve around Alan's masculinity and sexuality as a topic of discussion.

Even though Alan often disregards the questions and sometimes disparaging comments concerning his sexuality, showing that he asserted his masculinity to a point where such remarks do not faze him, there is one particular instance, which

causes a crisis for Alan. Due to his need to express his feelings and offer a listening ear to others, he joins a support group for divorced single parents. As Charlie returns home to find Alan on the sundeck with another man and asks him about his friend, the following dialogue ensues:

Alan: Greg is a divorced dad. He's got a daughter around Jake's age.
Charlie: Well, you can understand my confusion.
Alan: You think I joined a support group to pick up women?
Charlie: No, I think you joined a support group because you're a whiny little wuss. But as long as you're there, you might as well nail a few. (S04E21)

Against Charlie's expectations, Alan joined this support group for the sake of divulging and dialogue with people who have had similar life experiences as himself. Charlie insults him for this need of sharing by calling him a wuss, since it does not comply with what is expected of men in society. Furthermore, Alan's friend Greg is gay which leads other characters, like Jake, Berta and his ex-wife Judith, to believe Alan to be gay as well. Even though these remarks do not bother him at first, he begins to doubt his own sexuality, given how great he and Greg get along and that he enjoys the same things as a confirmed homosexual. He discusses this circumstance with his brother, who himself is facing a similar crisis:

Alan: I'm just saying that this friendship with Greg has been so easy and fun, and everybody else just seems happier thinking I'm gay. Maybe that's the answer
Charlie: What was the question?
Alan: Who is Alan Harper?
Charlie: That's easier. Alan Harper is an idiot.
Alan: Why is my sexuality so threatening to you?
Charlie: It's not threatening. I am not threatened. […] Okay. Now, you listen to me. You're not gay, I'm not gay, nobody's gay. (S04E21)

With everybody else perceiving him as a homosexual, Alan slowly begins to embrace the idea that he may indeed be gay. Consequently, he tries to ascertain whether he is actually homosexual and makes an advance towards Greg, kissing him as they drive to the latter's house following a trip with their children. He reveals to Greg that everybody else's perception has caused him to question his own sexuality. Upon this confession, Greg assures Alan that he is not gay:

> Greg: Alan, you are not gay.
> Alan: Are you sure?
> Greg: Do you find me sexually attractive?
> Alan: No.
> Greg: Do you find any man sexually attractive.
> Alan: No. Well, maybe George Clooney
> Greg: Clooney doesn't count. Trust me, you're not gay.
> Alan: Okay.
> Greg: You seem disappointed.
> Alan: I just -- I feel like I'm letting a lot of people down.
> Greg: Alan, its okay to be straight. (S04E21)

This scene is pivotal as it shows Alan's inability to convincingly perform one of two different masculinities (Hatfield 535). On the one hand, several characters have often noted that he does not embody traditional heterosexual masculinity, which has been considered the standard within society for a long time. On the other hand, he also fails to comply with the role of a new established form, that of homosexual masculinity. Ironically enough, his quest to conform to homosexual masculinity is denied by a gay man, while women often comment on his unsuccessful performance of traditional masculinity, since both women and homosexuals are positioned worse in the hierarchy of gender than heterosexual (hegemonic) men. This phenomenon

could indicate that both these subordinated performances of gender are better positioned on the hierarchy than Alan's masculinity.

While Alan often has to assume the feminine, expressive role in the household, he also casts himself into a feminine role outside the domestic realm on occasion. One such instance occurs when he meets Paula, a trans-woman that was formerly known as Paul. The following events transpire as they both go to the movie theater:

Paula: I'm having a great time.

Alan: So am I. Just so you know, going forward you gotta have to learn to embrace my masculinity and, you know, accept the fact that I'm the [Paula opens the door] – thank you – man in this relationship. Oh it's chill in here.

Paula: Oh, here. Take my jacket.

Alan: Oh! Cozy. (S11E09)

This scene shows that when others do not insist on him fulfilling the traditional male role, Alan is comfortable with assuming the feminine role even though he claims that he is the man in the relationship.

As mentioned, even though Alan is comfortable with his particular performance of masculinity, he is aware that it does not represent the desired norm within society like his brother Charlie does. Due to his inability to find a woman for a long-term relationship and to found a family with, he tries to perform Charlie's masculinity and attempts to adopt his brother's happy-go-lucky attitude in order to at least find instant gratification (S08E05; S09E08). While he finds success with women momentarily, they once again leave him after a short period of time and his latter attempt to perform Charlie's masculinity leads him to a mental facility.

Alan is an extremely protean character. While he commonly embodies effeminate masculinity, he often tries to perform different male roles. However, he is

typically unable to conform to the expectations connected to these roles. For this reason the other characters do not understand Alan and become frustrated with him. Consequently, Alan represents a failed attempt of a subordinate masculinity to find its place in the gender hierarchy.

3.3. Charlie and Alan: A Clash of Masculinities

With the codes of television, as introduced by Fiske, in mind, the differences between Charlie and Alan are detectable on several levels (*Television Culture* 5). An analysis of the first level, "reality," concerned with appearance, clothing style, and the characters' behavior reveals several differences between the two brothers. Hatfield describes Charlie's style as "a laid-back California style; he wears untucked, short-sleeved bowling shirts with shorts in almost every episode" (532). Charlie has a constant tan due to his home's proximity to the beach and spending his free time enjoying drinks out on the sundeck. In other words, his appearance already provides the audience with clues about his lifestyle. Alan on the other hand often wears polo shirts or long-sleeved button-up shirts, which he tucks into his pants, typically chinos. His skin tone is rather pale, and he is quite concerned about his receding hairline among other things (S07E09). These factors speak to his middle-class background and his anxious, fussy and uptight nature. Given Charlie's success with women and ability to live the happy-go-lucky life, various characters are seen trying to emulate Charlie's clothing style, which they consider a key to his ability to attract women (Hatfield 532; S03E16).

In addition to these differences between the brothers regarding the technical codes of television, other striking differences can be identified when it comes to the

ideological codes. The ideological codes of individualism, patriarchy, and capitalism all manifest themselves in Charlie and his behavior. He performs the work of the dominant ideology due to his concern about himself and the realization of his own goals (individualism). Charlie asserts his hegemonic masculinity and acts as an agent in maintaining the dominant position of men over women (patriarchy). Finally, his wealth and use of material resources to assert his dominant position, as well as his concern with cars and other status symbols, are representative of his role in legitimizing the ideological code of capitalism. Alan, on the other is not capable of enforcing these ideological codes, which are deeply rooted in modern society.

Within their non-traditional family unit, both are required to fulfill different roles. Due to his highly lucrative and successful career as a jingle writer and children's song star, Charlie earns an impressive salary and is therefore able to maintain his bachelor lifestyle and pay the household bills. Alan, on the other hand, is more concerned with maintaining the order among its members and keeping the household running, as the following scene shows:

    Charlie: So, what you doing?
     Alan: Paying our household bills.
    Charlie: You're a goof wife, Alan. (S05E05)

This scene illustrates how Alan is forced into the expressive role. As mentioned in the earlier cited work of Parsons and Bales, this role is commonly associated with women, whereas Charlie performs the stereotypically male instrumental role (47). Furthermore, both brothers represent stereotypical attributes and characteristics. Charlie exhibits traits commonly associated with men such as dominant, bold, aggressive, egoistic and lazy behavior, while Alan is shown to be affectionate,

sentimental, emotional and talkative, traits that are typically considered to be feminine.

