

MOTHERHOOD, STEREOTYPES, AND *SOUTH PARK*

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Mothers are a constant staple of laughs for the adult, cartoon audience. Laughing at the maternal has negative connotations—after all, knowing the sacrifices that many mothers make for their children and families in reality it seems unfair that in return for their selflessness mothers should be parodied in animation. But it is important to note that it is in cartoons aimed at an adult audience that new (or new readings into existing) stereotypes of mothers are presented—like in *King of the Hill*, *Family Guy*, *South Park* (*SP*), and on occasion in *The Simpsons*. In cartoons aimed at children, the stereotypical mother is a model of women's roles within the nuclear family propagated in America beginning in the 1950s. In cartoons aimed at adults there is no space for the myth of the perfect mother or wife and it is here that cartoons can parody the myths that are there in society.

SP is by no means aimed at children, though undoubtedly many do view it; rather the demographic of *SP* viewers is consistent with the demographic of Comedy Central—males aged between 14 and 30 years (Finnegan 24). Because of this, the candy-sweet image of a stay-at-home mother in apron, raising her two children, and taking care of them, her husband, and the dog is toxic to the success of the cartoon program. That and it is a far cry from reality as the audience will be well aware.

The following article will examine the three stereotypes of mothers that appear on *SP* by looking at the mothers of three of the four main characters: the middle-class mother, the Jewish mother, and the single mother. The focus of this piece is to illustrate how and why these three stereotypes of motherhood exist in American society today, and how they are depicted, and trivialized,

on *SP*. This is not to say that the creators of *SP* are intentionally turning stereotypes about mothers on their head; very often they are playing into and exaggerating them for comical effect. But the portrayal of middle-class, Jewish, and single mothers on *SP* does reflect back onto the audience and the prejudices that they have of women who fall into any of these categories. Expectations that the audience has of the behavior and personality of these women are not only met but also taken to such a surreal level that the relevance of these stereotypes can be questioned.

SP uses as many of the comic devices from cartoons that are associated with a child target audience as it does use comedy associated with adult cartoons. It is no secret to any regular viewer of animated television programs, or even if someone casts their mind's eye back to their childhood, that males outnumber females in cartoons. Although 51% of the U.S. population is female (Thoman and Stieber), in cartoons it seems that 65% of the fictional population is male (Thoman and Stieber); which would account for the statistic that females are outnumbered 4 or even 5 to 1 in cartoons made for children (Johnson). The creators of *SP*, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, have relegated females to supporting characters as the spotlight is on four boys of South Park: Stan, Kyle, Kenny, and Cartman. Women are not as outnumbered on *SP* as they are on other traditional cartoons. There are approximately 34 female characters compared to the approximate 52 male cast. This results in the percentage of women in *SP* to be some 39%. This percentage is clearly much higher than that of other cartoons, like those which belong to the classic staple of American animation that easily fit into the 45% of cartoons with no female lead in them (Thompson and Zerbinos 659). That 45% of cartoons have no female lead in them would not lend itself to the assumption that women and girls are under-represented in cartoons unless we compare it to the statistic that of 175 tested cartoons 99% had a male lead (Thompson and Zerbinos 659). While not trailblazing or intentionally aiming to be aware of women in animated entertainment, *SP* certainly accepts the fact that women are a part of society and adds them to the story, not in equal representation but certainly at a higher percentage than other cartoons.

Clearly humor has something to do with women being under represented in animation. As it has been pointed out, "funniest

