

MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS: GENDER TROUBLE AT WORK?

**- A popular culture study of gender in
management consulting -**



Master's Thesis

Managing People, Knowledge and Change

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ABSTRACT

- Title: Management Consultants: Gender Trouble At Work?
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- Keywords: management consulting, popular culture, gender performativity, masculinities, femininity, queer, television, parody,
- Thesis Purpose: The main purpose of this thesis is to add to the conceptual understanding of gender in management consulting, as portrayed through the lens of popular culture. It is further aimed to highlight the reciprocal relationship between popular culture research and the study of organization/ management consulting studies. Thereby, we hope to contribute to the existing literature that treats gender in management consulting.
- Research Question: How does the way gender is depicted on the popular TV Show *House of Lies* break with the masculine ideal of management consulting?
- Methodology: A qualitative study of the US television series *House of Lies* was conducted, using a popular culture analysis approach. Doing so, the concept of discourse analysis was utilized. In addition, we examined the existing literature on the subject. Our research was carried out from an interpretative-critical stance.
- Main Findings: After conducting a theoretical analysis of the management consulting literature, we found it to be strongly gendered, where the notion of the ideal consultant is associated with masculinity that female consultants have to conform to. This masculine ideal is being discursively constructed as opposed to structurally prescribed. *House of Lies* on the one hand adheres to binary gender categories and the masculine ideal. On the other hand, however, it transgresses them by playing with stereotypes thereby denaturalizing established views of gender. Thus, it acts as a parody and a powerful platform for critique and advocates the idea of gender performativity and multiple masculinities.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In a relatively short period of time, management consulting has taken on a significant role in modern organizations (Kipping and Clark 2012). Many decisions within a variety of organizations across different business sectors are being made with the support of management consultants and their presence seems ubiquitous. Eventually, management consulting has become the target of an increasing pool of literature and became a thriving area of research (ibid.). The contemporary, functionalist literature on management consulting focuses on the historic evolution of the consulting business or the client-consultant relationship, to name a few areas.

Much of this literature has also been emphasizing the construction of consultancies. It describes the rigid structures established within management consulting firms. Most often the hierarchical setting is being focused on and the rise within the hierarchy is the topic of discussion (Boston Consulting Group 2005). Rasiel (1999) wrote “[...] learn[ing] a few tricks for surviving not just at McKinsey, but in any high-pressure organization [is of importance]. Whether you are trying to maintain sanity while traveling for weeks at a time, trying to climb the greasy pole to success in your organization, or just trying to have a life while working 100 hours per week [...]” requires a lot from an individual (p. 159). In the words of Toppin and Czerniawska (2005) “tough work, that is hard on body and mind” if it is done in a “good and solid” manner (p.113). The authors thereby underpin the fact that a good consultant has to have a strong attitude. The vocabulary applied has a powerful masculine tone to it that suggests a direct and imperative connection between the tasks and the individual performing the consulting work.

These specifics contribute to the one-sided masculine ideal seemingly prevalent within the consulting industry. This 'ideal' consultant “corresponds to a man's body”, Merrilläinen (2004, p. 551) writes, and must have the qualifications, work orientation and be continuously available on a full-time basis in order to deliver high work performance. Hidden within this type of work are assumptions about consultancy as a gendered industry.

While being a modern, fast-moving profession, consulting appears to promote stereotypical views concerning gender in this profession. Within the stereotypical

thinking applied throughout the industry and in society, strongly willed, decisive individuals are often portrayed to be of the male sex. Due to this categorization men are being considered and are widely viewed as the breadwinner (Meriläinen, Tienari et al. 2004). They are being assigned characteristics such as those mentioned above, necessary to provide for their families. It is claimed that men are head-driven when making decisions, can handle challenges effectively and are not influenced by their gut or heart when handling business deals.

This stands in clear opposition to how women are projected in the literature. Conversely, they have been described as emotionally driven and hesitant to make definitive management decisions (Phalen 2010) that take great influence on business projects. The profession of management consulting is often defined as one that prerequisites the ability to make quick decisions under the pressure of time and/or financial tangents. This results, based on the evaluation of the feminine traits mentioned, in the logical conclusion that women are less fit to become successful management consultants. This exclusion, then, is grounded in gender attributes and the categorized, stereotypical thinking that is being adhered to. Within the framework of organizational theory it can therefore be argued that “men and women occupy different spaces, and in supplement, men and women labor a division over what is masculine and what is feminine” (Munro cited in Hassard and Holliday 1998, p. 196). They are being treated differently due to the societal power differentials between them (Brewis 1998). This clearly depicts that gender roles are being assigned to individuals based on their sexes by both in the professional environment and within society.

Since gender categories are thus assigned as opposed to freely chosen, we agree with authors such as Judith Butler (1993) who argues that they are, perhaps even inadvertently, ‘forced’ onto individuals. Storey (2006) describes this as an unintentional element that should not be underestimated. “Patterned behavior and constellations of ideas shared by the men and women who produce and consume the texts and practices” (p. 39) are being lived and carried over from one individual to another in private as well as professional settings. More specifically, many a time these stereotypes are being accepted as the norm and are rarely questioned.

With our study we are attempting to build a bridge between acknowledging the relationship correlating social and professional life and to discuss as well as disassemble these portrayed stereotypes within the organizational context of management consulting. This we endeavor by applying a popular culture analysis approach, referring to a popular television series.

Popular culture, as a field of academic interest, emerged in the mid-1950s (Hall 1980). It is most often associated with the Birmingham school, originating from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, England (Provenzo 2009). In continental Europe, this research facility was the first to contribute groundbreaking research in this area of cultural studies and sought to challenge traditional, elitist notions of culture as art and aesthetics (termed 'high culture'). They hailed culture as an everyday one, and as made by ordinary people (termed mass culture or 'low culture'). This presented a thoroughgoing departure of previous notions of high culture being a primary focus, spearheaded by the Frankfurt School around Theodor Adorno.

When it comes to popular culture and organizational research, Rehn (2008) declares, "any study of management and organization is always [also] a study of popular culture" (p. 766). Rhodes (2001) adds that organizations also exist outside their physical locations, namely as representations in cultural images that are created as people work to understand and make sense of the institutions that are in their lives. Cultural images thus do not only exist within the context of the private lives but also are being taken into organizations by each and every employee and are prone to constant re-institution, re-formulation or challenging. Rehn (2012), moreover, finds that pop culture has a mirror effect of society to it, arguing that portrayed images are not only adapted to the wider public, but exist in a mutually reinforcing relationship. Accordingly, society is not only influenced by popular culture, but also influences it in turn and thereby creates a mirroring image of organizational theory and popular culture (Rehn 2012).

If society and organizational theory are interlinked this closely, it is only rational to argue that portrayed paradigms and categories can also be projected onto fictional organizational culture as portrayed by popular media.

That is to say, categorizations and stereotypes are being transported by the means of mass media. At times, however, mass media can also evoke a change in the behaviors viewed as normal, thereby attempting to break with the ‘forced’ categories. But as much as modern media has an influence on society, society equally asserts a degree of power in controlling what is being depicted through popular media outlets such as television or in movies (Rehn 2012). This, for example, can be recognized by the fact that the content of television formats and movies in the past ten years has changed. Whereas in the early and mid-‘90s the depiction of sexual intimacies was frowned upon and avoided by the public, it became increasingly acceptable with the change of the millennium. The audience exercised their power over the entertainment industry by expressing their displeasure of such scenes. Nevertheless, although in the beginning adhering to the standards set by the audiences, the entertainment industry contributed to the change of perception leading to a much higher quantity of such scenes in today’s formats. In fact, the depiction of such private moments increasingly became a prerequisite in order to portray the daily lives of fictional characters as closely to reality as possible.

Tyler and Cohen (2008) highlight that “popular culture is a fundamental part of the social landscape that shapes our perceptions and experiences of organizational life” (p. 115). Yet, to date there has been a surprising lack of organizational analyses in academic settings drawing upon cultural studies and it is has been acknowledged as a rather recent area of scholarly inquiry (Rhodes and Parker 2008).

Notable exceptions exist that look at knowledge-intensive professions within the framework of popular culture analysis¹. But a gender analysis of management consultants within the framework of popular culture is an area that has yet to be uncovered in more detail. This master's thesis intends to contribute to this field of research.

1 See, for example, Cohen (2002) for an analysis of how viewers of different cultural backgrounds received the character of and the gender stereotypes in *Ally McBeal*, or Leopfsky et al. (2006) for the portrayal of the health care profession in an organizational setting (at the example of the television format “Emergency Room”).

As Rehn (2008) points out, when studying organizations through the lens of popular culture, the separation of the study subjects in aforementioned high and low culture phenomena is still very much alive but may hamper any true insight and contribution. It can be argued that by analyzing a series geared to appeal to the masses, we place our study within the range of low popular culture.

However, Rehn (ibid.) argues for a need to recognize what he terms hybrid forms of cultural products. These are phenomena that may at first glance appear as low culture, such as a popular television series, but in fact generate effects beyond pure entertainment as they are also filigreed towards managerial practices. Thereby, they address issues otherwise more commonly found in business and consulting literature.

We thus depart from the idea of low culture and place our research within his concept as looking at the series as a hybrid cultural product.

And while television is a medium for the masses, it provides opportunities to gain access to culture and cultural diversity as it is indeed *the* popular cultural form of the late 20th century and “without a doubt” the world’s most popular leisure activity (Storey 2006, p. 9).

To establish a correlation between stereotypical gender images in society (in this case the management consulting business) and the depiction of those in mass media, we position ourselves among Kerfoot and Knights (1998) as well as Fournier and Smith (2006). These authors argue for the existence of multiplicity and fluidity of masculinities and femininities as opposed to 'plain' binary gender theory.

Femininity within the context of management consulting was treated by Sheila Marsh (2008), who dedicated a book to the topic of how women approach and handle a career in management consulting. Judith Butler is “one of the founding figures of queer theory” (Storey 2006, p. 188) and thereby heavily contributed to the research of gay & lesbianism as well as drag and other forms of identification with and categorizations of sexual preferences. Her work, especially the concept of gender performativity, provides a third angle for analytical purposes of this thesis. In her reader on gay and lesbian studies she claimed that any “kind of categorization could be troublesome” (Butler 1993, p. 308) as it could lead to unforeseeable issues when the categorization is challenged. She urges that strict categorization of gender forms a stereotype that portrays a parody of gender itself. Gender is a fluid concept, which

cannot be hardened into categories (Linstead and Pullen 2006) and therefore the attempt to apply categories borders on irony. Our research taps into this and will follow through on the application of specific gender categories in popular culture. We thereby align with authors who argue for a more contemporary treatment of the subject (Rhodes 2001). This is both reflected in our research questions and the empirical material we have selected to utilize for analytic purposes.

Our empirical material will consist of the US-American dramaturgical television show *House of Lies*. This series revolves around team of high-profile management consultants and their professional as well as private lives.

This study inspects the gender perspectives as seen through the four main characters of the show: Marty Kaan (Don Cheadle) who is a Junior Partner at Management Consulting firm Galweather Stearn, Jeannie van der Hooven (Kristen Bell) who functions as the Engagement Manager and Clyde Oberholt (Ben Schwartz) and Doug Guggenheim (Josh Lawson) who both hold the position of the associate/analyst in the firm. Together they form the team of management consultants the show focuses on. The series mostly depicts people who were educated in elitist circles, holding degrees received from the so-called 'Ivy-league Schools' in the United States. Throughout the first season (comprising 12 episodes) co-workers, clients, friends, enemies and family members are being introduced to the viewer, but the main interest is still being placed on the previously mentioned characters. The show's base is set in Los Angeles, USA. Galweather Stearn claims the to be one of the top consulting firms in the market, second only to direct competitor and 'number one' company "Kinsely", which, so could be argued, is an innuendo to the actual number one in the real consulting industry: McKinsey & Company.

For our research aim and interest as laid out prior, we formulated the following guiding **research question** we wish to investigate:

How does the way gender is depicted on the popular TV Show House of Lies break with the masculine ideal of management consulting?

To explore this question, we developed two sub- questions:

1. How is the masculine ideal portrayed in the contemporary consulting literature as well as the consulting industry?

This sub-question will provide an inside view into the 'ideal' (masculine) gender notions as found in both the contemporary consulting industry and within the common literature. In order to answer our main research question of how such ideal is broken, we first of all need to establish what lies behind this 'masculine ideal', why it established itself in the consultancy and how it is manifested therein. We will also draw a connection to gender theory specifics where applicable.

The second sub research question that supports our main question reads as follows:

2. How is gender depicted on the television show *House of Lies*?

This sub-question we added as we are aware that we must in a first step find out how gender is portrayed on the show in order to then discover in a second step how this depiction challenges the notion of the masculine ideal.

We acknowledge that research on consulting themes has been brought to the academic foreground. Yet an analysis of this kind has rarely been executed through popular culture, focusing on how 'forced' categorizations of society are being depicted in the context of fictional organizational culture. As Marx (cited in Hall, Connell et al. 1977) claimed, we are made by culture and we make culture. Through popular culture, it is possible to determine how far the mass media influences society and how society is influencing mass media. Therefore, an analysis of this kind is feasible. It provides a much clearer insight as to how gender categorizations are being applied and whether they are not at all, partly or even fully adhered to without questioning them.

We debate that critically analyzing the gender perspectives of characters on the show through popular culture analysis will enable us to establish a connection between the fictional characters and the expectation of society of different sexes. Moreover, it will

be of interest to discover whether this television format portrays the consulting industry from a functionalist, less critically attuned perspective or from an angle that encourages the viewer to form his/her own opinion and criticize the visualization of stereotypes brought forward.

House of Lies started airing US-wide in early 2012. We will mainly be treating scenes from the first eight episodes as they provide sufficient material in relation to our research questions. Within the course of these episodes, images and identities are established, subsequently leading to a repetition in later episodes, making further viewing for our research purpose obsolete.

The interrelation between the gender categories Hollywood is portraying and the gender types society is applying can be traced within the organizational context of Galweather Stearn. We agree with Storey (2006) who asserts that gender theory is part of a concept in cultural studies that centers on ideologies. These ideologies examine notions such as heterosexuality, homosexuality, homosociality, femininity, masculinity or queer theory, amongst others. Set within the organizational context of a fictional management consulting firm depicted on television, we will examine how each of the discussed characters appears to be 'coerced' into adapting a specific gender role. This, we argue, is being executed in accordance with the gender roles that are prevalent in society. The show offers various possibilities of reading it. Next to the application of the commonly accepted frameworks of masculinity and femininity, we will delve into exploring other possibilities to interpret roles from different angles. The application of those angles is mainly related to the characters of Doug Guggenheim, Clyde Oberholt and Jeannie van der Hooven.

Due to its recent start, the selected series has not yet been researched and therefore represents a valid contribution to the existing scholarly work in popular culture theory.

Our empirical data will be based on the episode scripts in textual form, captured images as well as short exertions found on the homepage of the fictional consulting firm (<http://www.galweatherstearn.com>). To analyze the selected scenes thoroughly, a context-sensitive analysis rooted in discourse analysis will be applied. This includes the interpretation of power relations displayed within the management consulting

team. We are aware that our analysis is subjective and that the scenes analyzed may be interpreted and read differently by other scholars. However, we believe that our research is actively contributing to the area of management and organizational studies, thereby providing other scholars with an opportunity to pick up on angles presented in our research. It provides and adds to the understanding of the masculine ideal as existent in management consulting and treated in popular culture.

The analytical part of this study will be divided into three main parts. Each of the sections treats specific representations of gender on the show. The first part is going to discuss the character of Marty Kaan and the depiction of masculinity with regards to his role. A chapter on femininity follows this. Therein will turn to analyze the role of Jeannie van der Hooven within the team and the characteristics she is portraying in correlation to the job she is holding. Further, we will look at the implications masculine connotations have on female consultants.

The last part will discuss aspects in the show that deviate from the stereotypical presentation of gender on television.

CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

Studying a popular TV series, even in a business studies context, inevitably also means moving in the realm of cultural studies. 'Culture' as a concept is well debated within the social sciences and no single unified definition exists. What can be said, however, is that it culture can act as a system of meaning and information for a group of people (Rohner 1984). That entails culture to have a clearly subjective element to it (Triandis 1994). Therefore, in order to study popular culture artifacts and answer our research question, our methodological course cannot be grounded in positivist/objective assumptions about the social world.