Other characters on the show also comment on the difference between the brothers' masculinities and behavior. In the following scenes, their new neighbor Danielle, a promiscuous alcoholic that has moved to Malibu to leave her former "Charlie-esque" life behind for a more traditional life, comments on the distinguishing features of both men:

> Danielle: Whoa, whoa, whoa. There is no need to fight over me. Alan, you're a sweet, gentle guy. Charlie, you're a pig. But I find you very attractive. There's only one reasonable solution. I'll have to do you both. (S04E14)

Charlie's physical appearance and easy-going charm make him attractive to women, even to those he has just recently met, whereas Alan's sincere and caring nature becomes quickly apparent to women and makes him attractive to the other sex, though significantly less attractive to women when compared to his brother.

Keeping the focus on the women in their life, the differences in Charlie's and Alan's concepts of masculinity is easiest to observe when they are competing over the attention of a woman. The earliest instance of such a scenario is their competition over Frankie (S01E15; S01E16). Both brothers try to win the affection of Frankie. Charlie relies on his wealth, his looks, charm and sexual prowess. Alan on the other hand relies on his sincerity, affection, and genuine interest in Frankie, who like him is coming out of a tumultuous break-up. In what seems as a surprising turn of events, Frankie eventually ends up with Alan, even though just for a short time before she leaves them both. This scene is also incredibly humorous, as a result of a woman actually picking Alan over his brother, the embodiment of hegemonic

masculinity. Similarly, Charlie is confident that any woman they would compete over would pick him over Alan as the following encounter shows:

Alan: You know what, Charlie? I think you're jealous.

Charlie: Of who?

Alan: Of me. For the first time in our lives a woman picked me over you, and you can't deal with it.

Charlie: I can deal with it. I don't get it, but I can deal with it.

Alan: I feel sorry for you. I feel sorry that your heart has become so hard and small that you've lost the capacity to connect with another human being on any level more meaningful than the inebriated exchange of bodily fluids.

Charlie: Boy, leave it to you to take a beautiful thing like drunken sex and make it sound dirty. (S01E16)

As previously mentioned though, such moments are rare and Charlie, the hegemonic male, is generally more successful with women than Alan, especially when they are directly competing with one another.

In their daily lives as well as in competition over women, the two brothers often clash and show conflicting attitudes. One area where their opinions differ the most is relationships. Once again, the differences are visible by merely observing the events of the first episode. Alan is a divorced, committed and bumbling father of a ten-year-old, who gets another divorce as the show progresses, and Charlie is the easy-going bachelor who has no familial commitments. Their different lifestyles, consequently, impact their views on relationships:

Alan: You know, Charlie, if you took half the energy you put into manipulating casual sexual encounters and used it to actually build a relationship you'd be a lot happier.

Charlie: Hard to imagine.

Alan Are you saying you never wanna settle down?

Charlie: You mean get married? Let me tell you something, bunky. If you've got someone to clean your house and do your shopping and you're getting some action on a regular basis, the only reason you need a wife is if you have some sick compulsion to give away half your stuff. (S01E23)

The scene above shows how disparate their views are. Charlie, who does not plan his life beyond the present day and tries to enjoy the lack of commitment he has in his life with no family of his own, is the complete opposite of Alan. The latter believes in the traditional nuclear family and is mostly concerned with fulfilling the role of the committed father. Consequently, he is often seen discussing the security and joys marriage and children bring to a man's life. Charlie often makes fun of this traditional family configuration, which he considers to be outdated and unfavorable to men.

Another aspect concerning the hierarchy of masculinities is hinted at in the scene where Alan and Charlie's views on family and relationships clash, namely the subordination through verbal putdowns and insults. In comparison to some of the insults throughout the show, "bunky" in the previously mentioned scene is one of the less insulting putdowns. On other occasions, Charlie calls Alan a "fruit" (S06E02), "fruit basket" (S06E21), "the queer" (S08E02) and threatens to "whoop his candy ass" (S01E02). However, several other characters that are not related to him also insult him on multiple occasions, mostly because of his feminine traits. Furthermore, Charlie is often seen slapping and hitting his brother, relying on his superior physical strength to put Alan, the effeminate male, in his place whenever he tries to question Charlie's authority and dominant position. These remarks confirm the hypothesis posited by Good et al. that men who are not conforming to the expectations through their need to divulge and share their feelings, will be verbally ridiculed and insulted by other men on television (425).

Their reactions and views of homosexuality reveal another big distinction between the two brothers. At one point Charlie is invited to a party by a professional acquaintance, Eric. Eric works in show business and is openly homosexual. The backstory of this working relationship is revealed when Charlie admits he pretends to be gay in order to receive business opportunities from Eric. Fearing that Eric will think less of him once he finds out that Charlie is not gay himself, he decides to bring Alan to the party and convinces his brother to play his significant other. While Charlie is visibly having a hard time and is uncomfortable among the people in attendance, Alan embraces the role he has to play and enjoys his flamboyant outfit consisting of an unbuttoned, brightly-colored, flower-patterned shirt and a scarf. Ironically, a lot of Eric's colleagues are producers on the iconic "gaycom" *Will & Grace*. When they have a moment in private at the party, Charlie scolds Alan for his behavior:

Charlie: OK. You've gotta pull back a little. You're gonna set off the smoke alarm.

Alan: What do you mean?

Charlie: I mean, if you flame any more you'll light the drapes on fire. (S02E18)

Charlie is obviously uncomfortable with what he believes to be an exaggerated act by Alan (Hatfield 534). However, Alan points out that Charlie himself is putting on a performance and that he is merely doing what he was asked to do. More importantly, however, this scene also shows that Alan is more comfortable with this role, since he has asserted his own (effeminate) masculinity and knows that his behavior at the party is indeed just an act. Charlie, on the other hand, is uncomfortable with homosexuality and the thought that he might only be overcompensating his own homosexual nature as previously pointed out. His masculinity is based on asserting his strict heterosexuality and dominance over subordinate masculinities such as

effeminate and homosexual masculinity. Being unable to perform his usual masculinity causes a crisis for him that he desperately tries to overcome.

This difference in their response to homosexuality as a potential threat to their own masculinity is a recurring theme in *Two and a Half Men*. Even during simple discussions on homosexuality, Charlie immediately denies any potential of him being anything but a straight man. Upon embarrassing Jake by bickering in front of his friends, the two brothers sit down and try to resolve their issues by using one of Alan's old relationship-counseling books. They are both inebriated during this exchange and as a result take verbal jabs at each other. As they come to the section where they have to list things that they have in common, however, Alan points out that they are both battling homosexual panic, which Charlie refutes with an angry look, quickly disregarding this idea as topic of discussion and potential personal trait (S07E05). Once again, Charlie is not willing to discuss homosexuality, while Alan, even though he admits his panic, is ready to openly talk about this topic.

This foil character relationship between Charlie and Alan ultimately demonstrates the existence of a variety of masculinities and how they are changing in contemporary society. The traditional patriarchal image to which Charlie dearly clings to is drastically shaken as he interacts with his effeminate brother and other men who embody subordinate masculinities. These polar opposite personalities reveal the struggle of striking a balance between these two images of masculinity, which therefore results in an attempt to redefine masculinity.

3.4. Jake: Shaping the Next Generation

Jake (Angus T. Jones), the "half" man of the title, is Alan's son who stays with Charlie and Alan mostly during the weekends but sometimes also during the week. *Two and a Half Men* depicts the challenges of a young boy growing up and coming to terms with his own masculinity.

In the show's early days, Jake's life is defined by being the child of divorce. He embraces this image and tries to use it to his advantage, for instance to cause his teachers and other adults to feel bad for him so he can have his way (S03E19). As Jake starts to enter puberty, he initially is more interested in television and computer games than anything else. Jake can easily be labeled a "heavy viewer" and begins to adopt the behaviors and attitudes conveyed on television, which includes gender stereotypes. When he suggests that Charlie's opinionated and outspoken girlfriend Lydia "must be dynamite in the sack," in order for Charlie to accept her as a "stone-cold beyotch", Alan wonders where he picked up these derogatory terms to which Jake simply responds by naming popular American television networks (S04E06). The influence of television on Jake's language and views confirms the findings of Beuf about the acquisition of gender stereotypes, which have been discussed previously (143).