comic performances center around men losing their pants, falling down staircases and lacking control of their excretory functions” thus leaving viewers with the “general perception . . . that clean humor is the most appropriate venue for women” (Hendershot). If what is considered humorous for a male or female comic to perform is divided then it isn’t a surprise that this flows over into the cartoon realm. It is here that children of the television era receive some of their education about society because “cartoons are the kiddie version of what’s portrayed on adult dramas at night” (Bryan). If adult television programs are meant to be accounts of possible everyday dramas befalling everyday people, then cartoons are the illustrated version of these dramas, and to some extent do have some role in reflecting the environment and society that the viewer is inhabiting. Therefore “cartoons are depicting significant differences in the status, behavior, and capabilities of female and male characters. Thus cartoons tell cultural stories” (Bryan). It becomes clear then that although early cartoons are unrealistic from the point of view of the number of female versus the number of male characters, they are realistic in the sense that they reflect societal concerns or expectations at the time of their production. The idea of girls and women as being feminine, ones in need of saving or nurturers of men is evident in many American cartoons created during the mid-20th century. While initially, the stereotypes of the stay-at-home, very domestic female may have been closer to reality following World War II and the beginning of the idea of the nuclear family, today they are by no means relevant. And in full knowledge of this animators have been making changes since 1980 in cartoons vis-à-vis female stereotypes where we can now “see some evidence of female leadership, rewarding, bragging, insulting, failure, incompetence, gossiping, providing for routine services, and interrupting” (Thompson and Zerbinos 669) which were previously considered part of the male stereotype. These new characteristics of women are put to good use in *SP* where they mingle and usurp previous stereotypes of women and mothers.

SP's menagerie of characters can be classified as anything but stereotypically normal. Every one of them, male and female alike, has their oddities and quirks and all come together in the somewhat dysfunctional town of South Park. Women are not only mothers, teachers, and nurses, but the mayor is a woman, as is the

school principal, and the school bus driver. These women have the stereotypes of the new female characters as found by Thompson and Zerbinos and pointed out above. Women are just as much the center of ridicule and basis of humor as the male characters that are fathers, uncles, grandfathers or the priest, police officer, and doctor of South Park. The stereotype of their jobs as comedy relief and plot arc is far more prevalent than the stereotype of their gender for this purpose.

Motherhood is the reason, as comedian Jerry Lewis puts it, why women can't be funny because, "they symbolize maternity so centrally: to laugh at a woman would, somehow, be to laugh at motherhood itself" (qtd. in Hendershot). Although this was in the direct context of female comics, this can also extend itself into the realm of the stereotype of the mother wherever "maternity" as a defining "characteristic" may be in use. It is mothers who many of the jokes on *SP* are aimed at. In the following pages the focus will be on three types of maternal characters in *SP*: middle-class mothers, Jewish mothers, and single mothers. It is not mothers of any shape or form that the creators wish the audience to laugh at. It is the stereotypes associated with these different types of motherhood that the creators are using for entertainment. Although regularly berated for being sexist or misogynist, *SP* is acting as a mirror to American society, which it is parodying, rather than poking fun at women in general. The depictions of mothers, based on long-standing stereotypes, are relevant to American culture and not to the culture of other English-speaking countries (though similarities may exist between the stereotype of single mothers in the U.S. and Britain, for example).

Middle-class mothers is a broad category that I'm using to clump together those mothers in *SP* who are married and homemakers but belong to no definable ethnic group. These mothers are like Sharon Marsh, Stan's mother; Mrs. Tweak, Tweak's mother; or Linda Stotch, Butters' mother. It is through their husbands that these women reflect who the broader community of South Park consists of—Sharon's husband, Randy, is a geologist (scientist/academic), while Mrs. Tweak's husband owns and runs a coffee shop (small business owner). It is implied that Linda Stotch is an engineer and that she is on the South Park city council as treasurer but even so, she is seen at home cooking and cleaning while of her husband's work little is known. Even

though Linda Stotch appears to have a job outside of the home, all that the audience of *SP* sees of middle-class mothers is their being the primary caregivers and those who run the household. The stereotypes found by Thompson and Zerbinos, as mentioned above, fit these female characters very well. However, it does not mean that Sharon, Mrs. Tweak, or Linda are depicted as the epiphany of womanhood because the maternal, nuclear family mother stereotype is parodied on *SP*.