In the following, we will delve into more detail and elaborate on the specific epistemological and ontological considerations that inform our practice of research. Moreover, we have mapped the theoretical approach by which we are conducting our research. Thereafter, we will give a detailed overview as to how we collected and analyzed our empirical material. Also, potential limitations to the study, as well and

thoughts pertaining to the concept of practicing reflexivity while conducting research, will be addressed.

Research Approach – Epistemological and Ontological Considerations

Prior to undertaking any research project, researchers bring to the table their own specific worldviews that will influence and frame their practice of research (Creswell 2003). These worldviews are underpinned by epistemological and ontological considerations.

The term ontology refers to assumptions toward the nature of being and the existence of reality. Ontological considerations of a research process thus refer to how people understand and depict the world (Bryman 2008). Epistemological considerations, in contrast, relate to the nature of knowledge - how do we know and how is this knowledge produced?

These sets of beliefs manifest themselves in specific stances that researchers see themselves embedded in. The researcher's stance influences the employed methodology of a study and suggests how research should be conducted (i.e. quantitatively or qualitatively). Research methodologies – the scientific approach to a research question (Schnell, Hill et al. 1999) – can figuratively be described as being located on a continuum between the two theoretical constructs of positivism on one end and social constructionism on the other (Thorpe, Easterby-Smith et al. 2004).

The positivist approach assumes that “the social world exists externally” and “its properties should be measured through objective methods, rather than being inferred subjectively through sensation, reflection or intuition” (ibid. p. 28). Thus, the ontological cornerstone lies in the presumed existence of a stable and objective reality and any experienced meaning is inherent in that reality itself (Sandberg and Targama 2007). Epistemologically, knowledge is based on systematic observation and careful monitoring of that reality. Research in that tradition aims to discern truth.

This positivist position that has been dominating management and organizational science research for the past 30 years has been challenged in recent times by a steady increase of interest in the social constructivist approach (ibid.). In stark contrast to the

positivist approach, the paradigm of social constructivism follows the ontological notion that individuals in interaction with their world construct phenomena and their meanings (Merriam 2002). Reality therein is not fixed or a single agreed-upon entity but rather subjective and can be multiple. Epistemologically, knowledge is constructed and interpreted by social actors. Silverman (2005) takes up this concept and formulates implications for conducting research. He states that constructivism is “a model which encourages researchers to focus upon how particular phenomena are put together through the study of particular behaviors” (p. 377).

Relating this worldview to our concrete research, working at the interface of cultural studies and management consulting, we endeavor to disclose the way sexuality and gender are shown on a popular television show and connect those to the kind of masculinity that is seemingly practiced in the field of management consulting. Studying the particular behavior of the characters on the show forms a part towards answering our research question. Whilst masculinity does have real material conditions of existence, which we might call 'biological', there are many different ways of representing masculinities in culture and different meanings attached. Accordingly, there is not 'a single truth' or a reality to be discovered through our study, as researchers working in the positivist paradigm would aim for.

In consequence, it is through a social constructivist lens that our research problem is most suitably studied. Consequently, our research approach is mainly guided by constructivist tenets (in line with our own personal stance as researchers).

We concur with (Hall 1980) who argues that cultural texts and practices are not inscribed with meanings on their own that are fixed and stipulated by the production company but instead that meaning is the result of an act of articulation.

Culture, and especially popular culture, is an area where a continuing struggle over meanings takes place (Storey 2006) and texts act as a site where variable meanings can be realized. As we are aiming to bring underlying messages communicated through the representation of gender aspects and those meanings to the surface, we will take an interpretive perspective within the constructionist tradition.

Pointing to recent analyses of popular culture, it can be seen as a site of critical interrogation and ambivalence in relation to management and organization (Czarniawska 1999; Rhodes 2001; Smith and Keyton 2001; Tyler and Cohen 2008).

This capability to locate some of the most insightful and critical commentaries on work and organizations, seems to have been taken up only rather recently by organizational researchers (Rhodes and Westwood 2008). Hassard and Holliday (1998) note that where “organization studies texts present rationality, organization and monolithic power relations, popular culture plays out sex, violence, emotion, power struggle, the personal consequences of success and failure, and *disorganization* upon its stage” (p. 1). Sloane (2001, cited in Panayiotou 2010) adds that film is able to disclose stories that translate into concrete form concepts such as power, ambition, survival and vision.

Aligning with this stance, we see cultural texts such as *House of Lies* as incorporating the potential to contribute to cultural critiques of established meanings and categories (Tyler and Cohen 2008) and their enactment in the field of contemporary management consulting. Thus, there is always also a critical element to studying popular culture artifacts, focusing on questions of how mechanisms work, rather than purely what they mean (Storey 2006).

Hence, for our research, we add to an interpretive view a critical stance. This seems to be a fruitful approach as critical theory “is as much invested in exploring subjective lifeworlds as any interpretive tradition, but brings a critical edge and an ethical tone to [an] analysis” (Prasad 2005, p. 149), resulting in “synergistic and vibrant hybrids” (ibid.).

We would like to point out, however, that we do not wish to purport that because of being socially constructed, a common reality does not exist at all. This would, in fact, render any social science research meaningless. Rather, we concur with Prasad (2005) who argues that a research tradition should not be fixed in polarized assumptions, but seen as a dynamic and “complex ensemble of assumptions, worldviews, orientations, procedures, and practices” (p. 8)

Thorpe, Easterby-Smith et al. (2004) further assert that in practice even “self-confessed extremists” (p. 28) do not consistently cling to one approach. Whilst this appears to be fairly clear-cut on a theoretical level – in practice, the distinctions between the research paradigms blur at the sides.

By the same token, we do not therefore see ourselves within an entirely constructivist, subjective stance. Moreover, we argue that popular culture, to a degree, reflects

society. And if that is the case, there must exist some common understanding and shared meaning of reality towards *House of Lies* amongst the viewers.

Empirical Material

Collection

As mentioned prior, we gathered our empirical material from the new American TV comedy series *House of Lies*, which has been airing on a weekly basis on the Showtime channel. In this show, the viewer follows the life of a group of successful management consultants. This format started to air in January 2012 and recently finished its first season, consisting of 12 episodes, each 30 minutes long (TheInternationalMovieDatabase 2012).

To select our empirical data from within these of 12 episodes, we chose to conduct a symptomatic reading of *House of Lies*. The term symptomatic reading has been coined by the French philosopher Luis Althusser (cited in Storey 2006) and aims to unearth deeper structures beneath the surface of the text. According to Althusser, texts are governed by their “problematic”, a set of underlying assumptions, motivations, ideas etc. Given this “unconscious” presence of the problematic within a particular segment of a text, the text needs to be dismantled and read to shed light on the unconscious and uncover the underpinning assumptions (ibid.), i.e. examining it in a symptomatic way.

Proponents of this approach also concede that there is no single and clear-cut meaning to a text. And as it can have a multiplicity of meanings, the text is ‘decentered’ (Macherey 1978) in the sense that it is a site where conflicting notions not only become visible but also confront each other. Another focus of our reading of *House of Lies*, therefore, was to point to these productions of potentially conflicting meanings in the series, embracing critical theory notions.

We carried out this reading in the way that we undertook several concentrated viewings of the *House of Lies* series. Firstly, we watched the entire series to get an idea of its narrative structure and the storyline. We then singled in on the salient content of what was said, how it was said, done and certain behaviors that were

conveyed. This entailed pausing the episodes and making notes on excerpts we found particularly interesting due to the way they picked up on so-called 'male' and 'female' attributes and how they were treated in the specific context. We also took visual imagery into account (such as clothing). In a third step, among the pool of scenes we had thereby amassed, we purposefully chose scenes that corresponded to the major themes that can be found in the consulting literature. These mostly depicted internal work situations, i.e. consulting work in its organizational context, teamwork dynamics among consultants, the client-consultant relationship. However, we also included scenes that were expressive of the consultant's private life. After viewing the show, it became apparent to us that both key patterns and discourses were formed and tropes were refined as identities were established in the course of the first eight episodes. These provided sufficient material in relation to our proposed research questions, which resulted in the redundancy of viewing further episodes for our research purposes.

In keeping with our research question and expressed aim of the study, we chose scenes, which we believe to be the most emblematic of how gender and the masculine ideal are being portrayed. As we chose to analyze the four main characters of the show under the umbrella that is gender-studies, corresponding scenes were selected. We are aware, however, that this selection is strongly tied to our subjective understanding.

In addition to capturing images through collected scenes, we employed a document analysis by obtaining and reviewing text scripts in written form. This mainly served as an aid for us in case certain aspects could not be understood as clearly (for reasons such as the sometimes fast-paced speech, etc.). Moreover, we consulted five short video clips (around 3 minutes each) found on the homepage of the fictional consulting firm in the series, Galweather Stearn, entitled "Fridays at Galweather". Those were included in our material as "Fridays at Galweather" is mainly revolving around Doug Guggenheim and Clyde Oberholt and the depiction of their relationship as the two of them are getting into mischief at the firm. As Doug and Clyde represent two of the four main characters analyzed, these sketches furthered valuable insights with regard to their roles for us.

We aimed to broaden our research material as best we could with regards to the show and the different and combined methods used for gathering it allowed us to develop a more in-depth understanding of the consultants' experience on the show.

Analysis

As stated, we see social reality as produced through social interaction. But social interactions cannot be entirely understood without turning to the discourses that give them meaning. Hence, reality – and for our purposes, the reality constructed revolving around Galweather Stearn – is also substantiated through discourses. We therefore approached the analysis of our empirical material using the concept of discourse analysis.

The notion of 'discourse' is one that is contested and thus many different versions of discourse analysis exist (Potter, Wetherell et al. 1990; Gill 2000; Taylor 2001). Herein, the growth of interest in especially organizational discourse has seen researchers apply a range of discourse analytic approaches to language and other symbolic media that are discernible in organizations (Grant, Hardy et al. 2004).

One of the major differences looking at discourses consists of the extent to which a Foucauldian frame of analysis is followed (Kelan 2007). In the Foucauldian sense, discourse can be defined as texts and practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Discourses “do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention” (Foucault 2007, cop. 1972, p. 49).

Our own working definition of discourse, whilst taking into account the definition put forward by Foucault, sympathizes with Phillips and Hardy (2002). ‘Discourses’ in that sense, and more specifically organizational discourses, is understood as structured collections of texts that manifest themselves in the practices of talking and writing. They include a variety of visual representations and cultural artifacts that bring subjects and objects in an organizational context into being as these texts are produced, disseminated and consumed (Phillips and Hardy 2002; Grant, Hardy et al. 2004).

Practices of talking and writing, visual representations and cultural artifacts are the key terms here and to analyze dominant gender discourses on *House of Lies*, we will therefore have to take such components into account.

Looking at “talking and writing” may also suggest conducting a conversation or another form of linguistic analysis, but as our focus rests on the meaning of talk (or text) rather than on the actually linguistic organization of the components of talk (such as register, sentence structure, grammar), such analysis seems unfit. Thus, we critically evaluated the spoken language as a meaning-making system towards inherent gender sub-texts and it can be argued that it can be seen as a cultural artifact (Wheeler 2004).

We understand 'artifacts' as objects that societies and cultures produce for their own use (Given 2008). Such objects can provide personal information about people. Artifacts also always “embody specific forms of power and authority” (Winner 1986, p. 19). Therefore, analyzing cultural artifacts used on the show will provide us with further insights of the power relations involved in the construction and “playing out” of gender categories, in addition to more information of a consultant's belief system.

When accounting for “power games” and being sensitive to the context, we aim to look into the way male and female consultant subjectivities are constituted and questioned through discourse. After all, discursive practices in organizations “do not just describe things; they do things” (Potter and Wetherell 1987, p. 6).

Reflections

We have tried to approach our material as reflexive as possible, keeping in mind that a complex empirical material allows alternative lines of interpretation and re-interpretation (Alvesson and Sköldböck 2009).

Yet, subjectivities are an inherent feature in qualitative research (Bryman 2008). Research is influenced by the researcher's basic assumptions, as she or he is the primary element of all data collection and analysis (Creswell 2003). Whilst this enables us to be fully immersed in our research, we must also accept that at the same time, it may be viewed to limit our horizon and compromise the scope of our study in terms of truth or generalizability.

Despite such constraints, we would like to reiterate that our goal in this thesis is not to produce objective truths or uncover objective knowledge as we are working in the interpretive tradition. All reality is per definition subjective, thus there is no *one* true reality to be discovered or explained. And within research of popular narrative, Essers (2012) quotes that “the truth of stories resides in their meaning, their moral and emotional significance, not in the brute facts” (p. 333). Consequently, watching any television program is a selective process and our sense of selves is woven in and out as we are the ones that make sense of its meaning (Storey 2006).

Although qualitative research permits the researcher to thoroughly inquire about social phenomena, bringing a certain worldview to the table may at the same time, conjure biases. Biases are systematic errors in a research study caused by the deviation from the ‘true’ finding through “inclination or prejudice for or against” something or someone (OxfordDictionaries 2012).

For our study, potential limitations of available empirical material could pose such a bias. Our empirical data is provided by one single television show. Only parts are depicted and images are created through the use of (misleading) language in conjunction with visualization. Consequentially, according to Postman and Powers (1992), a television show might not be able to reflect a profession in its entirety.

Furthermore, we have chosen specific scenes over others as they represent a satisfactory sample for each selected character. We do acknowledge that there are a wide variety of other scenes available from the show, which also depict characteristics explainable by and through gender theory. Due to the scope and time limitations and the focus we are placing in our thesis, however, we have decided to include the selection of scenes into our work that best portray the phenomena to be discussed. Therefore, we recognize an exposure to an input bias with regards to the available sources for empirical material.

However, as our research is based on popular culture and the analysis thereof, it can be argued that it is a direct mirror image of what society or at least the producers of the show believe management consulting is about. This is especially so as *House of Lies* is quickly becoming a popular show, indicating that it addresses a potent topic in society and must on some level speak to the viewers. In the beginning of February

2012, only three weeks after the pilot episode aired, it was renewed for a second season. Additionally, it is questionable whether different empirical data, for example gathered through interviews, would furnish us with a broader depiction of the profession in its entirety. Rather, we reason that it would not necessarily provide us with a picture of increased valuation in terms of the reality portrayed, but is simply accessing a different kind of reality. Interviews offer one insight into people's thoughts and subjective understandings, but does the researcher necessarily receive "their" reality – or rather collect pieces/snapshots of the whole that informs interviewee's realities and assemble it according to the researchers' best understanding, creating one of several possible realities? *House of Lies*, with its viewership rising, portrays a relevant topic in contemporary society through fiction and offers a different angle, which in a way reflects a more widely agreed-upon, perhaps ironic, reality.

Altogether, this argument only confirms our epistemological stance of multiple realities existing – there is not one single reality that can be uncovered either through interviews, or a survey or through a popular culture analysis and the like. These methods, instead, just present one way of looking at different realities. In this undertaking, one method is not valued higher than the other as they each make different contributions.

Further reflecting on our methodological approach, we have identified a possible bias that relates to the gender focus of our thesis. It is our aim to analyze the ways in which gender is being constructed as part to depict the management consultant profession. We are, however, aware that we, as females analyzing the largely male dominated consultant profession, are particularly sensitive towards how females are being portrayed on the show. Following our own assumptions, we may render certain comments or scenes more meaningful than others, which may influence how we would evaluate the show's overall stance towards gender issues in general.

Any method chosen when doing research on a television series (or any kind of research, for that matter) requires a specific focus. Therefore we have to determine in advance in what way we wish to execute a research on popular culture. One could certainly engage with the theme of management consulting and popular culture in a

myriad of different ways. Doing so entails utilizing several differing theoretical perspectives and investigating a host of alternate empirical scenarios (Jeacle 2012).

We chose to concentrate on the discourse itself, reading the series as a cultural text with a primary focus on its representative content.

Another focus of research could have been put on the audience of *House of Lies*, which would entail departure from looking at what is happening in the series itself. This approach would favor looking at the viewership and how people incorporate the presented tropes and imagery into their own life (Rehn 2012). We decided against this focus as the show has just commenced and audience reaction is still very little. Consequently, it would not provide us with sufficient material for analysis.

CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

As elaborated earlier, our analysis of *House of Lies* requires a multi-perspective approach, necessitating the review of several bodies of literature. As the series revolves around management consulting, the first part of this chapter will look at management consulting in more detail. Firstly, we will provide a reasonably comprehensive, yet (due to reasons of scope) by no means exhaustive overview of the

field of management consultancy. Proceeding to management consulting literature, we reference the functionalist as well as the critical stream therein.

Due to our inquiry into the construction of gender on the show, we will then proceed to discuss gender theory, which requires the review of specific literature treating masculinity, femininity and queer theory – whereby the latter is being considered part of gender theory. In the third part of the chapter, we will combine the two to enunciate on how we view the management consulting industry as gendered. We thereby hope to explore our first research sub-question asking how gender is portrayed in the contemporary management consulting industry and literature.

Overview of the Management Consulting Industry

We follow O'Mahoney (2010) in his definition of management consulting being “the creation of value for organizations, through the application of knowledge, techniques and assets to improve performance, achieved through the rendering of objective advice and/or the implementation of business solutions” (p. 14). One can say with confidence there is hardly any big or medium-sized corporation in the developed world that does not make use of consultants in one way or the other (Toppin and Czerniawska 2005).

There are several reasons for an organization to enlist the service of management consultancies, such as awaiting solutions to new or continuous organizational problems, enacting a change (and also initiating a change process as a motivator in itself (to overcome situations of inertia, for example) (Huczynski 1993). Furthermore, organizational image or status, competitive pressures or plainly the persuasiveness of consultants' accounts can be listed reasons for the utilizing of consulting services (ibid.). In such wake, the management consulting industry has been expanding rapidly in the last three decades. Since the 1980's consulting experienced a huge growth at a rate of about 10% p.a. with revenues shooting up from US\$3bn to US\$330bn in 2008 (O'Mahoney 2010).

This expansion, however, did not take place in a continuous manner and was abruptly interrupted in 2000-2001 due to the so-called “dotcom” crash. Mistrust in the services that consulting firms offered with regard to information technology (IT) surged and resulted in a sharply declining demand for consulting services (ibid.). Yet the crash

did not prove to be as destructive, slowing growth rather than reversing it. Therefore firms began recruiting again in 2004 in the course of economic recovery in late 2003 (ibid.; Boston Consulting Group 2005).

However, in an almost cyclic nature, client organizations had to cutback spending on their consulting-budgets during the “credit crunch” that plagued the financial markets in the years 2008-2010. Historically, providing financial services has been the largest market for consultancies, in some countries accounting for one-third of the total market (Toppin and Czerniawska 2005). But as it is naturally very dependent on the situation of the market, demand for consulting services forcibly decreased during the credit crunch, but is by now slowly recovering.

The management consulting industry can be looked at and categorized in different ways. O'Mahoney (2010) uses the criteria of the prevailing business model of the consultancy, the type of services offered and the sectors they operate in as differentiators.

“Pure” consultancies operate as solely focusing on consulting work, such as McKinsey & Company. Conversely, “hybrids” have added consultancy as an additional arm, complementing their other business. Such firms include Deloitte, for instance. A generalist consultancy is one that offers many services. For example, Accenture offers everything from outsourcing to systems integration to strategy work. General consultants often work in large consulting firms where they can be assigned to many different roles. “Niche” consultancies on the other hand are usually of a smaller size and tend to specialize in one service area.

In terms of the services offered by different consulting firms, they can vary immensely from firm to firm and across regions. But they can be subsumed under strategy consulting, IT consulting, outsourcing, and generalist consulting.

Strategy consulting is “universally acclaimed as the sexiest form of consulting and one with which students, job-seekers, analysts, and academics prefer to associate themselves” (O'Mahoney 2010, p. 59). Firms such as McKinsey and the Boston Consulting Group represent such strategy consultancies. New recruits regularly come from the top universities around the world.

Recent trends see the nature of consulting shifting from primarily strategic direction of rather standardized operations to a variety of services. These services may include strategic direction for complex, global firms or implementation of business tools for managing the complexities of mass customization across the globe (Zanzi and Adams 2004).

Subsequently, it is understood that the consulting industry is broken down in different sectors, and cultures, strategies, and operations of different sectors vary widely (O'Mahoney 2010). Certain services are different from sector to sector and may require generalist or specialist knowledge.

Management Consulting Literature

In the past ten years, the profession of management consulting has been increasingly researched and widely covered in the existing literature. Herein, the focus is placed on two areas. The first is of a functionalist nature emphasizing the character of the work and the all aspects revolving around the industry (including how to set up own consultancy firms, etc.), outcomes and intentions. Whilst the second focus revolves around the critical discussion of the profession and the extent to which consultants actually do contribute to an organization's development. But, contemporary consulting literature, which investigates gender constellations in the consulting industry in depth, is, with a few notable exceptions, rather limited.

In The Functionalist Perspective

The functionalist perspective presents consultants as experts hired by clients for their ability to create, access and apply certain knowledge (Alvesson and Johansson 2002; Werr and Styhre 2003). It is in this way that consultants add value to the client organization. This often is supported by the relationship between the client and the consultant, as it is of a benign and helping nature. The consultant therein is dependent on the client's cooperation. This dependency results from a situation of asymmetrical

information where the client is in power due to the specific knowledge about the company. Consultants thus need to aim to understand their client's' exact needs in order to fulfill the expectations placed in him/her. If this is the case, the consultant will be in control of the process, solving the issue at hand through the application of scientific objectivity. Thereby helping the client to appear informed and endowed with expertise in their decision-making (Alvesson 1993). This expert status and the emphasis of the “perks” that come with the job (be it in monetary or other terms) ultimately grant the consultant profession a high status.

However, consultants can only be effective in that role if they demonstrate their abilities and certain competencies that it takes to “make the cut”. It is those competences and the general nature of the management consultant profession that much of the functional literature centers around. Publications discuss the ‘right way to get hired’ (Boston Consulting Group 2005), teaching individuals ‘how to become successful consultants’, or encounter “Insider guide[s] to setting up and running a consultancy practice” (Nash 2003).

Other works tend to discuss what it means to be a ‘McKinsey employee’. Rasiel (1999) remarked that his book aims to show the McKinsey way for approaching solutions, as “McKinsey exists to solve business problems. The consultants who succeed at McKinsey *love* to solve problems” (p. 1). Specific details for problems need to be detected, issues broken down, therefore rigorous analyzing, crunching numbers and finding facts is inevitable. Long working hours and limited free time appear as being readily accepted in this type of profession. Rigorous evaluation systems and the hierarchical pyramid nature of many consultancies' organizational set-up often incites ambition and instigates fierce competition – 'either it's up, or out of the game'. This stream of literature talks about the profession in an assertive, almost holy grail fashion.

Consulting portrayed from this stance appears as a tough yet personally rewarding business. It is described as a terrain that is not as easily to be navigated. It requires strong will and determination, paired with ambition, thick skin and little desire for lifestyle that does not merely revolve around the workplace. Hence, this may suggest that consulting is a profession that would naturally favor male employees over females, due to the specific nature of the profession. Within society women are still

often to be seen (only) as mild-spirited family mothers and therefore could render to be an unfit match for such a demanding position.

The consulting profession is indeed harder for female consultants to access than it is for their male colleagues. This is in spite of the fact that women push strongly into the profession, especially since the industry expanded (Ruef 2002). And although the number of women recruited to management consultancies has recently increased somewhat, these organizations remain dominated by male employees (Ibarra 1999).

In this respect, the functional literature on management consulting provides a first, good insight into the profession. It enables us to recognize certain images and how they are applicable within an organizational context

However, rather than engaging deeper in internal dynamics of consulting firms or concrete value provision by consultants, the functionalist literature enforces widely distributed images and notions about the profession. These are mostly portrayed in a light that positively emphasizes the profession's traits from an uncritical point of view. It does not pay further attention to what it means to be a management consultant or consequences that might arise for consultants competing in this profession.

Hence a second stream of literature present in management consulting theory is discusses the subject from a more critical stance.

In The Critical Perspective

The critical view presents – as the name suggests – a more nuanced and critical reflection on management consultancy as an aspect of contemporary organizational life. It shall be pointed out that, though an opposing concept to functionalist views, in reality, a clear distinction between the two is not always. However, for our analytical purpose, we will divide the two strands.

The more critical literature departs from the functionalist assumptions of that of by questioning the knowledge and value that is generated by consultants for their clients.

The intangibility of consulting services offered makes it difficult to pinpoint the concrete value that consultancies bring to any organization. Therefore, the value of consultancy is often placed within the client-consultant relationship rather than in consultancy work as such, transforming it into the key feature of management consultancy work (Werr and Styhre 2003). The demand for consulting services by a client organization is seen to originate from the client's managerial anxiety and identity crises rather than the need to have a specific problem solved. O'Mahoney (2010) phrases it in the way that managers are "insecure individuals who use consultants as psychological and epistemological crutches" (p. 319). A need for "secure" knowledge is created mostly through the shape of management fads and fashions that consultants sell.

When it comes to gender views in consulting, for example, the critique is based on an overwhelmingly male view of the commercial process and nature of consulting (Marsh 2008). This enhances the portrayal of the masculine ideal and flourishes the view of the consultant as informed by professional and managerial concepts. In a situation of high uncertainty, Alvesson (1998) argues, the ascription of gendered meanings may be experienced as reducing ambiguity and works as a defense mechanism. That would explain how the consulting process is a gendered one. Regrettably, neither strand of consulting literature dedicates much thought to this aspect.

As it is our goal to look into the construction and depiction of gender on *House of Lies*, we will in the following section enlist the help of gender theory to illuminate our research problem.

Gender Theory

Gender theory provides us with access to theories that enable a better understanding of the application of gender categorizations within management consulting. While it is acknowledged that gender theory is an extensive research area, our project focuses on notions of masculinity, femininity and the incorporation of alternative concepts.

Recent work on gendered organizational processes highlighted the ways in which gender can be shaped. Formal policies, informal work practices, everyday social interactions, idealized organizational symbols and images, and particularly,

representations of gender account for the most influencing factors in hierarchically ordered dichotomies (Hancock and Tyler 2007). Television, as a form of social interaction, therefore, also finds its place in this list. Kilbourne (1999) sees television as both a creator and perpetuator of the dominant attitudes, values, and ideology of culture, the social norms, myths and stereotypes by which most people govern their behavior.

According to Waters (2005) “stereotypes are used to predict the behaviors of others in common interactions. These are not limited to differentiating traits or personality trait adjectives, but can include expected patterns of behavior, feelings of group members, and identifying characteristics” (p. 7). The stereotypical characterizations of men and women are evident and contain definite psychological and physiological aspects that include actions as well. Usually women are characterized as slender and emotional, expressing associations with domestic life, family, and fashion. Men, on the other hand, are depicted as muscular, powerful and capable, associating them with the image of the foundation of existence, sports and technology (Carter and Steiner 2004; Döring and Pöschl 2006; Picklesimer 2007). This terminology can easily be applied to *House of Lies*, which, at first glance, deliberately seems to portray and elaborate on such stereotypes.

Consulting Judith Butler's work (1990), however, gender does not anymore appear as clear-cut. Instead, it is constituted, mobilized and negotiated through the enactment of discourse. In a similar vein, she considers gender to be seen rather as a performative characteristic instead of a strict biological attribute. She uses the notion of performativity to describe what seems very logical to her – the categorization of gender and gender attributes is senseless when considering the many different varieties of sexual preferences and behaviors. Taking Butler's argument in for our purposes, we could therefore reason that the scripted gender stereotypes as portrayed in the show are not as readily identifiable as they appear to be at first sight.

This has also been remarked by Hall (1980) by claiming “what is important are the significant breaks. [He notes,] where old lines of thought are disrupted, older constellations are displaced, and elements, old and new, are regrouped around a

different set of premises and themes” (p. 2) is where breaks in stereotypical behavior can be noted. With this statement he basically tries an attempt to open the minds and eyes of each individual towards other possible approaches to view social categorization and stereotyping. Where the management consulting literature fails to pick this up in detail, the television series *House of Lies* plays with some traditional views and with expectations that the viewer might have of a consultant character. This results in challenging perceptions related to gender theory by introducing gender aspects that the viewer might not have considered previously.

It could be implied that the viewer thereby is being taught to look behind the prevailing assumptions. Sexuality, in this case takes on a primary role in today’s television culture. It has become more visible and more mainstream (McNair 2002; McRobbie 2004). Nonetheless, some researchers have remarked that gender is not to be seen as a static categorization, as it is implied throughout most television formats and movies. Rather, it has to be recognized as a fluid concept that changes and contains multiple masculinities and femininities (Fournier and Smith 2006).

Yet, we will analyze and discuss the portrayal of gender along the lines of separate concepts in our study (as mass media in general largely continues applying stereotypical gender ideas). This does not, however, mean that we thereby conform to the idea of binary gender codes. Rather, we intend to foster a discussion about the power television shows have with regards to the possible ridiculing of typical images. This, we argue, it does by challenging the viewers to take on a critical stance toward the depiction of gender roles in organizational context on television.

But as nothing is merely black and white in this world, while discussing masculinity and femininity as separate concepts, we will nevertheless need to consider the “grey areas” as well. The concept of homosociality, which is embedded in queer theory, is representative of such an area.

Homosociality picks up on the idea of same-sex friendship and the construction of relationships within a same-sex group (Sedgwick 1985). It clearly expresses the existence and acknowledgment of variations in sexual identities and ideals. The thoughts of homosociality and queer theory, thus, appear as a tool to highlight the different assumptions correlated with gender theory. It provides access to the latest

development in gender assignment and enables a look behind the commonly persisting image of binary gender theory.

Therefore, next to discussing both masculinity and femininity in our thesis, queer theory and homosociality will be included to acknowledge the interrelations between masculinity and femininity. Consequently, the appliance of queer theory and homosociality provides a platform to stay alert of the concept of fluidity and avoid falling into stereotypes.

Masculinity

Within society as well as organizational culture, masculinity is interlinked with a certain male image that has been prevailing for many decades. “In most cases, competence, assertiveness, stability, independence, rationality, and less concern for the well-being of others were indicated to be among the advantages of being male in the corporate world” (Dennis and Kunkel 2004, p. 155). According to Bakan (1966) these male-associated traits are considered more suitable in the workplace and are pronounced as necessary in establishing professionalism. However, these characteristics appear to adhere to stereotypical images aligning with the dichotomous characterizations of gender unfolded above.

In the television series *House of Lies* stereotypes can be witnessed on a weekly basis. The male employees of the fictive consultancy firm are being portrayed as business-focused, assertive and highly competitive workaholics. Although a common appearance within management consultancies, competition is not just depicted amongst the employees of the organization, but even within the construction of the specific consulting team. Research on masculinity terms this hegemonic masculinity (Gramsci 1971), which illuminates the socially accepted ideal of male behavior. The occurring competition is being explained through the desire of establishing a hierarchy within given structures. Masculine behavior that supports masculine hegemony aims to seek dominance over other males and subordinate females. Through competition men are enabled to rise in rank subordinating the construction of an oppositional other (Arxer 2011). In this context only heterosexuality is being accepted, as McCormack (2011) highlighted when he wrote that hegemonic traits are “homophobic, misogynistic, and aggressive” (p. 84). This results in the desire to

compete in order to establish a position within the organizations hierarchy and even within a set team structure. However, Connell (1987) is careful to note that hegemonic masculinity is not meant to be a description of what a 'real man' should be like, i.e. universalize the notion, but it rather represents an ideal set of prescriptive norms central to the way men manage their daily life. Applied to popular culture, it can be established, that this refers to the norms of the ideal consultant, as depicted on *House of Lies*.

In 2006, Fournier & Smith declared that gender identities appear increasingly scripted; rather than being indicative of multiplicity, fluidity and ambivalence, they actually seem undeniable drawn back to basic stereotypes. Hence, masculinity seems trapped in its 'hegemonic' form that aligns it with stereotypical images of control, competitiveness and instrumental rationality. They further elaborated that although masculine identities are potentially multiple, in practice, they take on one hegemonic form that resonates with essentialist accounts of gender. As a result those males that adhere (unconsciously) to masculine hegemony follow the pre-formulated behavioral patterns.

Hegemonic masculinity consists of two key factors, according to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) – namely, domination and marginalization. Through domination ideal traits are established that men adhere to. Marginalization, on the other hand, describes the oppression involved in the ranking system of men based on masculinities. Within a societal and organizational context, they delve into competitions of both rank and acceptability. Should adherence not be displayed, the non-adhering individual would have to fear losing acceptance amongst same-gendered individuals or exclusion from the group altogether.