Jake living with two related men who oversee him becoming an adult, can be considered to be what television critics Casey et al. have labeled an ideological battleground (153). In Jake's case this idea means that both Charlie's and Alan's concepts of what it means to be a man clash and try to relay their interests in shaping Jake's masculinity. Consequently, Charlie and Alan are often arguing as they try to convey their beliefs to the next generation of male Harpers. For instance,

when Jake is invited to his first boy-girl party, both Alan and Charlie try to give him advice on what to do and tell him about their own experiences. However, Jake is shown to only have a listening ear for Charlie's suggestions, realizing that his concept of masculinity has resulted in him having success with women and therefore, ruining a potential father-son moment for Alan (S03E20). This instance does not mark the last time Jake is seen seeking Charlie's advice. The following scene shows another example of Jake asking his uncle for advice when he tries to find a gift for his crush, Wendy Cho:

Alan:	So what do you want this gift to say?
Jake:	Uh. Happy birthday?
Alan:	A birthday card says "happy birthday." What are you trying to tell her by giving her jewelry?
Jake:	I don't know. I guess that I love her. (Charlie looks surprised) What?
Charlie:	Nothing. That's terrific
Jake:	Hey, just because you don't love any girl, doesn't mean I shouldn't.
Charlie:	Excuse me, but I have loved many girls and many girls have loved me.
Jake:	That's not love, that's just sex.
Charlie:	I'm sorry, I'm not following you. (S04E04)

This exchange shows that Jake has understood the importance of jewelry as the way of claiming ownership of a woman and her affection as well as an integral part of Charlie's masculinity. However, Jake exhibits a favorable attitude towards a more traditional family setup, and therefore antipathy towards Charlie's lack of stable relationships. Later on, Jake is seen trying hard to emulate Charlie's behavior and trying out his lifestyle in an attempt to impress girls (S06E03). This plan, however, fails terribly and all he ends up with is a hangover. This turn of events serves Jake as an indicator that this aspect of his uncle's masculinity is not suited for him.

In his later years, Jake is the embodiment of the "pothead" image and is mainly spending his days smoking marijuana and going to parties. With Walden moving into the beach house, he is introduced to another performance of masculinity. Jake realizes quickly that Walden represents a new, desirable kind of male. Upon his tutor Meghan showing more interest in Walden than in him he asks his father whether this is "[…] what I have to look forward to in life? Always losing girls to smarter, better-looking men?" (S09E07). This realization demonstrates Jake's struggle of finding the ideal, "most successful" definition of masculinity for himself among the variety of masculinities that might be deemed more desirable.

With Jake beginning to enter adulthood and leaving the "half man" role, he begins to develop his own notion of masculinity. With both Charlie and Alan being main influences for his concept of what it means to be a man, he talks about his own ideal, which he considers worth striving for when he and Alan reflect on their time with Charlie:

> Jake: But probably the most important thing I learned is by the time I'm his age, I wanna be married and have a family.
> Alan: Really?
> Jake: Yeah, Uncle Charlie was very lonely, Dad.
> Alan: Yeah. Yeah, he was.
> Jake: And I don't wanna be like him.
> Alan: Good for you.
> Jake: Of course, I don't wanna be like you either.
> Alan: Even better. (S09E08)

This scene shows that Jake, even though he does not want to end up like his father, has adopted a more traditional point of view that values the importance of the traditional family unit and having loved ones in his life with whom he can share. The fact that Jake's idea of masculinity shows more traits of Alan's concept of being a

man than Charlie confirms the hypothesis stated by psychologists like Rosenberg and Sutton-Smith who posited that children learn gender roles through identification with the parent of the same sex (117). In other words, boys model their behavior and beliefs after their father whereas girls model it after their mothers.

Jake is the "end product" of growing up in a non-traditional family unit. The fact that he still clings to the ideal of a traditional family is rather ironic, given his father's and uncle's failures in successfully maintaining this structure in the traditional sense of maintaining a stable relationship with women. With hindsight of his male mentors, he tries to reach a balance among the various masculine as well as female images he encountered throughout his childhood. As revealed in the show's finale he has achieved his goal and got married while stationed in Japan (S12E15; S12E16), taking the first step towards the ideal he discussed with his father in the scene above. In a way Jake represents the hope in the younger generation of creating a new understanding of the traditional family, which breaks away from gender stereotypes.

3.5. Walden Schmidt: A New Kind of Man

With the show entering its ninth season and after the exit of Charlie Sheen and the Charlie Harper character, Walden Schmidt, portrayed by Ashton Kutcher, joined the ensemble of *Two and a Half Men*. Walden, a self-made internet billionaire with "a face that gives women an erection" first enters Alan's and Jake's life in the season's premiere episode when he attempts to drown himself in the ocean, only to fail due to the water being colder than expected (S09E02). It turns out he tried to commit suicide because his wife left him (S09E01). After a series of events he decides to

buy Charlie's house and permits Alan to stay with him for as long as he needs to, saving Alan from having to stay with his mother.

The first few episodes after his introduction offer an explanation as to why his wife left him. Walden's wife Bridget threw him out because she had to be a mother for Walden rather than a wife due to his childish behavior and dependence on her for the most basic of all things. In other words, Walden is the physical manifestation of the Peter Pan Syndrome, meaning that he refuses to grow up and act responsibly and age-appropriately. When he is introduced he also appears to fit the image of the geeky nerd, who is more interested in technology and video games than women. After moving in with Alan, however, they form a new family to overcome the challenges of everyday life and the loss they have recently experienced. Walden is forced to adapt and behave like a grown-up instead of man with the "emotional maturity of a 12-year-old" (S09E02).

On this path to find his mature self, he also goes on a journey to find, redefine, and perform his own masculinity. Walden represents a new kind of a man who holds traditional views similar to Alan, believing in the family unit and committed long-term relationships, as well as the ascension in the hierarchy of masculinities through economic gain and the appeal to women because of this money and his looks, similar to Charlie. Other characters are aware of Walden's status as the desired image of man. However, due to his tendency to fall in love too quickly with the women in his life, he is unable to maintain relationships for extended periods as in the case with Zoey, a successful lawyer and divorced mother:

    Berta: Wait a minute, there's another guy?
     Alan: Yep.
    Berta: Better than Walden […] Unless this new guy can fly around the room
           and shoot fire out his ass that bitch is crazy. (S10E01)

Even though Walden is seen as the embodiment of the new ideal man, a fact that is acknowledged by both Alan and Berta on multiple occasions, he has a hard time to find a woman for the stable long-term relationship he desires. While other characters have pointed out that he simply falls in love too soon, due to his desire for a traditional family and his romantic character, he also blames his financial wealth for the lack of lasting relationships in his life after his marriage, an aspect that previously guaranteed Charlie his success with women and formed the pillar of his male identity. Several women are shown to be after his money, thus reducing them to the negative, stereotypical "gold digger" image. After the first in a long line of incidents where women try to exploit his financial wealth and his initial naiveté, he expresses his concern over this situation to Alan:

> Alan: How you doing?
> Walden: Let this be a warning to you, Alan. There are women out there that will be nice to you just to get to your money.
> Alan: Thanks, but that's not really high up on my list of concerns. (S09E04)

While this scene shows that his success and wealth make him desirable, there is one particular instance in which they prove to be a hindering factor in maintaining committed relationships. When he assumes an alter ego that represents him without his money, Sam Wilson, he is able to build a relationship with Kate, a department store employee. However, once she finds out that he has been lying to her, Walden finds himself in the ruins of yet another relationship (S10E13).