The stereotype of mothers that many in the U.S. would recognize is one where the mothers are “perfectly loving, kind, patient, and giving” (Ganong and Coleman 496). This myth of motherhood in North America is further extended to encompass a specific type of mother, the “‘most appropriate’ mothers,” as being “heterosexual, stay-at-home mothers in first marriage, nuclear families”(Ganong and Coleman 496). Considering the diversity of families and types of mothers that exist in the U.S. today, this stereotype that is propagated in right-wing media and is within the cultural consciousness of the nation, creates an enormous amount of stress on women who feel that they cannot meet these standards, and feel that they aren’t the perfect or adequate mother for their children. As Ganong and Coleman point out these stereotypes feed negatively into society and the thinking of individuals, as “stereotypes about a group not only affect the behaviors of the stereotyped group, they also affect the behaviors of those who interact with them” (496), which means that women not only have to reconcile the stereotype within themselves but run the risk of being treated in a certain (possibly negative) manner by their community due to the prevalent stereotype about them. As West points out the myth of the stay-at-home mother versus reality “reaffirms the conflicting values and messages contemporary American mothers must confront” (5). The stereotype of mothers in nuclear families (which accounts for 62% of the American population) (Leo) is turned on its head in *SP*. The second-wave of feminism, which blazed through Western countries in the 1960s and 1970s, allowed women a chance to head off into the real world and earn their own money and build their own careers outside of the accepted realm of the household. These changing times heralded the beginning of the glorification of the working woman at the expense of berating the stay-at-home mother, a sentiment that has recently begun to change.

This is not U.S. specific, however, clearly as the movement was perhaps the strongest here, the effects of the labeling of these women stuck more in the United States. *SP* depicts stay-at-home mothers as they have come to be expected: hysterical, destructive, bored, and depressed. But in reality, which is not represented in pop culture or mainstream media, thus *SP* also, many professional women are opting out of their careers into building a career as a stay-at-home mother and many are happy with their choice (Yarbrough). The numbers of stay-at-home mothers are rising, from 1993 to 2003 by 13%, sometimes due to the increase in unemployment rates, and for the middle and upper classes, because the family can afford to have the mother at home (Yarbrough). This latter point appears to be the driving force for stay-at-home mothers in *SP*; there is no economic need for the middle-class mothers of *SP* to be outside of the household. This in itself seems to be representative of middle-class America today.

Sharon Marsh, Stan's mother, is the one of the main four mothers (the mothers of the three other boys, Kyle, Eric, and Kenny, being Sheila Broflovski, Liane Cartman, and Carol McCormick, respectively) who fits the bill of the nuclear family housewife at first glance. She is married, stays at home, and is raising two children and on a surface level at the beginning of the cartoon's run, seems to be the stereotypical mother: she listens to her son, worries over him, and wants the best for him and his sister, Shelley.

In the episode "Clubhouses" (s. 2, ep. 12) Stan's parents decide to get a divorce. Initially we see Sharon in the damsel in distress persona, when Sharon and Randy go through the clichéd arguments associated with a couple having troubles in their marriage:

Sharon: "When was the last time you really listened to what I have to say?"

Randy: "When was the last time you had something interesting to say? It's always gossip and stupid crap."

Sharon feels unwanted, undervalued, and unloved by her husband, and as we later see, her son Stan. Randy's comments about what Sharon talks about, "gossip and stupid crap," reflects not only his disregard for his wife's opinions but also the long-standing societal belief that stay-at-home mothers are boring and bland because they have so little to talk about except the gossip they hear and other pointless things like, for example, Sharon trying

to find her wedding band that's fallen down the drain. Sharon feels she deserves someone better, who will value her and after spending 15 years beside Randy they go their separate ways.

No longer the Stepford wife, Sharon has moved out of the desirable model of motherhood and into the moderately desirable mother. The cutesy-pie reflection of motherhood, based on the perfect mother stereotype, is destroyed. As Ganong and Coleman point out "Feminists have argued that there is a powerful 'myth of motherhood' in American culture" whereby "this myth of motherhood contends among other things, that mothers are either all good or all bad" (496). As mentioned previously, the "good mother" is the one who stays at home to care for her children, is in a heterosexual relationship, married to the father of all her children, and is importantly in her first and only marriage. Prior to her divorce Sharon is like those "married mothers [who] are seen as excellent parents, who will do anything for their children and there is a suggestion that they are good marital partners" (Ganong and Coleman 507).

