Exploring Patriarchal Beliefs about Womanhood, Motherhood and Femininity: A *The Real Housewives* Case Study

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Abstract

This study examines how the representations of womanhood, motherhood, and femininity in *The Real Housewives* perpetuate traditional patriarchal norms and reveal instances of internalized sexism and misogyny. Employing qualitative content analysis, the study uses purposive sampling to select episodes from multiple US franchises of the show and collects data from those aired between 2009 and 2023. Recurring themes centered on women's bodies and appearances, their role as a mother, and their relationships with men. The findings indicate that the show reinforces patriarchal views through adherence to traditional gender norms, the pressure to conform to idealized roles of femininity, and patriarchal notions that shape female identity. Despite their self-perception as empowered women, the *housewives* exhibit internalized sexism and misogyny, which undergirds patriarchal power. The study concludes that while *The Real Housewives* reflects societal patriarchal norms, it also at times critiques and challenges these expectations and thus highlights the complex nature of womanhood, motherhood, and femininity in postfeminist contemporary media.

Keywords: The Real Housewives, reality TV, gender norms, patriarchy, womanhood, motherhood, femininity, internalized sexism, internalized misogyny, postfeminist contemporary media

Research Dissertation

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1. Introduction

Reality TV has undeniably become a culture-dominating medium and shapes our entertainment and cultural landscape (Lindemann 2022). Despite its popularity, which its viewership has proven, and its relevance to contemporary life, in most social spheres the genre reveals negative connotations and continues to be devalued and labeled as a guilty pleasure (Lundy, Ruth, and Park 2008, 208-225). However, reality TV carries the potential to unveil the circuits of power in society, allowing to see the ways in which realities are socially constructed. Prior research has shown what the genre can teach us about society, key institutions, and broad social constructs such as gender, race, class, sexuality, and deviance (Durkheim 2002, 55-58; Epstein 1994, 188-202). Studies suggest that reality programming functions as a mirror to society's values and underscores the level of conservatism and regression that remains in society (Gerbner *et al.* 1986, 17-40; Montemurro 2008, 84-106). Especially the representation of gender and the performance of it can sustain the current power structure. In particular, reality programs with all-female casts like *The Real Housewives* often demonstrate how cultural notions and stereotypes about gender, gender roles and expectations are deeply ingrained. However, reality TV also bears the potential to challenge and push back against societal norms (Lindemann 2022).

This study aims to explore how the representation of womanhood, motherhood ideals and femininity imaginaries in *The Real Housewives* perpetuate already established traditional societal views and what role internalized sexism and misogyny play in these perceptions. The study will answer the following research questions:

1. How do traditional patriarchal notions manifest in the discourse of *The Real Housewives?*

2. How do these manifestations reflect instances of internalized sexism and misogyny?

The study is structured as follows: First, the study states the relevance of this research to the field of communications and provides context by referring to prior research on *The Real Housewives.* The literature review situates the study in relation to concepts and theories used to examine gender representation in media, and outlines the representation of womanhood, motherhood and femininity in the past and the present. The methodology chapter presents the data sampling and collection, ethical considerations as well as the analysis process. Following the analysis outline, the results are structured by research question and thus reveal how the representation of womanhood, motherhood and femininity perpetuate traditional patriarchal notions as well as how these manifestations reflect internalized sexism and misogyny. The discussion entails a reflection of the combined findings and relates them to the previously discussed literature. Lastly, the limitations of this study are presented.

2. State of the Question

The Real Housewives, a reality show produced by Bravo and inspired by the fictional series *Desperate Housewives* and *Peyton Place*, follows the lives of privileged wealthy women in various cities across the US. The franchise's first series, *The Real Housewives of Orange County*, aired in 2006. Currently, there are twelve franchises of the show dedicated to US cities. Over the last years, international versions of the franchise have been added across different networks (Reality TV World 2006; Bravo TV, n.d.; Lieber 2013, 113-14).

Due to its influence on establishing norms and ideals, television plays a crucial role for the representation of womanhood, motherhood and femininity. TV productions are considered ideological texts, which construct certain ideologies supporting the importance of heteronormativity and heterosexuality, the patriarchal institution of marriage and traditional gender roles (Feasey 2012, 178). Popular TV shows and their discourses oftentimes set societal and cultural trends. Depending on its popularity, the messages a show passes down are widely disseminated (Ramspott, Medina Bravo and Rodrigo Alsina 2011, 10). *The Real Housewives*

has grown to be a pop culture sensation with four franchises being in Forbes' list of the top 20 most popular reality TV shows of 2023 (Bohannon 2023). With millions of viewers per episode, *The Real Housewives* disseminates messages about gender dynamics to its audience, revealing societal attitudes towards gender and gender expectations. Therefore, this study is relevant to communications research as it demonstrates the significant role that reality TV shows, such as *The Real Housewives*, play in the shaping and reflection of societal patriarchal attitudes towards gender roles and expectations.