Walden clearly presents a new masculinity that has departed from the "man's man" image of a self-sufficient, physically strong, authoritarian, and crafty man. When the girlfriend of Charlie's illegitimate daughter tells Walden that he does not

conform to this image of what she finds desirable, he finds himself in a crisis. Even though he does not want to win her over as a potential love interest or is of any significance to him besides being the lover of his friend, he goes to great lengths to convince her of his manhood. Consequently, he tries to assert his masculinity and acts accordingly to the man's man role. He repairs and builds things around the house to show off his physical prowess and issues directives to the women in the beach house and Alan to establish his dominant position (S11E14). While he is content that both Jenny and her girlfriend admit that he can represent this type of man convincingly, Alan jokes about it and has the last laugh as the sundeck collapses with Walden in his construction site worker outfit. Since such things have never happened to Walden when he just performed his own masculinity, this scene can be seen as an indicator that this traditional image of the male itself is outdated and needs to be rebuilt and reconstructed.

Overall, Walden represents the attempt to negotiate between traditional and progressive images of masculinity and to find a middle ground of what is the desired form of masculinity. Combining features of both forms he embodies a new male role that is marked by financial success, economic security and leaves him in a position of power and superiority to pursue any interests. However, given his lack of success in finding fulfillment in life, namely lasting and committed relationships, it is safe to say that this process of defining such a new masculinity is still in progress. Walden's masculinity represents a temporary ideal at the current stage of this process that has yet to be finished.

3.6. Alan and Walden: Reexamining the Hierarchy

With the disappearance of Charlie and his dominant position in the house, Walden's introduction calls the hierarchy into question. Walden and Charlie's concept of masculinity as well as their beliefs and attitudes concerning relationships are vastly different from one another. Nevertheless, within the household, their microcosm of society, they are both in a superior position in comparison to Alan. In other words, much like in his earlier relationship to Charlie, Alan once again is placed into the subordinate position.

Although the subordination of Alan is the common denominator in both his relationships with the respective owner of the house, his relationship with Walden is different from the one with Charlie. With Walden sharing his traditional view about the importance of the family and stable relationships, both of them often discuss their feelings and give each other advice about the various challenges in their respective lives. The homosocial act of sharing with each other contradicts Charlie's hegemonic attitude about divulging (Feasey *Masculinity & Television*). At the same time, Walden does not resort to violence and disparaging comments to assert his superior position in the household.

The nature of their relationship leads to the two quickly developing a deep friendship with one another. For instance, after Walden's long-term love interest Zoey rejects his wedding proposal, Alan meets him at the bar and attempts to console his friend:

Walden: So I'm just supposed to accept being alone forever.

Alan: Hey, you will never be alone because I will never leave you.

Walden: […] You know, you might be onto something. Maybe I should just give up women. We should go gay!

Alan: Ha-ha. Good one. Heh.

Walden: No I'm serious.

Alan: Really? Okay, okay. If we're gonna do it we gotta do it right. We'll get married in New Hampshire, uh, register at Pottery Barn, adopt a Chinese baby. Oh, we can wear scarves at our wedding.

Walden: […] We live together, we like each other, we're halfway there.

Alan: Sure, mailman already thinks we're gay. (S10E01)

As previously mentioned, several characters comment on Alan appearing to be homosexual throughout the show's later run, and this scene is the first instance where both Alan and Walden discuss homosexuality. Alan's ideal wedding ceremony reflects the situation of homosexual couples in American society as well as pervasive stereotypes about them. New Hampshire was one of the first states to acknowledge same-sex marriage and is a popular travel destination and wedding venue for homosexual couples ("History and Timeline"). Furthermore, it emphasizes the stereotypical belief about homosexuals' affinity for home décor and furnishing to make a home and their tendency to sport flamboyant outfits, often featuring colorful scarves. Moreover, it acknowledges how same-sex couples have to resort to adopting children due to their inability to have biological children.

Additionally, the later course of their discussion of homosexuality at the bar sheds light on the respective roles they fulfill in their household and relationship:

Walden: Yeah, what do you think? Mr. and Mr. Walden Schmidt?

Alan: So I would take your name? Why wouldn't we take my name?

Walden: Because I'm the breadwinner.

Alan: So you think making a home isn't work? (S10E01)

Not only does Walden assume the breadwinner role, but Alan also defends himself with a "feminine" argument and acts in a way that can be considered stereotypically

female by saying that he wants to be provided for, and therefore won't sign a pre-nuptial agreement. Alan uses his effeminate masculinity to get what he needs and as a way to make his friend feel better, showing that he can easily perform the expressive role in their relationship, which is the traditional feminine role. Nevertheless, they do not actually enter a homosexual relationship.

Due to Alan's effeminate masculinity and Walden allowing him to stay with him, many characters assume that they are indeed a homosexual couple (S09E06). There are times, however, when Walden is uncomfortable with this circumstance. For instance he has to do his morning yoga exercises inside to avoid name-calling from the people at the beach (S11E02). The thought of being considered gay is again handled differently by both men in the household. While Alan does not appear to be affected by other people's disparaging, at times homophobic, remarks, Walden is visibly uncomfortable when others question his sexual identity. Consequently, Walden often has to defend his relationship with Alan in front of other people:

Bridget: How do you explain him to people?
Walden: I usually tell them my wife drove me to homosexuality. (S09E18)

The scene above is another indicator of the representation of homosexuality. Homosexuality is portrayed as the last resort, an opportunity to escape from the clutches of crazy women and a device to enhance the comedic value of the show on multiple occasions.

After a mild heart attack, Walden refuses to wait for the right woman to start a family and raise his own children, an aspect about Alan's life that he as always envied. Upon finding out that adoption is not an option since he is a divorced, single man, he proposes to Alan in an attempt to work around the system that favors married couples:

Walden:	But I wouldn't be half as happy with them as I would be with you.
Alan:	Go on.
Walden:	When I think of the ten things in a wife, you have nine of them. You're my best friend, you're trustworthy, you're loving, you're smart, you'll never leave me.
Alan:	Married or not, til death do us part.
Walden:	You're funny, you're understanding, you don't care if I leave the toilet seat up.
Alan:	I actually prefer it. Although the other night I forgot it was up and I had a surprise splashdown. I was like a turtle on its back.
Walden:	There's another one. As long as you're around I won't be the most awkward guy in the room. (S12E02)

Due to Alan's effeminate masculinity, he embodies almost all of the traits that make a woman desirable, and that were encoded in earlier portrayals of the ideal woman and loving, homemaker wife on television. The only thing he cannot provide for Walden is sexual satisfaction. Eventually, they both get married and are allowed to adopt a child, Louis (S12E05).

In this new all-male family unit both of them have to fulfill different roles. While these roles were more clearly distinguished in the family unit formed by Alan, Charlie and Jake, they are not as distinct from one another in the Harper-Schmidt family. Both Walden and Alan try to face the challenges of raising a child without a mother. For instance Walden, who due to his financial wealth and professional success is best suited for the instrumental role is also shown working around the house to provide his adopted son with a beautiful home. Moreover, the once immature billionaire is shown to have become a responsible and loving parent, finally achieving his desire for his own family thanks to Alan's help and knowledge about raising a child.

Even though they are not related to one another, they have formed their own family unit to deal with the challenges of everyday life. In their relationship, homosexuality is not an actual "lifestyle" choice (S11E03), as they refer to it themselves, but serves as a ploy for Walden to beat a system that is geared towards married couples. However, at this point the show does not just return to its original premise of two men struggling to live and raise a child together, but points out that society is undergoing changes. The nuclear family, consisting of a husband and wife as well as their children, is no longer the undisputed norm, and new family configurations emerge and become more common throughout society.