Although the episode deals not only with the changes in the mother following divorce but the father also, men are not in the same position as women who are "often . . . defined by others based on their marital and parental status" (Ganong and Coleman 496). Both of Stan's parents become petty and selfish divorcees but unlike Randy, Sharon's rank in the hierarchy of mother- and womanhood by which others see her suffers because a "mother's rank in this hierarchy . . . can be reduced overnight . . . due to a change in family structure, sexual orientation or employment status" (Ganong and Coleman 497), and so Sharon is no longer part of the most appropriate mother rank, but slips down to that of the "marginally appropriate" mother. This slip results in a change in her demeanor and her acting out the clichéd role of divorced and recently re-married mother: her interest is now her new husband, Roy, her own happiness, and not her children.

SP is thus taking on the issue of divorce in "Clubhouses" in America and the result it has on the mothers, fathers, and children; though the greatest criticism and blame in the eyes of the audience lies with the mother, in this case Sharon, because she is no longer the "good" mother that is mythologized in American culture and society even in the 21st century. Upon her getting back with Randy, she is portrayed as again being a kind and

caring mother, again a part of a traditional nuclear family. The Marsh family is back to balance and Sharon is redeemed—she can return back to the rank of appropriate mother.

Kyle's mother, Sheila Broflovski, is often the mother who is hated by the other three boys and sometimes even the other citizens of South Park. Sheila is used as comic relief when Judaism or over-protective parents are being discussed as she embodies everything that people have come to expect of the Jewish mother stereotype: Sheila is over involved in the raising of her children, she nags constantly, she is a stay-at-home mother who is almost out of touch with the reality of society around her and she creates more problems than she solves. Sheila is unlike the Jewish mother of Israeli cinema where "the Jewish mother does not evince a possessive and exclusive preoccupation with her children, but has a life outside of the family, a life of work and social commitments" (Freiberg 100). Sheila's representation is of the same vein as the stereotype of Jewish mothers as they are portrayed in Hollywood film or television like in Woody Allen's films (notably in *Oedipus Wrecks*), on sitcoms like *Seinfeld* (with the character Helen Seinfeld) or *The Nanny* (Sylvia Fine), *Dream On* (Doris Tupper), or *Will and Grace* (Bobbi Adler). This stereotype is often not a positive one and it appears that the Jewish mother stereotype appears to be an all-American construct to which there is no parallel in other Anglo-Saxon countries.

There are historic reasons associated with the American image of Jewish mothers being of women like Sheila on *SP*, or other characters on screen or in books. The demands placed on Jewish women and mothers in Eastern Europe were transplanted to American soil following the mass migration of Jews to America prior to World War II. The initially positive image of the "Jewish mother as the rock of her household, the core, and the heart" (Hyman) based on the traditions that had been infused with her identity in Eastern Europe as the caregiver and sometimes supporter of her family changed to one where she became "too strong" (Hyman) and it chafed her family as well as the community around her. Another commentator points out that if the Jewish mother is acting outside the norm of the middle-class American mother then "she is seen as exceeding prescribed boundaries, as being excessive" (Ravits 4). According to Hyman, the reason for the development of the negative stereotype associated

with Jewish mothers is because “her image reflects first and foremost a shift in the criteria for evaluating what makes a good mother.” Hyman continues by saying that “it is according to the middle class, mid-20th century American standards that the Jewish mother fails to meet the test,” that is, the above-mentioned stereotype of American mothers that another character on *SP*, Sharon Marsh, can’t live up to either.

Sheila Broflovski is meddlesome to say the least. In numerous episodes she campaigns to rid South Park of things she construes as being damaging and harmful to her and other people’s children or tries to help but fails miserably. Significant amounts of time in episodes are devoted to the Jewish mother stereotype: “Mr. Hankey the Christmas Poo” (s. 1, ep. 10), “Death” (s. 1, ep. 6), “Chickenpox” (s. 2, ep. 10), and even in the *SP* film, *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut*. In the film, the culmination of Sheila’s efforts at bettering American society results in war between Canada and the United States. The fact that war breaks out because of Sheila’s meddling is supporting the popular perception that the Jewish mother is “threatening because she acts . . . not as a subordinate female according to mainstream ideal” (Ravits 4). Sheila is the object of ridicule and resentment in South Park, and is scathingly scorned in Cartman’s song “Kyle’s Mom is a Bitch (in D Minor).”