Escaping this 'ideal' masculinity and its traits can therefore be very harmful within the organizational and consulting context, as promotions or pay raises depend on pre-defined behavior. This is especially evident in management consulting, as the business relies on perfect adaptation as well as on the right behavior.

In this customer service related environment consultants are constantly under evaluation and are being graded with regards to 'promotability'. The up-and-out

system rules a very strict assessment of the consultants, which leads to tolerable results only if the hegemony is being obeyed.

Steve Craig (1992) explains that “masculinity” is looked upon as a socially constructed idea instead of being referential. Social construction, in this context, is interpreted as everybody experiencing and looking upon masculinity in a different way. But this would mean that stereotypes differ, as everybody would create their own ideal image of masculinity. MacKinnon (2003) argues masculinity is a socially learned behavior that is more readily defined by the opposite of femininity. We would agree with his point of view, as stereotypes live off the fact that they are passed on from one individual to the next. Thereby the ‘accepted’ way of thinking about masculinity and its traits is being promoted.

The concept of masculinity being a socially learned behavior was already established in the work of Albert Bandura (1977). He proposed the concept of the social learning theory and by that expressed that socializing is a determining factor in learning behavior. However, the research also noted “what one learns from the social world is dependent on numerous internal factors and not solely on the external environment” (Sigoloff 2009, p. 2). As a result, the upbringing and creation of a self is just as crucial in producing/challenging stereotypes as the mass media, socialization or work behavior.

In more recent work, masculinity is not anymore seen as a static concept, but is rather referred to as multiplicity. Bishop, Cassell, et al. (2009) express that masculinity is not a uniform concept or an ‘essence of man’ but rather is a varying product of cultural and historical forces. In their research the diversity of masculine discourses in contemporary life share some common meanings and what is interwoven with the construction of masculinity is the concept of ‘mastery’ of others and of self. This, so it is argued, is imperative to protect the vulnerability of one’s gendered identity and maintain (male) masculinity. Therein, the control of a man’s emotions takes on a big part of a masculine notion to control the self.

Masculinity is also viewed as a “basic feature of strategy and formal hierarchy” (Fleming 2006, p. 244). The functional literature on management consulting does not

dwell on that further, whereas the critical literature addresses attributes that can be described as important components in the profession. The existing masculinity reproduces discrimination when it stimulates subordinate expressions of feminine desire. Brewis and Grey (1994) argue that women are defined by men and are being put in a domestic role or are looked upon as sex objects. Therefore it is suggested that men control definitions of masculinity and femininity. Given the historic data on gender issues, such as voting rights for women, we are inclined to agree with this, as the stronger role in society is usually being assigned to men (Acker 2006).

Some researchers have attempted to examine this phenomenon within an organizational context. They have found that the treatment of women in a professional setting does not differ from the views society associates with their role (England, Reid et al. 1996). This is especially applicable in professional environments that are known for being domains lead by men.

Femininity

By discussing femininity we work within the gender categorization as pre-defined by society and applied within organizational context.

According to Burrell (1984), organizations are viewed within the feminist literature as sites of female oppression, which is expressed by sexuality and sexual relations that are prominently observable. Brewis and Grey (1994) argue that women are not essentially sexual or emotional, but rather are defined and perhaps constructed in this way by the operations of male patriarchal power. To Deaux (1976) female-associated traits are generally considered less desirable and characterized as expressive or communal. From the traditional stereotyping and assigning of characteristics, it is quite obvious that women do not own any part in patriarchal power. The female role is described as being dependent on relationships, highlighted in labels like “wife, girlfriend, or parent” (McArthur and Resko 1975).

Masculinity and femininity thus are relational constructs – one cannot understand the single construction without establishing a reference to the other. In the course of the past 30 years, however, many events challenging stereotypes have taken place, so that one would assume a change of the prevalent categories. Yet, looking at today’s business culture and company reports it becomes quite obvious that the higher ranks

are still held by masculine figures. As both Powell (1999) and Dreher (2003) remarked, the number of women working in lower- and mid-level management positions has greatly increased. Nevertheless, the positions in top management are still largely assigned men. This could be related back to the stereotypes that women have been and are still appointed. The proclaimed 'feminine' ideal does not support women to hold top managerial position, as it is opposed to the traits that women are said to entail.

As Kerfoot & Knights (1998) noted, in organizational contexts, many women struggle to escape the 'feminine ideal' as described and accepted within society. In that they deny behaviors that are linked to the value of self and autonomy, define meaningful existence as achieved through the care of others, and through displays of social and sexual passivity. Women are downgraded by the masculine-dominated 'rational' environments, which reward aggressive competition. As women are not seen as strong enough, this results in men holding power over applied categorizations of masculinity and femininity. As a result, women, who strive for the realization of a successful career, are often described as masculine or at least incorporate masculine behavior into their organizational life (Muhr 2011).

Femininity, at this point, breaks with the static binary categorizations of masculinity and femininity in depicting behavior that has previously been assigned solely to men. The literature introduces this as feminism that is in alignment with "the 20th century political movement challenging male patriarchy" (Baxter 2009, p. 91).

Challenging the Boundaries

The show endeavors to challenge gender categorizations by questioning them, the attempt of re-defining its boundaries and considering the gaps between those boundaries.

One way of analyzing these "gaps" between strict binaries, i.e. fluid movements within the continuum of feminine and masculine ideals as its cornerstones, may be against the backdrop of queer theory. It represents one of the theories that include gender aspects but does not require a strict compliance with the categories and

attributes that are depicted. Consequently, it supports the riddance of stereotypes by easing the strict separation and challenging of gender perceptions.

Attenborough (2011) stated “we all simultaneously possess a range of identities, roles and characteristics that could be used to describe us with equal degrees of accuracy” (p. 665). When describing people, specific identities and/or characters are being assigned. These naming options represent ‘referential strategy’. The act of choosing to describe an individual ascribing categorizations “serves many different psychological, social or political purposes” (Wodak, De Cilla et al. 2000, p. 47). Moreover, these categorizations are being applied under pre-existing gender conditions where heterosexuality is viewed as the norm while homosexuality or queerness in any other form is being viewed as outside the norm.

In combination with queer theory stands the concept of homosociality. The framework of homosociality was first formed by Lipman-Bluman (1976) who discussed it as a preference for members of one’s own sex. This, however, did not necessarily include a sexual preference but was more to be seen in correlation to social activities. According to Bird (1996), “the concept of homosociality refers ‘specifically to the non-sexual attractions’ held by men (or women) for members of their own sex” (p. 121). Within a homosocial male group the strong bonding may feature linguistic commonalities to construct relationships amongst each other.

According to the Heterosexual Matrix by Butler (1990), sexuality, as we know it, is built on the stable binary gender classifications of masculinity and femininity. Each of these depicts sexual preferences only in one direction, which is oppositional to the other. In short, masculine individuals only show interest in feminine individuals and vice versa. This stability in the gender categorizations favors the definition of the obligatory practice of heterosexuality through this process. However, the stability of the binary gender structure was questioned, when Connell (2005) expressed, “opposites attract... if someone is attracted to the masculine ideal, then that person must be feminine – if not in the body, then somehow in the mind” (p. 143). What this expresses is that individuals can also express legitimate preference in same-sex sexuality under the heterosexual matrix, as long as they define themselves as

following the oppositional gender's stance. As this deviates from the ideal masculinity and femininity the heterosexual matrix is based on, the destabilization of the heterosexual ideal results in *queering of gender*, as it questions its solidity. According to Schlichter (2004) "when heterosexuality becomes the object of a possible de- and reconstruction, the question of the relationship of heterosexual subjects to critically queer activities also becomes relevant" (p. 548). This question we intend to investigate deliberating the roles of Doug Guggenheim and Clyde Oberholt, as they often depict moments that are not necessarily explainable through the sheer lens of both masculinity and hegemony. Therefore, queer theory and homosociality provide the possibility of looking behind common binary gender categories and therefore enable a more thorough analysis.

Relating the above – How is management consulting gendered?

In management consulting literature, female consultants are often looked at differently than male consultants – reflecting the general masculine structure of the industry. Amongst one of the first, Gealy, Larwood and Elliot (1979) have noted that the management consulting industry places disadvantages on female consultants even though these female consultants had received the same kind of training and possessed the same experience as their male counter-parts.

With regard to promotions, scholars have shown that female consultants appear less attractive than their male counterparts. Women have more difficulty in reaching senior levels despite having similar educational levels, years of experience and job performance (Powell 1999; Nelson and Burke 2002; Anderson-Gough, Grey et al. 2005). This phenomenon is referred to as the "glass ceiling" (first popularized in the Wall Street Journal, 1986) - "a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy" (Morrison and Von Glinow 1990, p. 5).

This relates back to both the hierarchical system of the management consulting industry and the gender attributes women are said to possess. Career structures inherent in consulting work are rigid and inflexible. As a result this leaves little possibilities to work flexible hours, part-time or taking a temporary leave of absence.

Consequently, remaining connected to the consulting firm and not missing out on training and promotion opportunities – termed going “of – and on – ramp” (Hewlett and Buck Luce 2005) enforces the gendered perception of the industry. The up-or-out promotion system commonly practiced in many consulting firms does not allow for many off-ramping options and instead often fosters intense internal competition amongst consultants in a bid to rise through the ranks. Therefore, the profession seems to enhance the disadvantage women by adhering to such criteria applied in the promoting process.

Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008) in their study on promotion to partner in management consultancies found that the career development process within the consulting firms is seen as being largely “self-managed”. Successful self-management encompasses qualities such as being proactive and self-motivated in the management of one's career. Self-promotion and networking are examples of such management, strategies with which the interviewed female consultants expressed discomfort (ibid.).

This points to another struggle female consultants experience with the prevalent ‘feminine ideal’. Self-promotion is seen both intuitively and normatively more acceptable for men than women (Miller, Cooke et al. 1992). Women may avoid self-promoting behaviors as it contradicts assigned gender categories and may be met with social censorship for behaving contrary to their gender stereotypical norms. In consequence, acts of self-promotion and active impression management may be dismissed for fear they may be perceived as unfeminine, domineering and aggressive (Janoff-Bulman and Wade 1996). Kelan (2012) suggests that much of the impression management takes place in settings outside of working hours through informal networking activities, making it difficult for women with domestic responsibilities to join. Thus, they lack these essential connections forged during those meetings and considering that networking is extremely important for a career in consulting, this may have negative effects on a woman's career opportunities (Kumra and Vinnicombe 2008).

A second factor that diminishes the female consultant's chances of rising to partner consists of the fact that women will have to fit into a prevailing model that has proven successful in order to advance in the organization. Success and fitness for partnership

in the consultancies therein is benchmarked by the qualities of current partners, which are predominantly male. Thus, women have to adjust to a model that was designed for men (Kelan 2012).

After this “internal” view, we now will turn to look at how female consultant leadership opportunities are being portrayed by the consultancies to the “outside world”. Drawing on Kelan's (2012) deliberation, when it comes to discussing why women should be represented at a senior level within management consulting firms, two main arguments are mobilized: Firstly, consultancies, amongst them the elite firms, aim to convey their conscious awareness of the added value women can bring to the company. Therefore the “resource women” must not remain untapped. Secondly, it is generally accepted that offering opportunities to women appears to be an issue of social justice and company responsibility. Many companies, in fact, include measures of gender diversity and women in leadership positions as a clear and distinct feature of the company. McKinsey (2012) devotes a considerable section of their company careers website to “McKinsey Women”, stressing a plethora of opportunities for women to combine childcare with working at the top layer of the organizational pyramid.

Other research highlights the “extreme jobs” (Kelan 2012, p. 503) consultants have, involving working long hours in a fast-paced, highly ambiguous environment (Alvesson 2004). Project deadlines are continuously tight and client-demands remain a top priority (Hewlett 2007). This 'high achiever' culture suits workaholic personalities but is, as mentioned prior, difficult to juggle with life outside work. Data suggests that women do not fear the pressure or responsibility that comes with extreme jobs, but it is the extended amount of work hours that they find difficult to commit to. Hewlett and Buck Luce (2006) comment that women may be less amenable to high hours as they are more attuned to the associated “opportunity costs” relating to existing families. They establish a direct link between their long workweeks and potential consequences for the wellbeing of their children. That it is mainly women, who carry such distress with them is not to say that mothers are more caring than fathers. Hewlett's research has rather shown more men working in extreme jobs as they profit from the support of an at-home spouse or partner.

Looking at this literature, it can be suggested that management consulting through prevalent acknowledged practices is a gendered realm. What a consultant should bring to the table in order to be successful and “good at what he/she does” is based largely on masculine characteristics and attitudes. It can therefore be established that gender is seen as a determined dichotomy of male and female with specific, allocated attributes. These gender attributes are not emergent and “performed” following Butler's argument. They are rather stereotypically allotted to being male, and in that sense pre-defined. And it is these features that are required in order to advance in the industry. The category of the “ideal consultant” is hence discursively constructed accordingly towards these masculine stereotypical traits as being the norm. These notions guide the perceptions in the organization. Adopting that particular standard to their consultant job, thus, is harder for females as according to that reasoning, they would want different things than men - “female traits- associated” things.

Returning to the example of McKinsey as outlined above, options such as taking maternity leave are rhetorically geared towards women only. The possibility of a male consultant taking time off to devote to his family seems an unfathomable notion. Here we witness again a reliance on established gender attributes where the male is the breadwinner, too goal-oriented to “ramp-off”. The female, in this construction, is to care for the family at home. Certain assumptions about men and women are being taken for granted and dictate the way women and men are seen and talked about. In the case of McKinsey, it follows the unquestioned inference that, it is women who desires to give up her career in order to stay at home for an extended period of time.

Through that manner, the consulting industry itself seems to gender itself. But as conveyed above, it is also consulting research and the functionalist literature that contributes to the gendering of the business as it also mostly rests on the heterosexual matrix when approaching consulting.

The expectation that men and women must both adopt a certain masculine standard to their consultant job in order to advance in the industry is not only hard for women to live due to the discursively designed ‘feminine ideal’. Regardless, this may also prove to be a constraint on men in consulting. According to Sarvan’s study (1998) covering male masculinity in the United States of America, modern masculinity is directed in a

new, more feminized form of masculinity, in which men seek to position themselves in both masculinity and femininity. However, in a masculine connoted industry such as in management consulting, it is expected from males to adhere to masculine hegemony. Within that context, behavior that could be perceived as feminine-laden is devalued and hence (albeit perhaps subconsciously) oppressed. Potentially losing acceptance due to the display of “inappropriately un-male characteristics” can result in the inability to hold on to the claimed position within the hierarchy, which could result in being dismissed from the job.

So far, we have elaborated on how consulting is associated with practices of masculinity. We have also shown how the consulting industry and literature act to perform “self-gendering”. Deriving from that, a number of tensions created by this gendered nature are bound to occur. These relate to linguistic and behavioral aspects that are organized on the one hand to maintain gender stereotypes. On the other hand, they attempt to break with such assigned (female) gender attributes in order to establish one's place in the consulting industry. Interactive aspects such as the work within the consultancy, dynamics in teams, effects on the client-consultant relationship, competition and ranking as well as status symbols all become relevant.

In the following chapter we will explore how these tensions are encountered through *House of Lies*.

CHAPTER IV: EMPIRICAL MATERIAL & DISCUSSION



Promotional Poster – House of Lies

In this part we will attempt a discourse analysis based on the gender construction in the television series *House of Lies*. For this reason we will be discussing the masculine gender and feminine notions portrayed on the show. Socially defined boundaries seem to be crossed and have been incorporated into a profession that exhibits strong masculine tendencies according to common management literature. We therefore will include the angle of queer theory with the aim of analyzing ridiculing elements of gender that may lead to a break of stereotypical behavior. By applying this approach, we offer a stance that reflects gender opposed to the texts the management consulting literature.

The chapter is divided into three parts. First, we will outline the masculinity and its representations on the show, which then is followed by femininity and the implications this masculinity-laden environment has on female consultants. The remaining and last part will discuss queer theory. It will highlight aspects in the show that deviate from the stereotypical presentation of gender on television and the literature.