Whereas Alan and Charlie's relationship predominantly revolved around maintaining the traditional male hierarchy, Alan and Walden work together cohesively by using each other's different ideas of masculinity to their advantage in order to maintain a stable household. Essentially, their relationship can be described as symbiotic, rather than parasitic as in Alan's relationship with Charlie. Charlie frequently accused Alan of "sponging" off his success and wealth. This perspective demonstrates the lack of a mutually acknowledged give-and-take and the existence of an invariable hierarchy. Walden on the other hand, believes in sharing his wealth with Alan and the people he holds dear in his life. Moreover, there is an emotional, mutual exchange and a willingness to share and work with one another instead of against each other. In a way this hierarchy is gradually taking the shape of a democracy.

3.7. Evelyn and the Subversion of the Traditional Female Role

Evelyn Harper, Charlie and Alan's mother, is undoubtedly one of the most intriguing females as well as one of the most frequently featured characters on the show. Considering the women involved in television's long history, Evelyn certainly proves to be an outstanding woman and a unique character. First and foremost she is the mother of two children and grandmother of Jake and Charlie's illegitimate daughter Jenny. However, other characters, especially her own children, often criticize her mothering skills:

Rose: We were trying to figure out why Charlie hates you.
Evelyn: Well, Charlie?
Charlie: Okay, fine, here it is. I'm not saying I hate you, but if I did it might have something to do with the fact that you're a narcissistic bloodsucker who drove my father into an early grave. After which you married a succession of men who couldn't care less about Alan and me, which was just fine with you because you looked at us like a couple of dancing monkeys you could just haul out whenever it suited you. And when it didn't, you sent us off to boarding school or camp or that kibbutz in Israel, where we got beat up because we weren't even Jewish! And now, now you show up here every chance you get to lay a guilt trip on me for not appreciating my cold, lonely, loveless childhood.
Evelyn: Well, obviously you're not ready to talk about it. (S02E02)

This scene in one of the earliest episodes that reveals the nature of the family dynamics between Evelyn and her sons, which is marked by a lack of affection and disparate views of Evelyn's mothering skills. Charlie and Alan often discuss their bad childhood, whereas Evelyn usually disregards their arguments and tells them that

she did what she was supposed to. Furthermore, the same episode reveals more about the way Evelyn raised her children:

    Berta: Was he [Charlie] breast-fed?
    Evelyn: Of course he was. Not by me personally. (S02E02)

Evelyn did not breast-feed her own children, an act that might be considered the basic act of motherhood. Furthermore, Charlie blames his mother for the death of his father, who died of food poisoning. However, Evelyn confesses that she was simply unaware of what it means to be a housewife and consequently did not learn how to cook, which is why she kept the fish in a drawer rather than the fridge (S05E17). Her argumentation also supports Fiske's argument that motherhood, contrary to long-standing popular belief, is not innate and not a part of every woman's identity, but a set of techniques, skills and knowledge that has to be acquired (*Media Matters* 25).

   Rather than spending her days grieving, Evelyn quickly recovers and returns to her successful career as a real estate agent. Consequently, she has even less time to spend on household duties, such as cooking, which she passes on to the maid. This action shows that she was not capable of balancing the demands of raising her children with her professional career. From a traditional feminist point of view, Evelyn embodies the "bad" woman, choosing a lucrative professional career over the stability of a family and relationship to her husband (Cobb 31). Furthermore, as the years pass she marries a succession of other men, all of which eventually turn out to be rather short marriages. Despite their reluctance to interact with their mother given her disinterest toward them, Charlie and Alan try to share the good news in their lives with her, which Evelyn either belittles or disregards. For instance, as Charlie visits her at the office to tell her about his engagement to Chelsea, she gets a work-related phone call and leaves him behind in her office (S06E20). Interestingly

enough, this scene shows Evelyn in her working environment, which is a rare occurrence since the events of the show mainly transpire in the protagonists' home. In comparison to her sons, she is often seen in work-related settings such as functions, showing houses to potential buyers or quickly stopping by at the beach house in-between client meetings before rushing off to other appointments. This working-attitude further emphasizes how Evelyn rejects the traditional female role as she is not often portrayed as maintaining her domestic duties as mother and wife. Rather she is the embodiment of the "new woman".

While Evelyn has been more concerned with her professional success rather than parenting duties during her children's formative years, she knows how to manipulate both Charlie and Alan and get the better of them on several occasions. One of the first instances shows her faking a heart attack to get back at her sons for being upset about her reaction to Jake's performance on a test in school (S02E14). Through her charade he gets the apology that she wanted all along from her sons. Another, and perhaps even more interesting instance occurs later in the show. This time, Charlie and Alan claim that no one will attend Evelyn's funeral, let alone mourn for her. While they are pleasantly surprised with the effects of their remarks they start to worry about her and try to surprise her with a crystal bowl for her birthday. Evelyn, however, is not pleasantly surprised and tells them that they are interrupting her birthday party with her loved ones. Charlie, intrigued by her remark, walks into his mother's house to find two men and child, a gay couple and their adopted son. Evelyn explains to Charlie who her party guests are:

Evelyn: Roger works in my real-estate office, Philip does my hair. And I introduced them. They make a lovely couple, don't they?

Charlie: Yeah, I guess. And they adopted Chung King?

Evelyn: Changpu. Yes, from China. Of course, I had to help them a bit,

          greasing the bureaucratic wheels.

Charlie: You bribed someone?

Evelyn: Oh, don't be ridiculous. I merely slept with a commie. (S02E14)

Charlie and Alan are taken aback upon seeing that other people, ironically the same family configuration as their own, have replaced them. This scene can also be seen as a pun on people mistaking Alan and Charlie and later Alan and Walden for a homosexual couple. They feel threatened and try to get on better terms with their mother, as Evelyn has planned. While it is interesting to see yet again how Evelyn is capable of subverting the hierarchy and power positions between men and women, it is equally intriguing that she used her homosexual acquaintances for her ploy. Hegemonic males like Charlie in the gender hierarchy typically subordinate both women as well as homosexual men. In her attempt to gain the upper hand, Evelyn uses Roger, Philip, and Changpu as instruments to subvert the power relations in the hierarchy, as well as for comic relief. Consequently, it seems that not only hegemonic males, but women as well take a higher position in the gender hierarchy than homosexual men since Roger and Philip are used as objects in Evelyn's scheme.

    Concerning her mothering skills, she does not treat her sons equally. Evelyn considers Charlie to be her good son (S09E22), due to him being able to support himself and any potential family that he might have one day and embodying what is expected of men in society. Her view of Charlie demonstrates that she has stereotypical opinions about men. She often makes derogatory remarks about Alan's behavior and financial situation. However, after Charlie passes and they open his safe-deposit box she also shows a dismissive attitude towards her once good son:

Evelyn: Actually I was quite surprised what was in there.

Alan: What the hell is this?

Evelyn: Charlie's journal.

Alan: Charlie kept a journal?

Evelyn: Your brother was a very complex man. Perhaps he needed a safe place to express his deepest emptions and innermost thoughts or some such nonsense. (S09E07)

This exchange between Evelyn and Alan, aside from ruining a potential mother-son moment, shows that Evelyn shares the stereotyped beliefs about men having to suppress emotionality and act as the strong man. This particular view explains the source of Charlie's behavior. Since this patriarchal image was the ideal his mother considered, he tried to conform to it in an effort to please her.