The Jewish mother stereotype could be considered obsolete if Sheila’s attempts at helping her children, family, and community are compared to the actions of Marge Simpson in an episode of *The Simpsons*.

In “Itchy & Scratchy & Marge” (s. 2, ep. 9) Marge Simpson decides to begin a campaign against Itchy and Scratchy International, the company which produces the “Itchy & Scratchy” cartoons. Throughout the episode (and in fact the entire cartoon series) Marge Simpson is depicted as a mother driven on a crusade to protect the minds against violence and instill a sense of tolerance and harmony in her children. There is nothing negative in Marge’s character nor are her actions construed as being over-protective or meddling in her children’s affairs, although she does have qualities similar to Sheila Broflovski. However, the prevailing attitude towards Jewish mothers in comedy and cartoons doesn’t allow for Sheila to be portrayed in a more positive light or accepted by the audience in a more positive manner even if she is similar to the stereotype of an “everyday” sort of mother, Marge Simpson.

Hyman believes that it is necessary that “the Jewish mother [be] exposed as the caricature” so that the supposed negative traits of her parenting can be recognized as actually being positive aspects of being a mother. Regardless of how many times Sheila attempts to help those around her, and how often she seemingly fails, she is not creating a negative character. Her actions, while initially blood boiling for her son Kyle, paint a portrait of a mother who indeed cares about her children and husband and is carrying the weight of her culture, religion, and gender in a positive way that is of benefit to her family as it helps create a loving, safe and stable environment for them. This though is not enough to relegate the negative stereotype of the Jewish mother in *SP* to the wastebasket even if the “Jewish mother in recent incarnations . . . is more progressive. She has moved with the times” (Ravits 29).

Thus far it is clear that the middle-class, non-ethnic mother is still portrayed in a more positive light than that of the ethnic, specifically Jewish, mother. Sharon is allowed more rein outside of her stereotype than Sheila is. The last stereotype, that of the single mother, is perhaps the most denigrating of all female and mother stereotypes on *SP* and in society, even in the 21st century.

There appears to be only one single parent, and a single mother at that, in South Park. All other children have both parents at home with them, as Cartman points out in one conversation with his mother, Liane Cartman. Liane is illustrated with conservative clothes and a conservative manner, but the end of season 1 reveals how misleading appearances can be.

The single mother has generally been viewed by the general public as being the worst form of motherhood available for women and for her children and “single motherhood is deeply stigmatised in the United States” (Cecilia Winkler, *Single Mothers . . . Book Review*, 204). As Eyer argued in her historical analysis of motherhood through the ages in America, “the idealized American mother gradually morphed into a ‘hearth angel’ after the Industrial Revolution, into a professionalized ‘housewife’ in the 1950s and then became ‘Super Mom’ in the 1980s” (qtd. in West 5). These changes did not allow space for the positive representation of those women who were mothers but without a husband. American society appears to be “a culture fraught with anxiety about the so-called decline of the family” (Sielbergleid) resulting in the “depict[ion of] single mothers as selfish homewreckers”

(Sielbergleid) of which there is no evidence of but something that American society appears to be willing to support. Even though, by 2002, there were some 23 million children being raised by single parents (*From Birth to Seventeen*), a majority of whom, are mothers, there is still an ingrained feeling in the U.S. that single motherhood is something outside the norm.

The depiction of single fathers on television has not been as negative as for women. Whether it be the show *My Three Sons*, *Full House*, or *My Two Dads*, the fathers are raising their children, following the death of their wives, with the help of friends or other male relatives. This is unlike single mothers who appear not to have much of a support network and are pushed to the periphery within the community they inhabit, e.g., to a certain extent in *Grace Under Fire*, or *Alice*, men are embraced by those around them and are aided in the raising of their children. American films about or featuring single mothers also paint a differing picture of them compared to single fathers. Whether in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, *Parenthood*, *Forrest Gump*, *Gas Food Lodging*, or other similar films the single mothers have been left to fend for themselves and their children, usually following divorce, sometimes with tragic results. This is in contrast to films like *Jersey Girl*, *Unwed Father*, *Big Daddy*, *Corrina, Corrina*, or *To Kill a Mockingbird* where the single father is portrayed as being a fully successful parent, even though they go through initial setbacks. Shows like *Oh Baby* are few and far between.