Masculinity

This first part discusses the prevailing masculinity in management consulting as it is portrayed through the television show *House of Lies*. To accomplish an analysis as thorough as possible, scenes from the show will be evaluated. The criterion for evaluation is the portrayal of masculinity in professional and private settings. We view this as necessary to point out how professional life cannot be examined separated from private life. Parts of professional life are always being transported into private life, as work serves to provide identification in social settings (Sullivan 2012).

The overall masculine tone is being set in the series through the way the actors express themselves. Although most conversations are rather fast paced, highly witted and packed with information, the language that is being used reminds more on an after-work sports bar than a highly professional setting. As the language applied is often viewed as male territory, the viewer hashes the impression that its application is a requirement of the profession.

The colloquial language applied in the context of most conversations – be it amongst the team, with colleagues or with clients – additionally incorporates sexual terms. We argue that the practice thereof is a way of bonding between the members. Through sharing such talk about the most intimate moments an individual can experience, feelings of closeness and commitment are created. Language here functions as an artifact that is related to homosocial group settings, as it provides a commonality in communication. However, although a sense of commitment is created, the language terms used also introduce a way of ridiculing sexual behavior by talking about it in a fashion that is usually practiced if emotions are to be avoided (Butler 1990)

House of Lies portrays masculinities in different settings. In order to establish a thorough analysis, three distinct areas have been chosen for discussion. It is argued that this is necessary since popular culture not only depicts and influences private life, but also professional contexts. Therefore both have to be taken into consideration to analyze both the depiction of management consulting on television and the prevailing gender application throughout the show. As a result, masculinity will be discussed in

an organizational and team setting, which reflects upon the lived masculinity in an organizational and team context. The second sub-section will be treating the analysis the client-consultant relationship and the masculine ideal depicted. This is then followed by the analysis of masculinity in private life.

Within The Organizational and Team Setting

The following scene shows the management consulting team of Galweather Stearn on an assignment in New York City. On their way to meet the client, Marty establishes that he is close to figuring out the “secret” that he thinks Jeannie holds. Upon being confronted with this, she denies the existence of such implied secret. After the team arrives at the client’s facilities they engage in the preparation of their first pitch. Once it has concluded, the team gathers to take a break together. They leave the offices and walk the streets of Manhattan to find something to eat. Doug and Clyde, who are walking behind Marty and Jeannie, follow their own conversation, while Marty engages with Jeannie to produce the below dialogue:

Jeannie: Why is it so important to you that I have some crazy secret that you're always trying to figure out?

Marty: Oh, it's just 'cause I've, you know, analyzed you using [...]
 my very powerful regression model and there's an 87% likelihood that we are gonna sleep together, so...

Jeannie: Haha.

Marty: Yeah. It's true, so we should just get to know each other...



Episode 1: God of Dangerous Financial Instruments, January 8 2012

This short snippet and the setting of the dialogue portray several masculinities very clearly. Firstly, Marty does not see Clyde or Doug as direct rivals for rank and title within the team. They hold lower positions within the organization and answer to Marty. Therefore, he engages to invest time into solving the mystery that is his other team member is supposed to hold. To this end, he has applied a specific model that led him to the result that he will have to get to know her closer. Furthermore, it predicted he would have intercourse with her at an estimated chance of 87%.

By exclaiming this, he tries to further establish himself in front of her through subliminally suggesting that her main appearance on the team is correlated to her sexuality. He thereby questions her professionalism and integrity of working as a management consultant. Subsequently, he denies her the ability to work in a professional environment and suggests that her main purpose is to take care of his physical satisfaction.

Management consulting is based on researched facts that are backed up by figures and numbers. This functions to forecast a probable success rate of the suggested theory (Rasiel 1999).. Marty does apply this technique in the dialogue with Jeannie, when he expresses that he applied a certain model to forecast the likelihood of their relationship. Usually, one would assume, when presenting such figures to a client, Marty does neither get nor has to expect a sarcastic response. In Jeannie's case, however, the response is laughter, underpinning her desire of wanting to be taken seriously on the job and therefore belittling Marty's probability rate. While she expresses her surprise of this result, Marty's reply to Jeannie's amusement is expressed in a rather cold, unappreciative facial expression. He looks at her reaction, yet does not join her to establish his exclamation as a joke. Moreover so, he remains serious and underpins his claim by saying they should get to know each other. Thereby he is implying that his remark is to be taken serious, resulting in a genuine objectification of her persona.

Hegemonic behavior is not only applied with outsiders but also occurs within an already existing group (Bird 1996). The management consulting team around Marty Kaan represents such a group. He leads the team and therefore holds the reigns in his hands. Hegemonic behavior involves a strict ranking system similar to the one visible here In order to apply a ranking system this rigid, each individual must know

its place and function. Ranks are being assigned on a matter of exercising power over masculine figures with less power. This behavior is sometimes depicted through a rivalry, literally fighting with words for respect and the lead position. Marty, in this scene, applies his superior status and his masculinity to establish rank with a female. Jeannie, to him, depicts both a woman – and the subordinate ‘other’ to be kept control over and a female holding a threateningly high rank within the organization. Therefore she poses direct competition to him and his authority.

By him wanting to figure out Jeannie’s secrets, he implies that her persona is not of interest to him unless she has a riddle for him to solve. When set into the framework of the profession, it can be established that management consultants are being hired to solve problems, make their ways through the mazes of different documentation and find the missing puzzle piece to enhance the organization’s efficiency. We argue that Marty’s interest in Jeannie also stems from this curiosity. Jeannie represents a puzzle to Marty; one that he wants to solve. He views it as a challenge to decipher her and by that triumphing over her. Furthermore, once he has established a reliable reading of her he is able to forecast her next move. This could prove valuable to him, as he would be one step ahead of her in defending his rank within the organization and within the team. Consequently, he would be able to succeed over a woman who declared of wanting to rise to partner level as quickly as possible.

Masculinity in the Consultant-Client Relationship

The following episode portrays masculine behavior in a consultant-client relationship. The team around Marty Kaan is assigned to a client in San Francisco. This client is the owner of NinjaKatz, Alex Katz. He has become rather successful, rich and famous by offering software. Marty and his team have been flown out to fix the on-going situation of the board wanting to eliminate Alex, after he went through with a business deal that was frowned upon by them.

In the beginning of this episode – titled Mini-Mogul – Marty aims to discuss the business situation with Alex. A private back room is chosen for this conversation, which is dimly lit. It is equipped with a leather seating arrangement, a table situated in the middle of the seating arrangement and a bar at the opposite end of the room. At

the time of the arrival of the two male characters, a jewelry sales girl and two bodyguards await their arrival. The girl is wearing a white, short mini-dress with a deep V-neckline top and has long, black wavy hair. The dress accentuates her lean figure, big bust and long legs. She appears to be from the oriental Middle Eastern area. Where as the bodyguards quickly left the picture, the sales girl remained in the picture and took on a vital part in the scene.



Episode 4: Mini-Mogul, January 29, 2012

Alex: Gonna spend my mon-ay on some little toys.
Oh, there she is.

Marty: Hello there.
Alex: Hey, baby.

Sales girl: I brought some very nice pieces from our store collection.

Alex: Yeah, I see that.

Sales girl: And perhaps you're interested in purchasing a piece of jewelry, mister...?

Marty: Uh, Marty Kaan.

Sales girl: How 'bout I make you two drinks while you guys take a look?

(Alex placing his hands on the sales girl's shin caressing it)

Alex: You know what, that sounds great.
You know where the bar is, babe.

Sales girl: I do.

Alex: Thank you so much.

(The sales girl gets up and walks across the room to the bar, while Alex is following her with his eyes, starring at her backside)

Marty Kaan: So you don't have any allies on the NinjaKatz board.

Alex: Ah, no. They all stopped talking to me after the Matrix deal. Bunch of crybabies, right?

Alex: (leanding forward and saying in a low tone):
[...] Can you believe that? Two years ago, a girl like that wouldn't even talk to me.



Episode 4: Mini-Mogul, January 29, 2012

Alex: (now presenting himself in confidence)
Look at me now, right?

Marty: Yeah, she's all over you.

Alex: It's probably because I got the black in the pants.

Marty: I have no idea what you're talking about.

Alex: The black card.

Marty: Oh.

Alex: Yeah, that shit's a pussy magnet, I'm telling you.
[...] And I'm, like, this close to just... mm!
Hittin' that...
(Gesturing sexual movement during intercourse)
You know what I mean?

Marty: Yeah. Word!

Alex: I'm thinking hardwood floors.

Marty: Nah, that's a manicured lawn going on down there.

Alex: No, no, come on. So out of touch. Do me a favor.
Look at her arms. No hair. Do you see hair?
No. She's Armenian. Those fuckers are hairy.

Marty: Huh.

Alex: So what that tells me is no hair on the arms means laser hair removal. You know, man, [inaudible] Vagina!

Marty: Good deduction.

Alex: Yeah.



Episode 4: Mini-Mogul, January 29, 2012

The sales girl returns to the table to offer Marty and Alex the drinks she has mixed behind the bar. By returning, she broke up the conversation for a short moment, engaging in it:

Sales girl: So... See anything you like?

Alex: Yeah, as a matter of fact, I do. (Reaching out his hand to receive the drink, but also gestures grabbing her by the hips)

Sales girl: Really.

Alex: Thank you so much.

This scene depicts multiple occasions in which masculine behaviors are demonstrated. Firstly, the business conversation only takes place between Marty and Alex. As both portray male characters it is suggested through this business setting that important conversations in management consulting take place between men only. Marty, additionally, is meeting alone with Alex. That puts him in a very masculine position entailing responsibility and a high degree of respect. By dealing with Alex alone, Marty establishes his position within his team as the leader. Furthermore, he takes on the task of dealing face to face with Alex, which suggests to Alex that Marty is holding a higher rank than anybody else in the team. According to Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) this masculine behavior can be explained by the theory of hegemonic behavior. More specifically, it reflects the urge of Marty to marginalize his team members as it enables an establishment of rank based on masculinity. In this

case the prevailing type of masculinity can even be further dissected into an external and an internal part. Demetriou (2001) defined the external masculinity with regards to domination over other males – here Doug Guggenheim and Clyde Oberholt, two male team members. Internal masculinity, on the other hand, discusses the dominance over women. The woman Marty has taken authority over is Jeannie van der Hooven, who takes on the only female part in his team.

Further along in the scene Alex proposes that women enjoy his company as a result of his financial status. The scene explicitly mentions the “black card”, which can be concluded to being the black American Express credit card. Apparently, Alex sees this as the only means necessary to establish a closer contact with women. This expression overall suggests two possible readings: (a) Alex has the impression that women can be bought and their only interest in him as a man is established through the means of money and (b) men are in power (over women) as long as they have the financial means. This establishes the impression that women are most likely drawn to him based on the fact that he owns money. He thereby denies women both the intellectual capacity of choosing their partner and the choice of sexuality they want to live. This is in accordance with Brewis & Grey’s (1994) research, in which they theorized that men and their desires define women. As sexual activity is a masculine trait and hegemonic behavior is most likely a result of following pre-defined behavioral patterns, it establishes the sexual objectification of women. Furthermore, it declares them to be most useful in domestic roles, denying women the liberalization to earn money. This positions the woman in a dependable and dominated situation. The constructed scene above suggests that women are driven by money and are easily calculable. An implication of this kind is therefore devaluating the status of women in both a societal and professional context.

Masculinity in Private Life

Masculinity is portrayed in the show through different outlets. One of them is Marty Kaan and his perception of what is most important in his profession – closing jobs. The second episode, entitled “Amsterdam” opens with a monologue given by Marty. It declares how successful he is at closing “just about anybody” and that this is the feature that differentiates him from other consultants. He is that good at his job, that anybody he persuades “opens like a goddamn lotus flower. They let him in and do not even feel it”. As previously mentioned, organizational behavior and private behavior are hard to separate. Consequently, the masculinity Marty expresses at his job can also be retraced in his private life.

One of the figures in the show he constantly has to prove his masculinity to is his ex-wife Monica. Coincidentally, she is also a management consultant. In this Episode both Marty and Monica are meeting potential clients to sell their ideas and companies services to them. Neither of them was aware that they have chosen the same location for the sales pitch. While pitching to his client Marty starts shifting his focus to look outside. This one moment of glazing around has him discover Monica at another table, talking to her client. He squeezes his eyes in a challenging, somewhat surprised manner. Following this incident, he returns back to the monologue he held at beginning of the episode. He states that in order to close the deals a consultant has to “be willing to violate personal space, violate manners, violate laws. Hell, violate every molecule so all that’s left is the ‘yes’”. After having said this, Marty re-engages in the conversation with the client and cheers him on to believe in the right and in the magic that Galweather Stearn can do, if hired.

Yes, it appears as Marty is good at what he is doing, he closes deals and is being awarded assignments. He is successful in his job, rarely meeting a challenge he cannot turn into a victory for him. This may also be due to him not experiencing much of a serious threat to his masculinity in his professional life. However, although not feeling anxious about a possible devaluation of his masculinity in a professional setting, in his private life he fights with threats to his masculine appearance quite a lot. One of the intruders that question his masculinity is his ex-wife. To Marty she is the enemy, the person to stay away from and the feared emancipation of masculinity. Monica and

Marty have a passion for hating each other, and although divorced, they keep having sexual contact whenever their paths cross. A situation like this is portrayed in this episode.

After Marty closed the deal with the client the scene is cut and drastically shifts. It portrays the attempt of Marty wanting to take charge over the strong appearing. Monica in a bathroom of a restaurant. He wants to hold on to his masculinity, which is proposed in the position they have chosen for the sexual act. Marty is taking charge, determining the speed and motions, while Monica has taken on the position of the receiver. Set in correlation with the monologue Marty held at the beginning of the episode it can be recognized that he is assuming the position of the 'closer', who only demands a 'yes' from the other party to execute his business.

Monica: Okay, just fucking finish.
Marty: No.
Monica: Okay, okay. You know what? Time's up. We're done.
 Get off.
Marty: You want me to stop, say the safe word.
Monica: Stop. How about that?
Marty: Say the fucking safe word.
Monica: I don't know what the fucking stupid goddamn safe word
 is.



Episode 2: Amsterdam, January 15 2012

Marty: The fucking safe word is "Amsterdam."
 You made the goddamn word up.
Monica: I didn't...Why would I fucking make "Amsterdam" up? Fuck

you.

Marty: Those...Aren't...The...Words.

(Monica is displaying an action of rage throwing a vase after Marty with the intend of hitting him)



Episode 2: Amsterdam, January 15 2012

Marty: Oh, ho ho... You want to play?

Monica: Yes! Come on. Yeah. Fucking love it. Fucking love it.
You love this?

(Monica is now displaying the emotion of anger and is placing her hands around Marty's neck in an attempt to choke him)

Monica: Get the fuck off me! Yeah, oh, what's the fucking safe word now?

(Marty now has placed his hands around Monica's neck as well to attempt a choking motion)

Marty: You fucking tell me.

Monica: My... Fucking...God! Shit!

Marty & Monica: Amsterdam!

In this scene Monica challenges the masculinity of Marty by telling him to stop, despite him being in the position of holding power over her. As he does not agree with Monica's request he refers to a safe word they used during their marital sexual activities. Monica however, does not remember the word, which is a sign to Marty that he is still in charge. He therefore does not want to confer with Monica's wish to stop and keeps up his motion.

Throughout this first challenge of his masculinity the couple progresses from one position into another. This results into them facing each other, but still leaves Marty in charge. Monica, all the while, assumes a fetal position lying on the side. As Marty is no much closer to her, she sees her private space violated and her powerful position fading. What follows next, can only be described as a drastic action on her part, aiming to re-gain power over her private space. She places her hands around Marty's neck to demonstrate him that she is not shy of using physical violence to stop him. From Marty's point of view this may just appear as another confirmation of his powerful masculinity, as she feels threatened enough to physically assault him.

Marty only started realizing that she is to be taken serious, when Monica brings her hands closer together, thereby stimulating a choking action in Marty. As a result to this direct challenge of his position and the refusal of Monica to say 'yes', he returns the motion of choking and performs the same action on her. All the while, they are still having intercourse on the bathroom sink in the restaurant. By reproducing Monica's gesture of choking him he in evidently tries to fight to keep his masculinity and the power correlated with it. Monica threatens to take it over; she intimidates him to a certain point where he sees himself as the loser in the fight over power and rank. Although he physically holds the stronger position she appears to bully him into believing that he will not get a 'yes' from her. This leads to the suggestion that his failure in private life stands in direct correlation with his professional life and represents a threat to his professional success.