Another recurring topic of discussion is Evelyn's sexual life. Similarly to her husband's death not preventing her from pursuing her professional interests, it does not stop her from satisfying her sexual needs. In addition to Evelyn being highly sexually active, she is portrayed as a promiscuous woman exploring more than mere traditional intercourse such as SM, a fact she openly acknowledges (S09E02). In fact, her promiscuous and experimental nature dates back to her marriage, during which she and her husband engaged in sexual activities with other couples (S04E11). Moreover, several characters in addition to Evelyn herself often hint at her having sexual relationships with women. This rumor is later confirmed when she enters a relationship with Jean, the mother of Alan's long-term love interest, Lyndsey (S09E19). Evelyn is a character who deliberately crosses the boundaries of the traditional female realm. This mentality leads to a disturbance in the dominance of the male realm. In a way Evelyn sets the tone for the other female characters who enter the scene. They and Evelyn alike openly challenge the patriarchal order, which results in a reevaluation of masculine identity, as previously demonstrated.

Her sexual prowess also rivals that of Charlie's. The "cougar-image" emphasizes her strong sexuality and dominant position in comparison to younger men, who assume the role of the "prey" in this metaphor. Although this stereotype possesses a negative connotation towards older women, the behavior of seeking a younger sexual partner is not all dissimilar from Charlie's behavior. This similarity hints at a double standard in society. Therefore, Evelyn actually adopts a more masculine stance toward this aspect of searching for lovers. In the following scene, Alan characterizes this image of his mother:

> Alan: Okay, well, just a little head-up before you journey to the caves of Mordor. My mother has what you might call a, uh, proclivity for younger men.
>
> Walden: You mean she's like a cougar?
>
> Alan: No, she's not like a cougar. She's the mother of all cougars.
>
> Walden: So, kind of an über-cougar?
>
> Alan   A super-duper über-cougar. (S09E07)

This depiction of Evelyn as the superlative cougar demonstrates that no young man can escape her claws. Interestingly enough, Walden does sleep with her in the end. Evelyn, therefore, occupies a dominant sexual position, which traditionally would be occupied by a man. Her assumption of male roles casts her as an unnatural woman, which would explain the insults she receives from her sons. However, they are ineffectual in hindering Evelyn from her pursuits.

Consequently, Evelyn can be seen as a representative of the modern woman. She has achieved all the goals second-wave feminists have long fought for, namely professional success, financial independence from men and sexual liberation (Gordon 154; in Glitre 18). Furthermore, in the sitcom's long history of depicting

women, she is the foil character of June Cleaver, television's ideal housewife and the epitome of the suburban homemaker of the 1950s from *Leave it to Beaver.*

3.8. Berta: The Unconventional Housekeeper

The one female character that is featured in more episodes than any other is Berta. Berta is Charlie's, and later Walden's, bulky and sharp-tongued housekeeper, who has worked for Charlie since before the beginning of the show's events and remains an employee at the beach house until the show's end. She appears to be in her late 50s or early 60s, matching the idea of the character being an "old hippie" with a trailer park attitude (Harris, "Conchata Ferrell"). However, her exact age is never revealed to the audience and her last name is unknown even to her employers (S01E04; S11E03). Besides her intimidating stature, scalding remarks, sarcastic and at times cynical nature, Berta is known for the rather unique interpretation of her job and the duties it brings. For instance, she takes naps during her working hours (S06E14), drinks alcohol (S03E16), and shows a reluctance to clean up after Alan and Jake, which on several occasions leads to her most iconic line "I ain't cleaning that up".

While her role as a housekeeper is historically perhaps one of the most stereotypical occupations for women and a symbol of their subordination, Berta refuses to be forced into an inferior role within the household on the grounds of her job. Consequently, she refuses to be called a maid as demonstrated in this conversation among Alan, Charlie and his girlfriend Lydia:

  Lydia: Charlie, you need to talk to your maid.
  Charlie: Ssshhhh, keep your voice down.

Alan:	Yeah, we don't use the "m" word around here.
Lydia:	Why not?
Alan:	Because it's disrespectful.
Charlie:	And demeaning.
Alan:	And wildly inaccurate.
Charlie:	The point is, Berta keeps this house running and more important she is kinda like family.
Lydia:	She's rude, offensive, and vulgar.
Charlie:	OK, exactly like family. (S04E10)

This conversation reveals several characteristics about Berta and her role in the beach house. While her position might be the most stereotypical and the one with the lowest prestige of all inhabitants in the house, she is by no means placed in an inferior position. Since Charlie and Alan have fearful respect of Berta due to her attitude and stature, they avoid the derogatory term "maid" and refer to Berta as the housekeeper, indicating the respect they have for her. Similarly, Walden also refers to Berta as his housekeeper when their professional relationship is a topic of discussion (S09E03). Additionally, the scene shows that the men are dependent on Berta. Earlier in the show, Charlie goes so far as to say that "we're all gonna die," after Berta threatens to quit her job (S01E04). The dependence of the male protagonists, especially Charlie and Walden, shows that they are overwhelmed with the challenges of the expressive role that is traditionally fulfilled by women. Furthermore, she provides Charlie and Alan with her parenting expertise when they are not up to the challenges of raising Jake without his mother (S01E20). Within the house, Berta clearly inhabits a dominant role, despite her occupation's low position and low rank in the social hierarchy.

Given that she has worked hard to achieve her dominant position in the household, which does not mirror her position in society as a whole, anyone who

threatens her role is met with one of her one-liners and verbal jabs. While she does support Charlie's lifestyle, acknowledging that he represents the desired male role in society and the fact that he is her employee after all, she does not refrain from voicing her opinion in front of him, even resorting to intimidation:

Berta: We need to talk. I don't mind your girlfriend throwing the occasional thong or panties into the hamper. I just boil them and sell them at the swap meet. But this broad is taking advantage of my easy-going nature.

Charlie: Now, to be fair, Lydia does have her positive attributes.

Berta: Yeah, well, I ain't hitting any of them attributes, so I don't give a rat's ass

Charlie: All right, all right.

Berta: You know what she said to me, Charlie? She said I need to learn my place around here.

Charlie: Oh, she didn't.

Berta: Ah, but she did. Is that true, Charlie? Do I need to learn my place around here?

Charlie: No, Berta, we all know your place

Berta: And where is that place, Charlie?

Charlie: Wherever you want it to be.

Berta: There is only room for one alpha dog in this house.

Charlie: I know.

Berta: And who is that alpha dog, Charlie?

Charlie: You are.

Berta: Say it.

Charlie: You're the alpha dog.

Berta: Aw. You sweet talker you. (S04E10)

Given the influence over the men in the household, their dependence on Berta and her attitude toward people threatening her role, she is able to assume a dominant position that maids and housekeepers typically do not inhabit in society. Ultimately,

she is granted her way and Charlie leaves Lydia over Berta and her role in his life. Her ability to manipulate the behavior of the men in the household is further illustrated when she causes a big conflict between Charlie and Alan, which results in both of them playing tricks on one another and Charlie almost throwing his brother out of the house before the latter apologized (S04E03).

Similarly to the non-traditional families in the beach house, her own family is non-traditional, having gone through two divorces and raising four daughters all on her own (S09E21). However, Berta embraces the stereotypical concepts of tough-love towards the people that are important to her and directly points out their flaws and mistakes:

Alan: Berta, aren't you gonna introduce us?
Berta: Oh, I'm sorry. Where are my manners? Charlie, Alan, I'd like you to meet my youngest daughter, Naomi. The light of my life. A little angel who swooped down from heaven and landed on a married man's penis. (S04E07)

Such moments occur fairly frequently and sometimes make her appear as if she does not care for her family members and friends. However, Berta does fulfill the role of a caring mother, but in her own unique way. These moments show that Berta has understood the mechanisms and workings of a society that is dominated by patriarchal ideology. She tries to set an example for her daughters, as well as her granddaughters, by resisting the stereotypical belief that women are weak, both physically and emotionally. Essentially, she wants to provide them with the opportunity to lead a fulfilling life in a society that is dominated by men and by adopting an attitude that will defend them against men trying to exploit them. While all her daughters have had children before they were able get an educational degree, she is still a devoted mother only hoping for the best in the lives of her

children (S01E12). In order to defy the stereotypical view of women as the weak sex in society she tries to suppress any emotional outburst and signs of vulnerability (S04E07).