Single mother families are not uncommon in the U.S. eighty-four percent of African-American families have single mothers as heads of households (Robinson), mainly because black women know that "more services and benefits are available to her when the father is absent" (Robinson), a sentiment which plays into the hands of those individuals who believe that single mothers are "welfare queens," a view particularly prevalent in Britain but also in the U.S. However, the black community is more understanding: "young Black mothers are willing to postpone marriage and accept the community's understanding that the role of mother is more important than that of a wife" (Robinson). Here women have a support network that is primarily made up of other women in, or formerly in, a similar situation to them.

Placed at the feet of single mothers are many of the social ills that are said to plague modern society today. Unemployed youth,

rising suicide, homicide, theft, rape, and drug use rates can all, apparently, be attributed to the rising numbers of single mothers. The argument by proponents who believe that single motherhood is the cause for society's problems is that the problem is that children do not have a father figure present in their lives and have no one to control them (Wynn 1964; Biller and Solomon 1986). That "families without fathers are likely to be poor, and it is the negative effects of poverty, rather than the absence of a father, that lead to negative developmental outcomes" (McLoyd qtd. in *The Costs of Propaganda*) are not often considered when arguing the case against single mothers. Recent research has also found that "single motherhood does not necessarily compromise how well prepared six- and seven-year-olds are for school" (Lang), meaning that children of single mothers have the same readiness for school as what children being raised by two parents do. As Ricciuti points out, "the majority of single mothers do not typically have the social, material and economic resources which support quality parenting and child care as readily as two-parent families have" (qtd. in Lang). That is, single mothers lack the social network and funds in order to help the successful development of their children—single motherhood in itself is not the cause of these children's problems. The poverty of the Cartman family doesn't seem to be an issue. Liane supports herself through appearing in porn and being a prostitute; as Johnson-Woods states "her sexuality is normalized as an economic necessity—she does it to support her family" (180). Liane herself is accepted by the South Park community (male and female alike), however, Eric Cartman's personality is reflective of the most negative stereotypes associated with children, especially boys of single mothers.

Eric Cartman's character is popular with audiences, no doubt because of his amoral qualities. He is a lying, manipulative, spoilt, selfish, racist, sexist, bigoted, and greedy child with sociopathic tendencies who enjoys inflicting pain on others. Insecure about his identity and sexuality, Cartman is often the creator or manipulator of problems and events in South Park which generally lead to his momentary downfall at the end of an episode. Constantly at odds with Kyle, because of Kyle being Jewish, and with the other boys and people of South Park because of their gullibility or honesty, Cartman embodies the worst traits imaginable

in a person. There appears to be little, if any goodness in him. Cartman himself describes a small part of his wrong doings

I took a crap in the principal's purse . . . seven times. Then there was the time I convinced a woman to have an abortion so I could build my own Shakey's Pizza. I pretended to be retarded and joined the Special Olympics. I tried to have all the Jews exterminated last spring. Uuh, oh yeah, and there's this one kid whose parents I had killed and then made into chili which I fed to the kid. ("Trapped in the Closet," s. 9, ep. 12)

The list of anti-social behavior exhibited by Cartman is impressive. His personality is generally put down to his mother spoiling Eric and not being able to control him—overfeeding him, giving in to his hysterics, or believing him even when he's blatantly lying (as highlighted in the episode "Tsst," s. 10, ep. 7). Ganong and Coleman attribute American society's belief that "mothers are . . . almost entirely responsible for the growth and development of their children" (496) to the myth of motherhood. This results in white single mothers, who are without the support networks of the community or from the government, being viewed as the most inappropriate types of mothers (Ganong and Coleman 497). Liane Cartman's sexual promiscuity is also regularly a cause for joke and what transpires in Liane's bedroom is implicitly blamed for Cartman's instability—he is apparently dressed up as a mailman and dances for his mother and her lovers (s. 1, ep. 5).