The behavior shown in this scene is explainable through hegemonic masculinity and the ranking system it requires. In a professional setting Marty is quite successful at defending his rank from others who threaten him and by that, his masculinity. His private life, however, represents to be more of a challenge due to the image he has of his ex-wife. He sees her as direct threat and therefore applies all actions necessary to ensure that a woman does not threaten his masculinity. When having sex with her, he usually assumes a dominating position, thereby directly applying rank and control over the sub-ordinated Monica.

By applying behavior that is coherent with hegemonic masculinity he confers the defined characteristics of aggressiveness, misogynistic and homophobic manners.

These, according to McCormack (2011), are a fixed component of hegemonic masculinity. The misogynistic behavior is clearly visible in the context of the relationship he has with Monica. He treats her in a very masculine manner, at times insulting her or questioning her the ability to be successful in her job. Within the misogynic behavior he does not refrain from aggressive behavior, as depicted in the choking activities. Furthermore, the way he expresses himself when talking to Monica is another factor that could be analyzed as aggressive behavior. Although not expressed explicitly within the framework of his relationship with Monica, it is acknowledged that Marty associates himself rather with heterosexual activities than homosexual behavior. It is argued that his constant depiction of having intercourse with females is to be seen as evidence for hegemonic behavior.

Due to the fact that he confers to the masculine ideal his position demands of him and the masculine ideal he portrays in the television series, it is suggested that professional life and private life are correlated. A clear separation cannot be made. This result would agree with the findings of Rhodes and Westwood (2008) whose research remarked this in detail.

Femininity

This chapter will treat several scenes portrayed on *House of Lies* with the aim to represent the image of women in consulting. We argue that through the display of femininity on the show and the depiction of women performing stereotypical behavior, the masculine image of the profession is once again enhanced. This correlates with the findings of Brewis & Grey (1994), who claimed in their study that women in a professional, knowledge-intensive occupation are most likely pushed into a certain role by their masculine opponents. This then therefore enforces the stereotypical execution of images applied through the patriarchal power of men.

The show offers multiple angles, which, by separating them into categories, will increase the shedding of light on femininity not just within a professional setting but also in consideration of the private life. By analyzing each of these areas, multiple characteristics will be exposed and a correlation between private, social and

professional setting can be established. Recognition of this is helpful in the attempt to analyze how women cope with the hierarchical system within management consulting firms. Furthermore it allows estimations about how it influences their behavior and whether they (unconsciously) conform to the stereotypical images of women that are applied in the mentioned contexts.

Anderson-Gough, Grey et al. (2005), in their study of accounting trainees found that although female accounting trainees start with the same prerequisites, often find themselves trapped in the industry's net of masculinities. As a result it takes them longer to progress in their careers, face more hurdles along the way or realize that the prevailing masculinities cannot be fought and give up. *House of Lies* therefore functions as a research opportunity with regards to the treatment women experience in the profession of management consulting.

Femininity within the Organizational and Team Setting

The upcoming scene has been chosen to depict Jeannie's behavior within the set team constellation. We argue, by analyzing her behavior within a team, it can also be estimated how femininity is being perceived in an organizational setting. This, according to Riodan (1997) and Dutton and Dukerich (1991), is reasonable, as the ideals depicted in a team demonstrate a reflection of the application of ideals within an organizational environment.

Jeannie has a clearly assigned role within the team. It is for her, the engagement manager, to support her team members in getting all the information necessary to win projects. Her role also demands of her to take care of the relation between the consulting firm and the client and to report to her boss, Marty Kaan. But as opposed to being 'just' a follower of the leader, in this episode she actually assumes the role of the project leader, putting her in charge of the whole project.

Entitled "Utah", this episode introduces the viewer to the necessity of being flexible when functioning in the role of the management consultant.

The team is flown out to assist a client in Utah in optimizing their already very

successful organization. The aim is to accelerate business development and thereby achieve an even higher turnover. The business owner, a male individual of Mormon belief, did not expect Marty Kaan to be of African-American descent. As the business owner does not appear to be happy about Marty being in charge of the project, the positions were assigned anew within the team. As Jeannie holds a higher rank in the team hierarchy she was entrusted with this position that requires assertiveness, competitiveness and to some degree as well aggressiveness.

Therefore, by accepting and assuming this role she agrees to oppress her feminine characteristics – namely those of caring for other people, showing support and siding with those who appear in need of it. She determinately portrays masculine features to fit into the corporate scheme in order to convince her superior of her abilities. This adaptive behavior has also been represented in the study on a study of a female Chief Executive Officer in a Danish organization. Muhr (2011) notes that this female business leader adapted masculine traits in order to achieve her high position and to be able to maintain it.

As this assignment is closely tied to an upcoming merger and therefore is a determining factor for employment, Marty made it clear to his team that this assignment is of utmost importance.

Jeannie realizes that she now, more than ever, has to show that she is able to fulfill any role she is placed in. Unfortunately, the solutions Jeannie suggested to the client were not well received. And, as a result of a false number, the team nearly lost the project. Only with Marty's help the client was (re)-convinced that Galweather Stearn is the right management-consulting firm to be hired for the project. On the flight back home to Los Angeles, Marty felt compelled to talk to Jeannie about the dangerous situation she had put the team in.



Episode 5: Utah, February 5 2012

Marty:
[...] You know, with this potential merger coming up, all of our asses are on the line? You understand that? Wasn't a rhetorical question, baby doll. Do you understand that?

Jeannie:
[...] Yes, I understand. And I also realize that that bad number might have sunk us.

Marty:
You're goddamn right.

Jeannie:
[...] But the only reason that our asses are on the line, Marty, is because of you. Because you have so little control over your behavior. Because you could not resist slapping around Greg Norbert's manhood, such as it is. You are the only reason that this potential merger exists. And by the way, please, let's stop kidding ourselves... it's not a merger, it's a goddamn acquisition.

[...] Now... now, here comes the fun part for me. Whether I like it or not, my fortunes are tied to yours. Which means I'm also in the crosshairs. Which means you fucked me over, asshole. Okay?

(2 seconds break)



Episode 5: Utah, February 5 20

Jeannie: And you know what? Another thing. I might possibly be the last person on the planet who has known you longer than five minutes and actually likes you, and all you do is shit on me. So you know what? Fuck you.

In this scene Marty addresses the delicate situation in a conversation with Jeannie. But quickly after Marty introduced the topic of the conversation to her, she turns it around and makes it her own. In doing so, she assumes the leading part in the conversation. She reasons in a very calm and argumentative way, just as it would be expected from a masculine individual according to the common stereotyping. Following Marty's initial lead of appealing to her feelings, she turns the conversation around and attempts to appeal to Marty's conscience. This triggers a very insecure and nervous reaction with Marty, who tries to display that what he is being told is insignificant to him.

Jeannie presents herself as a straightforward female lead character, establishing her position with Marty as a strong personality. This is explainable through her adaption of masculine traits. What this scene therefore depicts very nicely is that femininity is not only to be oppressed in context of organizational behavior, but also requires downplaying it in correlation with the team behavior. The direct addressing of the problems, as demonstrated by Jeannie, is a trait that is rarely found in women. Feminine qualities do not comply with this behavior (Mavin 2009). Within the stereotypical feminine characteristics, it is expected of a woman to care about the other person's feelings by avoiding the direct addressing of problems that could lead to conflict.

In the latter part of the conversation Jeannie talks about the treatment she receives from Marty. She clearly voices concern and appears to be personally hurt by the treatment he gives her. Her facial expression depicts her dismay and while she expresses her concern her voice starts trembling and her eyes tearing up. This clear depiction of emotions is positioned along the expected form of a feminine role (Deaux 1976). Jeannie shows vulnerability and thereby admits that she is more feminine than she wants to be. Feminine traits cherish the outburst of emotions and support them. In the context of management consulting, however, emotions are to be oppressed. According to Gramsci (1971) the display of emotions is not within the masculine ideal and is therefore not accepted in the context of a masculine group behavior.

Consequently, the showing of emotions, according to hegemonic masculinity, will result in the loss of acceptance and rank within a masculine group setting. This is especially applicable for females in a hegemonic setting, as they are being acknowledged in a supporting or sub-ordinated position.

Jeannie, in this case, is depicting emotions based on the disappointment of non-acknowledgement for the results she has achieved. The prevailing masculinity she adapted to has not let to a positive acknowledgement of her achievements in her profession. This resulted in her not being able to withhold her emotions anymore. Although wanting to appear masculine her feminine side is taking over as she expresses her feelings. What becomes clear here is that she is fighting with the role adaptation and although she would like to suppress her femininity, she is not able to control it as much as she would like to. By expressing her disappointment in Marty's treatment of her she unconsciously asks for acknowledgement of the work she has been doing. It appears as if she needs to hear the confirmation from Marty that she has been performing well. This, however, Marty rarely does. Especially in the context with clients, as discussed next, she seems to long for recognition. In that way she puts herself in a dependent position, depending on the acknowledgement of her achievement by others. This is where Jeannie, within a team-related or even organizational context, enters a vicious circle. Due to her wish for recognition she suggests that she is not as secure about her place in the team or the organization. As a result, her position is being challenged by colleagues and maybe even by herself, which leads to her wanting to be recognized more and therefore working harder at appearing masculine to fit in.

Femininity in the Consultant-Client Relationship

This far, the masculinity-laden industry, as demonstrated on the show, has been depicting male characters in charge. The following scene changes this perception. However, during a dinner meeting with the client Jeannie loses the challenge of convincing him of the value Galweather's consultants and their concepts can add to his organization. This leaves her with nothing but a lot of stress to come up with another strategy for the client in a matter of hours. Against the advice of Marty she

PowerPoint pages full of garbage.

CFO: That spending figure strikes me as high.
Where... where did you get that?

Jeannie: (Showing insecurity through her lack in speech) I...

Marty: That's FCA.
(continuing the scene in a still shot for explanatory purposes)

From Calvin's ass. Calvin Sobel is something of a consulting legend. The term's an homage, and when uttered with absolute certainty, it is a surprisingly effective answer to, "Where'd you get that number?" It's also FMA. From my ass.
(Now returning to the actual persuasive scene with the client)

Marty: You want to take a look at these?

Although put in charge of the project, this scene suggests that Jeannie, when put under stress might not function as reliably as men do in the same situation. Inevitably this relates back to the stereotypical thinking that women are not made to conduct business deals of any kind. Their character, according to categorized thinking, does not correlate with it. And, even if offered the possibility, they might require assistance to keep their 'cool' and close the deal.

This series, especially in this chosen episode, portrays women working at Galweather Stearn in supporting functions only.

The series portrays several women working at Galweather Stearn, struggling to establish a career. In order to be successful they may try to escape the feminine ideal and break free of ascribed pre-definitions. Although Jeannie has been put in charge of the project, Marty doubted her abilities. By that he applied hegemonic masculine behavior and subliminally 'puts Jeannie back into her place'. He shows her that her attempt to break free from the 'ideal' feminine behavior failed.

When looking at the character of Jeannie from an organizational perspective, the oppression of feminine behavior is confirmed. It is her goal to establish a career and become partner at Galweather Stearn; she wants to be powerful and accepted for her knowledge and skills. Therefore, she has fully emerged into and accepted the masculine ideal of the corporate culture and industry. She moves with distinctiveness, dresses mostly in pantsuits and applies the same language as the male characters

(including excessive swearing). She attempts to apply the same persuasive terminology that her boss Marty Kaan uses when dealing with clients. To her using strategies paired with the right vocabulary is the key to solving the problems of the clients. To her assuming power and control is the key to successfully assume the role of a management consultant. A role, she has recognized, requires very masculine behavior as it is constructed in accordance to the masculine ideal of the profession.

Femininity in Private Life

Episode 6, aired on the 12th of January, deals amongst other things with the wedding preparation of Jeannie and her fiancée. It's every girl's dream to create her own wedding, to come up with a concept and plan out the details as early as possible. A wedding is supposed to be the happiest moment in a woman's life, a moment filled with joy and love. Naturally, it consequently is described as one of the most important memories, hence deserving a very detailed planning.

Jeannie and her fiancée are about to get started on the wedding preparation. Their first way takes them to the local wedding cake specialists, whose passion it is to create custom-designed wedding cakes. Upon entering the store, the owners ask Jeannie and her fiancée detailed questions about the couple's idea of the perfect wedding cake. They try to retrieve answers about the desired shape, taste or color. Neither of these questions the couple sees itself able to answer. Jeannie seems to feel quite alienated, frustrated and uncomfortable when being asked all these questions. She appears to be rather intimidated by the whole situation.

As the couple is not able to answer the detailed questions they ask to see the "book" (a collection of standard wedding cakes). While taking a look at it, and still feeling uncomfortable in the situation she finds herself in, a more determined and dedicated couple enters the store in order to discuss their wedding cake.



Episode 6: Our Decent into Los Angeles, February 12 2012

Store owners: Hi!
How are you doing?

Couple:
(to be married) Good.

Store owners: (Upon being presented with a personal collection book
that is filled with wedding related newspaper clippings)
Oh, my goodness!

Wife-to-be:
Provence. Okay. I pulled this out of a bridal Magazine in

Store owners: OMG. I love this cake.

Customers: Six-tiered hexagon almond amaretto cake, covered in
Tiffany blue sugar flowers and fondant bows, for 200
guests.

Store owners: Beautiful.

Husband-to-be: Well, my wife has great taste.

Wife-to-be: You just said "wife."

Husband-to-be: I sure did.

Wife-to-be: (Producing squeaking noises, expressing her happiness)

Jeannie: (Feeling absolutely uncomfortable with the just
witnessed scene she starts to breath heavily and is
almost hyperventilating. She is looking for a way to get
out of the situation by pretending to have received a
text message.)
Oh, shit... Fucking Marty Kaan needs me to come into the
office today.

Jeannie's Fiancée: On a Saturday? Seriously?

Jeannie: Yeah.

Jeannie's Fiancée: My God, he has no respect for your personal life.

Jeannie: Okay, well, it's my job. I mean, what's not my job is to
[...] be standing here, tasting 14 different varieties of dry
cake, you know?
That's not more important.

In this scene Jeannie is confronted with the image of feminism as pre-defined by society. The couple she witnesses is expressing great anticipation of their wedding day and showing their affection for each other in a public place. This stereotypical behavior is showing Jeannie the sides of femininity that she has been oppressing. This ultimately leaves her feeling very uncomfortable. It almost appears as if she wants to protect herself from turning into one of those “stereotypical” fiancées/wives, when she puts her arms up against her body to shield herself from the witnessed scene. The whole situation triggers emotions of disbelief in her, recognizable on her face. While in disbelief, her body posture and facial expressions suggest that she reverts back to the state of an innocent girl asking for protection. Consequently, she ends up expressing body gestures and facial mimics that stand in opposite to each other.

With her discomfort recognizable she looks over to her husband-to-be, who himself is tied up in disbelief over the situation. When he fails to see her display of the need for rescue, she comes up with a solution herself. To her the only way to cope with the situation is to escape. She wants to leave the store as quickly as possible to create a far distance between her and the picture perfect couple with all their stereotypical traits. To her this is the necessary action to escape the depicted female ideal. The only way she acknowledges as most reliable is to fall back on her work. This includes the line of argumentation and language. She pretends that Marty had sent her a text message, telling her to show up at the office immediately. By expressing this she assumes back the power over her life she felt threatened of losing at that time in an attempt to regain control. In the bakery she is questioned in a rather persistent manner relating to an area that is not within her expertise. This is something she usually does not experience. In fact, at work she is usually the one who asks the, while the clients answer them. Hence, work to her is the only safe place that is part of her comfort zone. The feminine ideal she is supposed to adapt to in her private life is received by Jeannie as a threat and escape can only be found in returning to environment she knows best.

While referring to the fake text message she applies the same jargon she uses at her job to position herself within the organization and the team. She falls back into the masculine pattern that she has learned to adapt to and usually occupies most of her

life. Instead of dealing with the insecurities she feels, she returns to her masculine consultant mode to argue her way around it.