This resistance against the stereotypical image of women carries on during Walden's time in the beach house, who rehires her due to his inability to take care of himself and the tasks around the house. With Jake being stationed at an army camp in Japan, Walden, Alan and Berta become closer and create their own ersatz-family. However, she clashes with Walden as he basically offers to pay her salary without her actually working at the beach house, due to her age and throwing her back out during work. Berta is infuriated, since she does not want to be someone's charity case and is unwilling to show vulnerability (S11E03). This particular case shows that she is so concerned with defending her position of semi-independence in patriarchal society despite her very unfavorable occupation. Consequently, she mistakes a nice gesture for Walden making her a charity case and therefore subordinating her through his financial resources. This reaction once again shows, how she represents the struggle of women trying to avoid exploitation and subordination in patriarchal society.

Although Berta represents women's resistance to the stereotypical classification of being weak, she herself maintains attitudes that are infused with (male) stereotypes. She refuses to share her feelings, normally a trait associated with men. Additionally she often meets men who openly discuss their feelings with snarky remarks. Consequently, Alan and Walden are often on the receiving end of her one-liners and disparaging comments about their need to express their emotions. Arguably one of most humorous incidents is her response "Back off, Zippy. If you want pillow talk you gotta spoon me first," to Alan's need to

communicate after intercourse, a need he cannot satisfy with Kandi (S03E21). The adoption of stereotypical male perspectives represents her survival strategy of living in a world dominated by men, in a way not dissimilar from Evelyn. Her appearance and behavior actually bring the image of Rosanne Conner to mind. As previously discussed, Rosanne also introduced a new image of the female in the sitcom.

Overall, Berta is a fascinating character due to the way she responds to stereotypes and how she manages to succeed in a society that is shaped by the needs and ideology of the patriarchy. She does not comply with the gender stereotypes and role expectations about her occupation, which in return provides her with the possibility to do as she pleases in her private and professional life. Berta represents a parodied interpretation of the woman as keeper of the domestic realm. Traditionally, the husband maintained a high level of respect once returning home from work and would be catered to by the wife. Berta, however, frequently belittles this respect toward men at home by expressing her dominance as the "alpha dog" and having the men so heavily dependent upon her. She essentially subverts the subservient position of a woman as a maid.

3.9. Women & Gender Stereotypes in *Two and a Half Men*

Due to the show's focus on the men trying to find their significant others, a plethora of female characters have appeared during the 262 episodes. According to the genre conventions of the situation comedy, *Two and a Half Men*, like many of its predecessors in the genre of domestic sitcoms, relies heavily on stereotypes when depicting female characters. This section offers an overview on a few of the most salient stereotypes.

Morgan and Manis have pointed out that female characters on television are frequently limited to their own home (947). Within this setting, they are supposed to maintain order within the family and tend to the needs of its members. Due to the focus on domestic order and the well-being of their loved ones, women are excluded from the professional realm. Interestingly enough, *Two and a Half Men* does not prolong this tradition. Due to the show's premise, the male protagonists are the ones who are confined to the domestic realm, whereas the women pursue professional careers. For instance, Charlie's long-term love interests were often seen in their professional environment, the dance school and theatre in the case of the ballet dancer Mia, as well as the courtroom and official function for Linda, a judge. His longest on-screen relationship with Chelsea frequently portrayed her meeting Charlie during her lunch break, leaving his house to go to work, and working on her laptop in bed. Surprisingly, her actual job is never revealed, but it appears that she has built a successful career as a journalist, which she is able to maintain and balance during her relationship with Charlie. These three female characters subvert the stereotypical depiction of women in sitcoms as well as the beliefs about women and how they are supposed to tend to the household rather than pursue a professional career.

Melissa, the receptionist at Alan's chiropractic office, is a recurring character between the sixth and eighth season of the show and a stark contrast to Mia, Linda, and Chelsea. Similar to Berta, her profession as a secretary to a male professional with a higher degree of education can already be considered a feminine occupation. Initially attracted to Charlie, she eventually enters a relationship with Alan, despite their respective attempts to keep their relationship strictly professional. Such a relationship draws upon the image of a male professional's casual fling at work. She commonly tends to Alan's every wish and tries to be the perfect housewife and

caretaker for him. Her attitude and actions indicate that she complies with the dominant patriarchal ideology (Fiske *Understanding Popular Culture* 49).

In addition to the woman in the working environment, the "gold digger" image is a frequently portrayed (negative) stereotype. Sylvia Fishman, also known as Courtney Leopold, is a recurring character during seasons five, eight, and nine. Initially one half of a con-artist duo who "pick out marks with more money than brains and then take them down the aisle" (S05E17) she would later return to the show in the role that appears to be the physical manifestation of the stereotypical gold digger. After spending time in prison for accidentally killing her partner while they were planning to steal Evelyn's money, she later reappears in Charlie's and later Walden's life. As a gold digger, she is a woman that uses her stunning looks, in her case her tanned, hourglass-shaped body, blonde hair and big bust, and sexual intercourse to engage men in relationships and attain their money. Even though men are aware of her intentions, as in Charlie's case, they are unable to resist her and are willing to be scammed due to the sexual gratification they receive.

Furthermore, she is willing to exploit the weaknesses of men for her material benefit such as Charlie's hedonistic lifestyle, which cause him to constantly look for sexual gratification or Walden's emotional vulnerability after he separated from his wife. Although she acts oblivious to other people's accusations regarding her intentions, she fully embraces the image of the gold digger. For instance, as Alan accuses her of being "someone who's creating a lifestyle from finding wealthy men, and sponging off of them as much as they can" (S09E04), she simply brushes him off and applies a layer of sunscreen as she sunbathes on Walden's sundeck. This event also shows that she is aware that she needs to maintain the physical

appearance that makes her attractive for men of all ages and allows her to lead such a lifestyle.

Unlike the previously described women, Walden's ex-wife Bridget, a recurring character during the last four seasons, represents a woman who defies the traditional notions of what men consider attractive in a woman. After Alan and Walden run into her and her date, a successful plastic surgeon for children with war injuries, Alan tells his friend that his soon-to-be ex-wife attracts special people (S09E06). Alan suggests that Walden's wife picks out rich men and wonders how she is capable of doing so. Unlike the gold digger Courtney, she does not have the looks praised in Western society that men find desirable. Therefore, Alan wonders whether she has any other skills or particular traits to attract rich and professionally successful men, such as a "magic vagina". Her character essentially shows a changing of the times in which women are not entirely judged and valued based on their outward appearance. Alan cannot comprehend the attraction to Bridget as he holds on to Charlie's understanding of what makes a woman attractive.

The vengeful former significant other, be it an ex-wife in the cases of Bridget and Judith or ex-girlfriend like Frankie and Rose amongst others, is another common stereotypical role female characters are cast in. Throughout the show, the majority of women on *Two and a Half Men* are shown to be devastated whenever their relationships end and even more so, when they see that the male protagonists have moved on to new ones. Consequently, they are shown as being unable to handle the break-up, and at times try to get back at their former significant others by interfering with their new girlfriends such as Rose beginning to stalk and befriend Charlie's fiancée Chelsea (S06E21) or Bridget driving her car into Walden's house upon learning about his relationship with Zoey (S09E11). This depiction of the vengeful ex

is related to the stereotypical belief about women being emotionally weaker and less stable than men, which is the reason for their inability to deal with break-ups. Such an image confirms the results of Alfermann (see table 1) and other researchers discussed in the theory section of this thesis.