When Stan, Kyle, and Kenny are worried about Cartman in "Cartman's Mom is a Dirty Slut" (s. 1, ep. 13) after having spotted him giving a tea party to his stuffed toys, they head to the school counselor, Mr. Mackey, to ask for advice. On Mr. Mackey's wall are three posters: "Father and Son Day is Coming," "Dad's are Dandy," and "If You Don't Have a Dad You're a Bastard." Clearly Eric is made to feel inferior around the school because of his lacking a paternal figure in his life and that has led him to want to know who his father is. The creators of *SP* are mocking the feeling of inferiority that schools and specifically, adults, can sometimes instill in children who are fatherless. The message that the school and the community sends out to children of single mothers is that they are undeserving of the love and support that a community has on offer for other children—needless to say the double edged message "If You Don't Have a Dad You're a Bastard" is not one

that will positively affect a child. The preoccupation with the myth that the majority of America today is still living in traditional, nuclear families can possibly have an adverse affect on children without adults even realizing it.

Liane's obvious enjoyment of sex, as it is discovered with women as well as men, is a constant running gag in the series: Liane appearing on the cover of "Crack Whore Magazine," paying for tradesmen's services with sex (s. 9, ep. 6), being arrested wearing sexy lingerie and being led away with two men by police when Cartman wrongfully accuses her of molesting him (s. 4, ep. 16), sleeping with Chef when he's trying to raise money (s. 2, ep. 14), or her keeping an "UltraVibe Pleasure 2000" (s. 1, ep. 10) amongst many others. This is all to berate her and to offer reasons for Eric lacking a father (or rather a biological mother), and also to exaggerate the promiscuity that is often associated with single mothers (and their cause for becoming pregnant in the first place). Without a doubt, in the audience's mind, Liane is on the lowest rung of the motherhood hierarchy—she is a sex-worker who indulges in drugs. She embodies all that could possibly be negative in a mother, and society thus labels Liane as a "bad" mother, a label which she cannot as easily shake off as Sharon because even if Liane were to suddenly marry and live an "ideal" family life, Cartman's development and his many negative personality traits would still be blamed on her. Liane is to be held completely accountable for just who Cartman is. Although Johnson-Woods argues that Liane is "a socially acceptable mother who is allowed her own sexual agency and her own ambivalent gender" (180), I would argue that Liane is the embodiment of the stock single mother stereotype and it is through this stereotype that she is "one very subversive woman" (Johnson-Woods 180) to the expectations of mothers and motherhood in the U.S. The fact that she is the antithesis of the other mothers in South Park and allows Cartman to do as he pleases and panders to his wishes and demands means that she is to be held responsible for everything that Cartman is—and Cartman is not a "good" boy.

Who Liane is as a woman is called into question in the series. Stone and Parker deal with this question of Liane and her womanhood; it is divulged to the audience that she is in fact not Cartman's biological mother but biological father: Liane is a hermaphrodite (s. 1, ep. 13; s. 2, ep. 2). This does not cause much

change for Liane's character—Liane is still Cartman's mother, still single, still considered a loose woman and is just as disparaged by Stan, Kyle, and Kenny (and most of South Park) as before. Liane's position in the hierarchy of motherhood doesn't change with the discovery of just who she really is. She is certainly the "head of a nontraditional, postmodern, new millennium family" (Johnson-Woods 180) but one which the viewing audience, and non-*SP* viewers in general, would be loath to accept as it is in stark contrast to the belief in the nuclear family which still holds sway in the U.S today.

South Park works on the premise that its audience is well acquainted with stereotypes about different groups of people in the community and it is using that knowledge in order to trivialize society in general. Therefore we mustn't be surprised that one of the groups who are "stereotypically" depicted on the cartoon is mothers, and within that middle-class, Jewish and single mothers. While the stereotypes on the cartoon at first glance are far from kind to mothers and their parenting skills, it does do mothers a favor: *South Park* doesn't allow for the type of mother who is perhaps most readily recognized from children's cartoons and from film, that is the middle-class homemaker who is happily married with two children. Mythmaking about women's roles in the family and the ideal family does not take place; if anything it is parodied and inverted. Although there are many varied views of what constitutes the perfect mother in American society today and what is the prevalent and perfect family, *South Park* trivializes these beliefs and shows how there can be functional families that fall outside of what is considered "normal."

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