When her partner questions the ‘fact’ that she is requested to come in on a Saturday, Jeannie turns to a defensive mode. She argues that her work is more important than tasting wedding cakes thereby undermining her fiancée’s statement that she requires/deserves a private life. She unconsciously compares her private life to her professional life and clearly establishes that her career and job are more important to her than the prospective life she faces with her husband-to-be. That particular moment expresses that the masculine traits she applies in a professional context take over her private life as well. She shuts herself off and runs away from situations that are unimportant and trigger an uneasy emotion in her. By choosing this path she does not fear to appear careless about the feelings of others – no matter how close they are to her in her life. She assumes a role that lets her talk her way out of uncomfortable situations, puts her in power over other individuals and that lets her triumph over others through the application of her knowledge. The situation depicted does not portray her in this kind of light and therefore requires immediate intervention.

Transgressing the Boundaries

In the first two parts of this chapter we have analyzed scenes from *House of Lies* that displayed masculinity and femininity in rather stereotypical manners. *House of Lies* portrays male consultants such as Marty Kaan as proper ‘alpha males’. Therein exhibiting the typical facets of the masculine thinking, where images of power, ranking and competition and toughness dominate. This behavior is in accordance with the concept of hegemony. The discursive contribution of the ideal consultant here is based on binaries and oppositions as described in the literature. This is also embedded in normative discourses about how males and females should behave in consulting.

But the series offers possibilities for alternative readings, too. The portrayal of consulting as a masculinizing business is only one aspect of what the show makes of its protagonist consultants. Upon taking a closer look, one can see how the essentialist gender categories, as propounded by functionalist thinking in management consulting,

are being obscured and played with in the course of the show. In the following, we will look at Doug and Clyde as well as Jeannie to show alternative interpretations.

Doug and Clyde – A Bromance?

Although colleagues, Doug and Clyde share what appears to be a rather distant relationship. As part of Marty's team, Clyde presents himself as a slick, rather self-absorbed ladies' man, whose sole preoccupation seems to be to “bag” as many women as possible without making any commitments. He is very disciplined and ambitious when it comes to his job. He is “tough as nails” and in that sense follows the consultant ideal. Feelings and emotions are “not his thing”. Doug, on the other hand, is a less secure, socially awkward Harvard graduate who went straight to work for Galweather after finishing business school. He worships Marty as his mentor (which Marty sees otherwise) and very much sucks up to him (which Clyde also does). He has a rather old-fashioned opinion when it comes to women and relationships and for the most part believes in romance as opposed to meaningless pick-ups.

Having said that, he, too, at times displays overtly machoist behavior, swaying between congratulating Clyde on his latest “conquest” and jealousy thereof.

Although their roles in Marty's team are clearly defined, they both hold similar-level positions. This results often times in the attempt of trying to outsmart each other and vying for Marty's approval in the hopes of being promoted sooner rather than later.

Constant bickering and snide remarks mark their conduct towards each other, the latter usually made by quick-witted Clyde. Doug seldom knows how to return the ball and often resorts to defensive comments whilst still determined to “get back” at Clyde.

It may, at first glance, appear that through such interaction Clyde and Doug each work at legitimizing and producing the kind of social relationship that would generate their dominance to subordinate the other. According to Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994) this is typical of hegemonic masculine behavior.

However, spinning into a different direction, the show, at the same time challenges this first reading by incorporating elements that are incongruent with the above described. While Doug and Clyde on one hand are shown as having not much of

organizational environment. The following scene is a depiction of this. Doug and Clyde are being called into the office of Greg, presumably a superior/partner in the consulting firm.

Clyde: Grant, what's up buddy?

Grant: Come on, have a seat.
[...]
Guys, I stopped this before it got to HR because – we don't want anybody getting fired right?

Doug: Fired?

Clyde: What are you talking about? (Disbelieving face)

Grant: There have been a lot of complaints regarding your behavior around here!



Fridays at Galweather: Sexual Harrassment

Doug: Wo wo wo, what happened?

Grant: You two have more sexual harassment infringes than anyone else in this office – by a landslide!

Clyde: Aahhh, yea...but which one of us has more...probably this guy (pointing at himself)!

Grant: This isn't a contest!

Clyde: Right.

Grant: This is some serious shit!

Clyde: Yap.

Here, Doug and Clyde assert their masculinity through the violent control practice of sexual harassment (Ashcraft 2009). However, at the same time they foster their bond by engaging in the practice “as a team”, while still managing to turn the situation into a competition.

What needs to be mentioned in this context is that pursuing gestures and characteristics correlated to femininity is not accepted within the group of homosocial men. Talking about feelings or showing other 'feminine' aspects, so Bird (1996), automatically leads to the exclusion from the group. Nevertheless, feelings and emotions can be uncovered in the relationship of Doug & Clyde. The following scene depicts such a situation. In an episode of "Fridays at Galweather", which is a short clip format revolving around the show, Jeannie, Doug, and Clyde are riding the elevator on their way up to the office.



Fridays at Galweather: Blackout

Clyde: Come on Jeannie Beannie, there's a gun to your head and you GOT to choose.

Jeannie: (visibly annoyed) I'm not playing this game!

Doug: You HAVE to..it's me or Clyde, which one is it gonna be?

Jeannie: Having sex with the gun is not an option?

Clyde: No!

Jeannie: Fine, make your case.

Clyde: Jeannie, here it comes - you can have this - a man - (pointing up and down himself)..

Doug: ...a man who holds a gun to your head!..

Clyde: ...or a guy who has four pairs of snow pants.

Up to this point both Clyde and Doug rival to see which of the two Jeannie would have sex with. They take an 'active role' during a staged sexual encounter and reduce

Jeannie to a sexualized object (and nicknaming her along the lines of a toy to play with), thereby complying to another attribute of hegemonic behavior.

(Suddenly the light goes off and the elevator stops)

Jeannie: Not again!

Doug: Oh shit!

Clyde: (Starts pushing all the buttons) You know what, Doug can you do me a favor, can you pop this back on, can you just pop this back on??

Doug: Pop this back on? I'm not Professor X, Clyde. I can't make things magically move with my mind.

Clyde: Ok we gotta get out of here, you guys know we gotta get out of here, lets get out of here.

Jeannie: Oh my god, you are terrified!

Clyde: I'm not terrified – if I had a choice I wouldn't be here right now that's all!

Doug: Ohhhh, terrified ...I have never seen you like this before.

Clyde: I've never seen you like this before!

Jeannie: (ironically) Oooh good burn.

Doug: God! Who's the alpha dog now bitch? Huh?

As Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994) posit, hegemonic forms are never fully comprehensive and do not completely control usually established subordination. Thus, there is space for such subordinates to validate their self-worth and practice resistance. Here, in a sudden turn of events, Doug receives the opportunity to grasp control and expresses it as the scene progresses.

Clyde: (ignoring the comment)
You know what, can I use your hand... I'm gonna pop through the top.

Jeannie: Clyde this is not a Bruce Willis movie, you can't just escape through the top.

Clyde: (now shouting in panic)
We HAVE to escape through the top!

Doug: Now you listen to me, you have to calm down.

Clyde: YOU have to calm down!

Jeannie: (ironically) Again, very nice burn.
(Clyde fearfully mumbling and cowering in a corner, Doug and Jeannie looking at each other surprised and confused)

Jeannie: Argh, no, I can't.

Doug: (Then turns to Clyde) It's ok, It's ok ...it's ok buddy.
(Going over to Clyde) It's ok, it's gonna be over soon,
come here, I got you (taking and hugging Clyde)



Friday at Galweather: Blackout

Clyde: (whispers)
You gotta help me.

Doug: (starts singing)
Threeee blind mice ...(Clyde chimes in) ..threeee blind
mice, see how they run...

(Jeannie rolling her eyes, turning away and banging her head against the wall)

(Electricity goes back on, Doug and Clyde continue singing)

Jeannie: (Grinning)
Alright - I think I've made my decision.

(Clyde and Doug looking up in sheepish manner)

[...]
If there were a gun to my head, I would force you to
pull the trigger - because I would rather die than touch
either of you two pussies - ok? Have a good day.
(Leaves elevator)

Clyde: (pushes Doug away on the floor when doors open) Get off
me!

Looking at the situation keeping the 'required' masculine ideal in mind, Doug initially rejoiced in the fact that Clyde revealed this hitherto unknown side. As a result, he is in joy over gaining the stronger position as the “alpha dog”. He underlines his point by adding the word “bitch” to his exclamation. In this scene it not only functions as an expletive but also a derogatory term addressing a subservient male.

But, upon seeing the vulnerability and helplessness of Clyde, he quickly turns his satisfaction into caring for Clyde, displaying a nurturing characteristic. This is rather impressive given how constitutive it is for consultants to adhere to masculine traits. After all, if others saw Clyde breaking down and not being able to handle a small elevator problem, how can he be expected to fix clients' problems that are of a much bigger scope than that of an elevator blackout at Galweather? Thus, Doug, by deciding to calm Clyde down, gives up on the opportunity of executing his newly gained control. He assumes feminine traits by not leaving Clyde alone in the corner of the elevator. Moreover, Doug begins to sing 'Three Blind Mice' to Clyde, an English nursery rhyme. If there was anything like 'un-masculinity', one may argue, it could probably be a scene of two men signing little children's songs. Doug and Clyde revert to a level of childish behavior thereby unintentionally conveying to such 'un-masculine' behavior. However, it is argued the masculine image of independence salient in popular culture has put emphasis on negating all traces of such childishness. This, for the above-mentioned reason, *House of Lies* does not conform to.

Clyde, initially having maneuvered himself into a subordinate rank, chooses not to problematize his display of a strongly "feminine" side and its associated traits. The hugging here serves as a protection mechanism and securing a sense of safety for Clyde, who readily accepts this kind of support by Doug. This is completely contrary to what he would have usually done. He either would have pushed him away or mocked him thereby not allowing for a situation displaying behavior, language and gestures that oppose the essential characterization of hegemonic masculinity. It becomes clear that Clyde is overwhelmed with his own feelings. Through these emotions conveyed by hugging each other, both men fail to create the required symbolic distance from femininity that would be required to label it a homosocial interaction. It is clear that Clyde is overwhelmed by his emotions and does not know how to react once the electricity is back on, so he chooses to escape the situation by avoiding dealing with it. It remains unclear how Doug would have reacted had Clyde not decided to make the choice for them.

The show here teases the viewer by starting to erode taken-for-granted gender performances. *House of Lies* not only questions the pre-defined ideals; it even takes it



Doug: No. No! Come on. No. I only played the male parts.

Partner: Oh, sure, you did.

Doug: I did! I only played the male parts...what the fuck is happening?

Will and Partner: Shut up, Doug.

Will: ...You know they wear man thongs?

Partner: What? Nooo.

Will: To hold everything in and up. While they're dancing.

Partner: Come on. Who does that?

Doug: It's called a "dance belt."
(becoming visibly embarrassed)..Just FYI.

Partner: So, so wait. At the end of the Hasty Pudding show, they do what?

Will: They call it the "kick line." This year, 12 sexy
[...]
bumblebees lined up.

Will: You know what? I have a buddy with access to the Pudding
[...]
photo archives. I bet we could dig something...

Will: And... jackpot.

Doug: You know what? Before you say anything...

Partner: What is it? Let me see.

Drag in that sense is one mode of performance and queering can be seen as the disturbance of gender. Therein sexual categories are used as a hook to critically scrutinize the way the masculine ideal is seen in consulting.

Will and the firm's partner laugh at and mock Doug while discussing the specifics about the 'Hasty Pudding' theater group. Throughout the conversation, however, they present themselves as surprisingly well informed about the group's practices ("wearing man thongs") as well as their latest piece (their newest play is called "This year, 12 sexy bumblebees lined up"). This scene plays on the attempts of the two performing masculinity and stresses the heteronormative aspects of the situation, which seem to call for a re-establishment. But given the circumstances and the actual discourse through which they do so makes them appear ridiculous themselves. This is further confirmed by the fact that they take establishing of a distance to Doug's effeminate way too seriously,. As a result the entire scene is turned into a mockery of the established categories and masculine behavior. Doug, meanwhile, may actually appear the less ridiculed person in the scene. After the initial hesitation and embarrassment to admit that he played theater, he relishes and embraces this side of him.

Here, queer theory, 'the parodic repetition of "the original" ... reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural and the original' (Butler 1990 in Tyler and Cohen 2008). That is to say, "the original" being a female, pointing to the actual constructedness of what aims to essentialize.

Thus, queer activities like drag have the potential to reveal the arbitrariness of conventional gender distinctions and identities by parodying them.

Jeannie - The Macho?

We looked into how *House of Lies* not only challenges boundaries, but transgresses them by picking up elements of male bonding beyond being social and cross-dressing. It is, however, not only the male consultants who are subverted into subjects that do not conform to what the profession usually displays. Female consultants, here the role of Jeannie, show behavior that does not fit into the common notion of femininity in the context of management consulting.

In the first episode of the series, Marty and the team fly across the country to take on an engagement for Metro Capital. The presentation does not go as well as planned and it looks like the team will not secure the job. Angered and hungry, they leave the building to get dinner and “have some fun”, wanting to forget about what had just happened. The chosen venue – in very masculine fashion – is a strip club to which Jeannie as the only woman in the pod, tags along.

Having arrived, the team lets loose. Whereas a primary expectation might have been that Jeannie would feel less secure and might struggle, the opposite is the case. Instead she moves distinctively and confidently in a setting where women are downgraded to function as “entertainment”. She is right there with the guys, drinking, partying and seductively dancing with other female strippers, at times even taking the initiative.

Jeannie: Are we billing Metro Capital for this?

Doug: Duh.

Jeannie: Ok, let's go spend their money.



Episode 1: Gods of Dangerous Financial Instruments, January 8 2012

Holloway in her study confirms that the practice of drinking alcohol is a gendered one. The performance requires masculinity, especially in areas such as this strip club “to master the disciplines of drinking” (Jayne, Valentine et al. 2011, p. 60). This is crucial to succeed in dominant male interaction (ibid.). 'Others', most notably women, who do not fit this profile, are therefore excluded from the group, thus losing status and recognition.

In popular culture, excessive drinking habits are something that would also most often not be associated with women. Day, McFadden et al.'s (2004), analysis of print media at the turn of the 21st century demonstrates that interpretations of women's drinking habits in popular culture abide by 'traditional' ideas about femininity.

House of Lies here breaks with this notion twofold, by firstly taking this interpretation itself and turning it around as Jeannie is portrayed to be one heavy drinker that night. Secondly, it also breaks it with regards to the picture of women in consulting. Where the functional consulting literature suggests that women are often disadvantaged in their networking possibilities by being hindered in attending after-work social activities, Jeannie has successfully overcome this barrier and proven otherwise. In addition, whilst women must adhere to come close to the ideal (masculine) consultant idea in order to succeed, there seems to be a limit in terms of their behavior. It is

clearly stated what exactly they are expected to be/do and what manly activities they do not have to engage in. Jeannie provokes by behaving over the top and excelling at what must be seen as male-dominated domain. This goes beyond proving that she belongs in this position amongst the male consultants and asserting it, challenging traditional views.

Jeannie not only escapes the stereotyping and challenges dominant masculinity in the above-mentioned scene, but this behavior can also be witnessed in different professional settings. In the second episode of the series, “Amsterdam”, Jeannie joins Doug and Clyde while waiting for a flight. Clyde, at that time, is telling a story to Doug.

Clyde: ...and then started losing all this weight, and it was really sad.

Jeannie: You fatties talking about diets again?

Doug: Jeannie, I'm sorry, do you mind? Clyde, go on.

Clyde: Thank you, Doug.

Jeannie: That happened to a girl on my floor in college – bulimia. Ah, couldn't even watch it.

Doug: Jeannie, a little sensitivity. Clyde is right in the middle of a very personal story about...

Research suggests that men do much less to protect their health than women (Gough 2006). Concerns regarding food ‘is for wimps’, which suggests that negating or casting aside food-related issues is an act of ignorance to appear more masculine. Consequently, engaging in such a topic thus would appear to be navigating in rather un-masculine realms and behave effeminate. This again relates to the patriarchal mythology of the dominating male (Brewis and Grey 1994). Women are usually associated with topics such as food, cooking, and thus also diets.

Jeannie, talking in a condescending manner, calling Doug and Clyde “fatties” therefore suggests that not only she is taking on the masculine stance in this situation. Moreover so, the roles are actually completely reversed, with Jeannie scolding the two for their feminine topic.