A final noteworthy aspect is the comparison between the female characters, which contribute to drive forward the plotlines and the many female minor characters, often Charlie's casual sex dates. The range of roles these women, like the ones already mentioned in this section, is significantly wider than those of the casual sexual encounters, especially during the Charlie Harper days. Most of these women do not utter a single line on the show and are often subjected to the misogynistic comments of Charlie. Even during the Walden era, the names of the women in such marginalized roles are unknown and draw heavily from often negative stereotypes. Several of these women fit the bill of "a bunch of starving, crying, gold-digging, crazy-ass bitches" (S10E05). On the other hand, there are recurring female characters such as Chelsea, Mia, Linda as well as the main characters Berta and Evelyn that resist a reduction to common, negative stereotypes. Nevertheless, this depiction of strong women should not lead to the preemptive conclusion that *Two and a Half Men* contributes to a deconstruction of long-standing stereotypes and a new arrangement of the female role as done in other studies, a trend that has been pointed out by Lauzen et al. (210).

4. Conclusion

Two and a Half Men reassesses the traditional norm for families, the nuclear family. The families on the show frequently subvert this long-standing ideal family-setup within society, which was so heavily promoted during the early days of situation comedies on television. The majority of families on *Two and a Half Men* fail to conform to this traditional image. Divorced, single parents with children (i.e. Alan and Jake), dysfunctional family setups (Evelyn, Charlie, and Alan; Berta's family) as well as adoptive families (Walden, Alan, and Louis) are featured more frequently than the nuclear family. These various types of families have emerged due to the changes in society, such as women being entitled to their own professional careers and the fast-paced, at times, individualist lifestyle within capitalist societies. This is not to say, that the nuclear family is outdated and has no place on television or in society as a whole, but indicates that this traditional, for the longest time undisputed family configuration, is now one among a wide variety of family setups. As such, *Two and a Half Men*'s portrayal of the family unit is representative of the changes within American society as a whole.

Similarly *Two and a Half Men* depicts how gender roles have changed within society and since the beginnings of the domestic situation comedy. In these new family configurations, the traditional gender roles as posited by researchers such as Parsons and Bales, Eagly, and others are no longer accurate. Although the show's characters exhibit knowledge of the roles women and men are supposed to fulfill in the social and the domestic realms where deviant behavior is often ridiculed, such deviant behavior, like Alan's effeminate masculinity, is needed to succeed when

facing the challenges of everyday life. The fact that "deviant behavior" is required for everyday survival proves that traditional gender roles are no longer the absolute.

Concerning stereotypes, there is no doubt that *Two and a Half Men* heavily relies on stereotypes, similar to the flock of situation comedies in television's long and illustrious history. Such traditional stereotypes include the committed, bumbling father, the happy-go-lucky bachelor, the immature and childish male, and the female gold digger. However, stereotypes such as the nerdy geek in Walden's case is also representative of the shifts in society as it entered the digital age. Especially the depiction of women in *Two and a Half Men* is heavily infused with stereotypes. On the one hand, several female minor characters, like Charlie's numerous casual sexual encounters embody negative stereotypes about women. On the other hand, the major female characters such as Berta and Evelyn are stark contrasts that represent the image of the strong woman, resisting subordination by men and adopting a more superior role to their male counterparts. Although the positive depiction of such strong women should not be overstated and misinterpreted as the end of the negative, stereotypical portrayal of women, it is definitely a development towards a more egalitarian society and representation on television. This trend supports the claims of scholars like Beuf about the generally positive portrayal of women in the situation comedy.

Two and Half Men negotiates among various masculinities. The show's portrayal of the male protagonists' quest to find fulfillment reveals the different characteristics and ideals of various masculinities. Through his success with women, Charlie is, to some degree, capable of finding the fulfillment he desires, but is ultimately killed on the grounds of his performance of masculinity. This fact could indicate that Charlie's masculinity is no longer the currently accepted ideal, referring

to hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, Alan and Walden are also unable to achieve fulfillment for the longest time despite their understanding of masculinity. Eventually they achieve it through the adoption of Louis and entering long-term relationships with their love interests at the end of the show. This thought of unfulfillment speaks to men's obsession with pursuing the chimera of becoming the ideal man. Since neither of the men can find fulfillment in the pursuit of the ideal, a possible explanation is that the times in which only one performance of masculinity is considered the ideal is no longer valid, and that different masculinities can all lead to men achieving their personal and social goals.

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List of Tables

Table 1: Stereotypical Traits of Men and Women

Dorothee Alfermann, *Geschlechterrollen und geschlechtstypisches Verhalten*.

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Appendix

Deutsches Abstract

Two and a Half Men ist eine der erfolgreichsten amerikanischen Sitcoms seit der Jahrtausendwende. Im Zentrum der Handlung stehen der erfolgreiche Junggeselle Charlie Harper (Charlie Sheen), sein neurotischer und kürzlich geschiedener Bruder Alan Harper (Jon Cryer), sowie dessen Sohn Jake Harper (Angus T. Jones). Über acht Staffeln hinweg zeigt *Two and a Half Men* wie dieses ungleiche Trio mit den Herausforderungen des Alltags als unkonventionelle Familie umgeht. Mit dem Beginn der neunten Staffel ersetzt Walden Schmidt (Ashton Kutcher) Charlie. Fortan versucht dieses Trio gemeinsam die alltäglichen Aufgaben wie eine Familie in Angriff zu nehmen.

Die vorgelegte Diplomarbeit untersucht wie diese über zwölf Staffeln höchst erfolgreiche Sitcom das Familiengefüge, Geschlechterrollen, Geschlechterstereotype und Maskulinität präsentiert. Zu diesem Zweck werden die Erkenntnisse aus ausgewählten Werken und Studien zu diesen Themen präsentiert und mit den wichtigsten Ereignissen aus den 262 Folgen von *Two and a Half Men* verglichen. Dies soll Aufschluss darüber bringen wie *Two and a Half Men* die Familie auf dem Fernsehbildschirm repräsentiert und ob diese mit den Entwicklungen in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft übereinstimmen. Außerdem sollen die Darstellung von Geschlechterrollen, der Umgang mit Geschlechterstereotypen, sowie die von den Charakteren verkörperten Maskulinitäten analysiert werden. Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist zu analysieren ob und inwiefern *Two and a Half Men* dem Beispiel traditioneller Darstellungen in erfolgreichen Sitcoms aus der Geschichte des amerikanischen Fernsehens folgt, oder ob diese dekonstruiert und ein anderes, den gesellschaftlichen Entwicklungen entsprechendes Bild zeichnet.

English Abstract

Two and a Half Men is one of the most successful sitcoms on television within the last two decades with a run of 262 episodes across twelve seasons. The show follows the lives of the successful bachelor Charlie (Charlie Sheen), his uptight and recently divorced brother Alan (Jon Cryer), and the latter's son Jake (Angus T. Jones). Over the course of the first eight seasons, *Two and a Half Men* revolves around this unlikely trio's attempts to master the daily trials and tribulations as an unconventional family unit. As the show entered its ninth season, Walden Schmidt (Ashton Kutcher) replaces Charlie and the three men, once again, form an unlikely family unit.

This thesis analyzes how this incredibly successful situation comedy represents the family unit, gender roles, gender stereotypes and masculinity. For this purpose, an analysis of selected works on these topics is compared and contrasted against a selective close reading of the 262 episodes in an attempt to determine whether the on-screen developments represent the changes in American society adequately. Furthermore, this thesis analyzes whether the representations of the family unit, gender roles, stereotypes, and masculinity in this series are similar to those in television's early sitcoms, or if *Two and a Half Men* can be considered an attempt to reevaluate this norm that was previously promoted.

Lebenslauf

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