Such role reversal can be seen in other situations as well. Returning to the elevator scene, it is Jeannie who masters the situation with the most composure. She is depicted laughing at Doug and Clyde, calling them “pussies”. This she underpins by

pointing to the wimpy emotions and behavior they start to unveil. In addition to calling them names, she emphasizes that by turning and banging her head on the elevator wall. Thereby she aims to show her disdain of their behavior. She, unlike Doug and Clyde performs masculinity according to the script.

In another instance, Clyde plans on seducing a Mormon woman, but as Mormons practice abstinence before marriage, he explores other options. Yet, when the opportunity to act presents itself, he backs out and rushes to leave the woman's suite while she is in the bathroom. The next day, Jeannie remarks:

Jeannie (to Clyde): Did you seriously not fuck her in the ass?
...You are SUCH a pussy!

Jeannie here constructs a superior masculine self, questioning Clyde's manhood and his ability to take and retain control of the situation.

Doug, in contrast to what studies suggested (Schwartz, Rutter et al. 1998), usually appears to enjoy casual sexual encounters (over a committed relationship). Some researchers, however, conflate anal eroticism with danger, particularly danger to masculinity and male gender identity (Guss 2010). The show thereby plays around notions of homosexuality, with Clyde struggling. While he is initially open to the idea and is found actually bragging about it, he somehow does not manage after all. Women, in general, are believed to view emotional involvement as a per-requisite to physical contact (Taris and Semin 1997). However, Jeannie does not fit into this category. She rather indicates that Clyde is emotionally weak and a coward for not engaging. She actively plays on his unwillingness to take a risk (by taking part in this rather "unconventional" form of sexual behavior (Samuels 1997)), usually a salient component to constructing hegemonic masculinity and the profession of management consulting. She adopts a behavior similar to what Panayiotou (2010) calls the 'macho' manager, embracing the willingness to be ruthless and tough when called for.

By doing so Jeannie renegotiates gender boundaries, which disagrees with studies that have noted the conceptual difficulty to separate "men from masculinity" (Nye 2005, p. 1942).

House of Lies hence does not merely 'question' commonly accepted pre-defined gender characteristics and borders but transgresses and subverts them in a playful way. It thereby advocates the depiction of a plethora of masculinities and femininities, enabling characters to work beyond the dichotomy.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

In this chapter we will summarize our main findings and elaborate on the implications these may have. We further suggest additional research vistas.

Having arrived at the initial outset of our research, we read about a new television show entitled *House of Lies*. This show was set to portray the subject of management consulting on US television starting in January 2012. As our research interest lies in this area, it immediately sparked our interest. We became curious as to how consulting was going to be represented on television, as it is a profession that is occupying an increasingly significant role in modern organizations (Kipping & Clark, 2012). So much so, that in fact, “whether we are aware of it or not, many of us will have experienced the outcome of some kind of consultancy-lead initiative” (p. 1). Toppin sees consulting as “a tough profession” (ibid., p. 118). According to the Boston Consulting Group (2005), “the consulting lifestyle is difficult, faced-paced and demanding” (p. 34). The utilized vocabulary found in these writings, as well as others (see, for example, Rasiel, Sturdy), appeared to have a masculine connotation. Merrilläinen, Tienari, et al.’s (2004) notion of the 'ideal' consultant “corresponds to a man's body” (p. 551) as a profession that requires high qualifications and a work orientation that presumes a continuous availability on a full-time basis.

Upon watching the first episodes, we recognized that the show picked up on the depiction of masculinity and the idea of a gendered consultancy. This reinforced our curiosity about the show. But upon consulting the available literature we quickly realized that there was hardly any scholarly work to be found that looked into the construction and enactment of masculinity and femininity in management consulting (noteworthy exceptions include Meriläinen, Tienari et al. 2004; Marsh 2008). The vast majority of the literature seemed to 'accept' the prevalent masculine ideal in the consulting business. The research we gained access to, if related to gender, furthermore focused on topics of a more quantitative nature, such as examining the number of women in consulting (Vermeulen 2006) or on areas such as work-life balance (Hewlett and Buck Luce 2006; Mescher, Benschop et al. 2010).

Thus, we set out to research applied gender notions found in management consulting. We thereby aimed to contribute to the niche of qualitative studies dismantling and examining gender and stereotypical categorizations thereof within the context of management consulting. To carry out our research, we applied the concept of a popular culture analysis taking an interpretive critical stance. The consultation of *House of Lies* provided the necessary empirical material for this project.

As Tyler and Cohen (2008) point out, “popular culture is a fundamental part of the social landscape that shapes our perceptions and experiences of organizational life” (p. 115). And to Rehn (2008), “any study of management and organization is always [also] a study of popular culture”(p. 766).

Yet, within the field of organization and management studies there is a surprising lack of research that draws upon cultural studies and therefore constitutes a rather recent area of scholarly inquiry (Rhodes and Parker, 2008). Taking a popular culture analysis approach, we also hope to have contributed to this scholarly field of enquiry.

In addition to the value of the concept of popular culture analyses to organization studies as such, we also believe that it made for a good approach to study gender in management consulting.

Rehn (2008) discusses that popular culture represents a mirror image of society and its actors. He furthermore argues that popular culture reflects the stereotypes that are applied within society. Rhodes and Westwood (2008) went even further when they asserted that one of the actors in society is the industry with its employees. They thereby confirmed the inseparability of popular culture, society and the organizations. Popular culture, in that sense reflects a fuller scope of society by focusing on society as a whole. Subsequently, the depiction of a profession on television most likely depicts it in its actuality. Consequently, we concluded that this television show enables the establishment of a connection between management consulting and is contributive to the discussion of gender notions in the profession.

In conjunction with such arguments and our research interest, we formulated our guiding research question “*How does the way gender is depicted on the popular TV Show House of Lies break with the masculine ideal of management consulting?*”

To explore this question, we developed sub-questions, breaking down our main research into smaller areas of research. In order to answer our main research question of how the masculine ideal is broken, we first needed to establish what lies behind this 'masculine ideal'. We furthermore explored why it established itself in consultancy and how it is manifested therein. Hence, the first sub-question intended to discuss the depiction of the masculine ideal in the contemporary consulting literature and the consulting industry, involving a literature analysis.

We were also aware that *showing* how gender is actually depicted on the show prerequisites discovering how the portrayal of gender on *House of Lies* *challenges* the notion of the masculine consulting ideal. This is what our second sub-question paid attention to.

Main Findings

The management consulting literature comprises texts largely written by current or former consultants, renowned 'gurus', and academics also working in consulting. After we conducted a theoretical analysis of the literature, we encountered a prevalent practice of "self-gendering".

That is to say, we located a dominant discourse in the consultants' construction of their ideal selves that seems to prevail in the literature, which is ultimately related to the discourse of hegemonic and competitive masculinity. The idea of 'masculinity' therein rests on what Butler (1990) termed the 'heterosexual matrix'. It describes gender as a binary system of masculinity and femininity and thereby highlights its biologically pre-definition. This entails fixed ideas of what the two categories should consist of and which attributes make up masculine characteristics. This masculine ideal, we found, is based on stereotypical notions about men, which associate males with characteristics such as self-assertion, competitive edge, work and goal orientation, and self-control (Dennis and Kunkel 2004).

As gender is seen as a determined dichotomy of male and female with specific, allocated attributes, we found that, within the literature, female consultants were looked at differently than male consultants. But literature explicitly treating femininity in context with management consulting was, unfortunately, rather scarce.

To gain further insight into the area we henceforth included texts that referred to other knowledge-intensive occupations, such as accounting or advertising. Early research showed that female individuals experience a similar stereotyping (Deaux, 1975) as male figures with regards to assigned character traits. Women were often portrayed as being soft natured, potentially hindering them in fully performing and realizing their professional duties and aspirations in knowledge-intensive occupations. When applied in the gendered profession of consulting, we were able to establish a connection to the claim by Brewis and Grey (1994). This expressed the relation of the predominant masculinity and resulting masculine patriarchal power with regards to femininity.

In order for female individuals to receive full recognition, they consequently have to break free of the assigned stereotypes (Kerfoot and Knights 1998), which usually results in the denial of female attributes. Kerfoot and Knight thereby contributed to the already established work by Butler's (1990) in this area. Based on the empirical material utilized, our research has shown that female consultants indeed constantly attempted to break with the pre-defined and socially accepted ideals that are put on them. As they assumed a role within the organizational context, we therefore found that strict binary thinking must be doubted since gender assumes a rather performative role.

To investigate such claims established in the literature, we then turned to our empirical material, consisting of selected scenes from *House of Lies*.

We observed that the show does not approach gender in a unified, straightforward manner but in several different ways.

Firstly, it adheres to the conformist idea of the masculine ideal, as discovered in the literature, by portraying the lead male character on the show as a tough, driven, controlled 'alpha male'. He enforces a strict ranking system within his interactions, thereby applying hegemonic masculinity. This sort of system draws on the notion of competition that was established as a common and important feature within the consulting industry. Competition, furthermore, so we discovered, assumes priority in a hegemonic group setting, due to the above-mentioned reason. Only by adhering to this system and through the establishment of competing behavior, a consultant can justify for his/her position within the ranking system. The show, in support of this discovery, depicted quite clearly that masculinity is an obvious factor in the career of

said management consultants. Furthermore, the show served as evidence to the theory that organizational behavior and social behavior are inseparable. Each character does not only portray stereotypical ideals with regards to their professional life, but also adheres to those in their private time.

Following the examination of masculinity in male roles, we identified that feminine roles were scripted to remain within the realm of accepted masculine behavior and traits as well. Their roles, we found, were mostly portrayed as following the masculine ideal. The acceptance of the prevailing notions of masculinity takes place due to the urge of wanting to be acknowledged for hard work and professionalism. This confirms the finding of Brewis and Grey (2005), that women are most likely pushed into certain roles by their male counterparts as the stereotypical execution of images is being enhanced by the patriarchal power of men. As noted above, the notion of competitive masculinity assumes a prominent role in management consulting. This pre-setting requires women and more feminine characters to adapt to the settings, should they want to pursue a career in this industry. In consequence, they have to break free from the pre-defined feminine ideals as ascribed by society. This fortifies the belief that the masculine ideal, in consulting, is not a structurally inherent feature but discursively constructed and assumes a normalizing function. As a result the pre-defined gender categorizations are being questioned and deviated from the commonly accepted norm.

Apart from this first distinct depiction of categorical thinking, we found that the show also acts as a parody of these established notions within the industry. It displayed behavior that is not in alignment with the commonly accepted traits and plays on as well as transgresses fixed gender categories. Thereby it broke with the masculine ideal put forward in consulting. Usually tough, determined consultants display feelings and strong homosocial bonds to an extent that undermined their masculinity. In this sense, we found, they were rendered effeminate. The feminine characters, in turn, took on a form of overtly masculine behavior, at times initiating a change of the commonly enshrined gender roles. That resulted in hegemonic males turning into subordinates.

The show furthermore presented male consultants as cross-dressers, who exhibited behaviors commonly ascribed as feminine – thereby behaving 'queerly'. Queer in this context represented the idea of the performance of gender, which according to Butler (1993) is an expression of sexual and private preferences. It stands in opposition to binary gender theory as it acknowledges the gray areas that mark the spaces in between strict femininity and masculinity. “Queering” in that sense de-naturalizes established views, so that new forms of gender performance can be solicited (Butler, in Parker 2002). This is to break with the stereotypical images and to provide new angles inviting the observer to re-think the ‘gendering’ as exercised in society. Therefore, with regards to management consulting, we discovered that queering ridicules the existing notions of the ideal, masculinity-laden consultant. As a result we found that the show takes on a double role: although primarily in alignment with gender categorizations, it also attempts to ridicule the rigid societal expectations as it pointed out alternatives to the accepted norm.

Theoretical Contributions

McDowell (2001) noted that recognizing the nature of gender identities as multiple and relational has marked one of the most important shifts in the theory of the social construction of gender. Whilst such is the case, this shift has largely remained outside the field of consulting research and its literature.

As we have identified in our findings, notions of elitist professionalism are infused by masculine ideals. Furthermore, we have shown that the pre-requisites necessary for excellence in this profession are constructed as the norm throughout the literature. Numerous studies tended to the ways in which fixed ‘masculine values’ transcend aspects of recruitment, advancing within the firm or identity construction (see for example Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Alvesson and Robertson 2006). But studies of how masculinity is actually constructed and can exist in multiplicity are rare.

This is where we see the theoretical value and implication of our popular culture study. The show functions as an agent, with the potential of putting forward and introducing the concept of multiple masculinities and femininities to the functional consulting literature. Thus, painting a more nuanced picture of the consulting individual.

The fashion in which the show displays gender in the management consulting profession contributes to confronting the rigid structures. It thereby enables and re-enforces these categories – and instead portrays gender as fluid as opposed to static and fixed (Fournier and Smith 2006). *House of Lies* therefore acts as a powerful critique and parody of what is seen as “typical” in management consulting and opens up several plains of discourses as opposed to the dominant grand discourse (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000) of masculinity.

Practical Contributions

Arguing that private and professional life are interlinked, and private life is influenced by popular culture, a separation of these three is hardly possible (Rhodes 2001; Rhodes and Westwood 2008). Consequently, through popular culture media, a space can be made available to reflect upon the gender roles as lived in society. On a practical level the show has the capability to affect viewers as its content is transported into society. In this context is contemplated and digested, but is also challenged and reformulated. Subsequently, cultural artifacts do not exist and remain within the context of the private sphere but are taken into the organizations and society. In that way, the show also has the ability to exert influence on contemporary consulting practices by igniting a debate and proactive digestion of what is being seen on television. As we had identified, masculinity is constructed as a behavioral norm in management consulting. But our findings related to the television show may ignite a discussion of this accepted and taken for granted norm.

Lastly, it enables a parodic way of looking at characteristics that portray the ideals of a profession. This occurs through the depiction of gender as a performative act, by actively scripting the characters into assuming roles that cannot be ascribed to one static gender categorization. The television format provides the viewer with the opportunity to question aspects of gender theory applied by recognizing the overly dramaturgical acts that lead to a sense of irony towards the characters depicted. In this sense, we suggest, the show is to be seen as a parody on gender categorizations (Butler 1993), running on (extreme) stereotypes and the repetition thereof, questioning them at the same time. In consequence, it offers an approach to ridiculing

a profession and its 'genderedness' that is taking itself and its masculine appearance too serious. Accordingly, studying popular culture contributes to a more holistic and especially culturally attuned approach to understand contemporary consulting.

Further Research

While conducting our research, we encountered some interesting "side issues", which would be worth exploring further. What had struck us from the beginning is the rather unusual fact that Marty Kaan, as junior partner of the "number 2 consultancy in the country" is of African American descent. In that context we think it would be interesting to conduct a post-colonial reading of the show, which appears to be an under-researched area within consulting studies (for postcolonial critiques in business and management studies in general see for example Frenkel and Shenhav 2006; Boje, Mollbjerg Jorgensen et al. 2012).

Moreover, it has to be kept in mind that the show takes place and is (mostly) viewed in a "Western" societal context. It therefore is embedded into distinct (organizational) cultural, political and economic circumstances. Gender notions are not constituted and enacted in isolation and such internal and external environmental factors naturally assert an influence. But due to the scope of our research, we neglected such influences and instead decided to focus on gender as a separate analytical unit only. Incorporating such factors, however, may provide additional insights to this field of research (Mc Call 2005; Kelan 2012). To gain those, we would advocate for a second, intersectional study of increased scope.

Furthermore, we believe that incorporating audience research on the perception of the show would provide a valuable tool to uncover the common impression the series establishes of the profession. It could lead to useful insights and feedback as to whether the perception generated by the authors of this thesis mirrors that of the viewer as well. We suggest such research to be addressed after the second or third season has been broadcasted and a viable and representative fan base has formed.

Another theme we encountered is that of idealizing the profession. It could be interesting to research in how far the show has influenced the industry and its recruiting procedures. As common literature expresses, management consulting is already a very popular profession with graduates and experienced employees alike. However, we suspect that the show will further increase the application rates to business schools etc. further. This however, would call for quantitative studies rather than qualitative.

This thesis demonstrated a first attempt of incorporating a show into the research topic of gender categories in management consulting. Thereby, we hope, we qualitatively contributed to this research area and increased the understanding of the prevailing 'gendering' in management consulting.

CHAPTER V: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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