With its numerous franchises the show has been a subject of considerable research, especially regarding social constructs like race and class, gender stereotypes and the reappropriation of the American housewife. For example, Bunai (2014) analyzed the portrayal of the Black *housewife* on the show and found a reflection of a compilation of historical and contemporary stereotypes that impacts the image of the Black woman in America (35-53). Leonard (2020) argued that the show redefined the term 'housewife' towards an image that adds professionalism and success to the paradigm. She also claimed that the franchise's concept coupled with its success commercializes 'wifedom' in the process (278-79). In a similar manner, Derenzo (2011) explored how women on the franchise *The Real Housewives of Orange County* are put into the traditional roles of the American housewife (6), and concluded that the *housewives* do not fit the exact artefact of a traditional housewife but rather have successfully reappropriated the term and created their own ideal of a housewife that incorporates traditional gender roles as well as the glamorous luxurious lifestyle of women of the upper social class (27). Howard (2015) analyzed gender stereotypes of female performativity depicted in *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. She stressed how reality shows with an all-female cast, such as *The Real Housewives* franchise, often depict women as stupid, untrustworthy, demanding and incompetent (103-06). She explained that the belief behind these stereotypes is grounded in gender essentialism, which assumes women and men are "bound by nature to act a certain way because of their gender" (106). Lieber (2013) pointed out that the storylines on *The Real*

Housewives mostly revolve around the women's disposition towards the ordeals of marriage, motherhood, female friendship, and romantic relationships (120-21). She considered the show's primary narratives a reflection of "the ongoing question of how women might step out of that [traditional feminine] realm without leaving it behind entirely," and the current generation's conception of feminism and gender politics (114).

While existing research has established an understanding of how race, class, gender stereotypes and the reappropriation of the American housewife show up in this franchise, the subtle or sometimes obvious ways in which internalized sexism and misogyny inherent in the show reflect patriarchal societal attitudes and beliefs has not been studied. Through qualitative content analysis, this study contributes to the existing research by examining how the representation of womanhood, motherhood ideals and femininity imaginaries in *The Real Housewives* mirrors and perpetuates already established traditional societal views and sheds light on how these portrayals perpetuate internalized sexism and misogyny. The potential for progress to challenge the societal norms is discussed as well.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Theoretical Framework

To explore how patriarchal notions show up in the franchise, and how this reveals instances of internalized sexism and misogyny in the female cast, the study employs the following intertwining theories. The study looks at the Sexual Scripting Theory by Simon and Gagnon (1987) to facilitate the importance of the study's dissection of patriarchal messages. The framework postfeminism as a sensibility by Gill (2007) allows to analyze the intersection of female liberation and self-agency with the persistence of patriarchal norms. Lastly, the concepts of internalized oppression (Pheterson 1986), internalized sexism (Ramos David 2014; McKinley and Hyde 1996) and internalized misogyny (Szymanski and Kashubeck-West 2008;

Saakvitne and Pearlman 1993) will guide the research in the unveiling of patterns and help understand how sexist and misogynistic beliefs are internalized and reproduced.

3.1.1 Sexual Scripting Theory

According to the Sexual Scripting Theory proposed by Simon and Gagnon (1987), culturally ingrained messages or scripts that shape and uphold norms for acceptable sexual behavior in society form individual sexual beliefs and assumptions. Such scripts entail societal norms, guidelines and media portrayals and present distinct sexual narratives for women and men. Scripts influence people's interpersonal interactions and relationships as well as perceptions about their own sexuality, sexual identity, desires, and roles in romantic and sexual relationships. Individuals incorporate these scripts into their own realities and internalize them. This is also known as the heterosexual script which delineates corresponding yet unequal sexual expectations for women and men (Papp, Ward, and Marshall 2021, 50-65). It is important to note that Simon and Gagnon (2003) considered their scripting perspective a social constructionist framework due to society's everchanging character. Movements and theories such as feminism, gay and lesbian studies, self-psychology, etc. have changed and continue to change the societal landscape. Thus, this theory helps to establish patterns of behaviors regarding the sexual within social life and individuals (491-97). The focus on the sexual in the social and societal context constitutes the key belief of the theory: Simon and Gagnon considered that "the sexual takes on its shape and meaning from its social character" (492). The script acquisition, activation, and application model by Wright (2011) as part of the sexual scripting framework helps understand how exposure to the heterosexual script and its references on television, particularly reality TV, impacts the sexual beliefs of its audience and has the potential to reinforce the normalization and internalization of such. According to the model, media reinforces socially constructed roles and expectations, and shapes "sexual beliefs by teaching […] new scripts, priming familiar scripts, and encouraging the use of scripts in

everyday life" (Papp, Ward, and Marshall 2021, 52). Although this study does not look at viewer's perceptions and the impact of the messages that are being passed down by *The Real Housewives* but rather the messages itself, this theory situates the importance of breaking down and analyzing messages that reinforce and reflect misogynistic beliefs and attitudes.

3.1.2 Postfeminism as a Sensibility

Due to the nature of this study, postfeminism as a sensibility is employed to examine how media represents women and femininity. This framework suggests that contemporary media incorporates both empowering and traditional patriarchal values. The idea that postfeminism should be understood as a sensibility was created by the author Gill (2007) who postulated that postfeminism is made up of both feminist and anti-feminist themes. Therefore, the author proposed postfeminism as a sensibility that uses postmodernist and constructionist perspectives to analyze contemporary cultural and media products, especially their relation to gender (147-48).

Gill highlighted postfeminist media culture by its preoccupation with the female body: femininity is considered a bodily property. Instead of placing the feminine identity on motherhood as it was common for decades, the author noted that in contemporary media a sexy and fit body has become central to women's identity. The author mentioned how a great number of TV programs center around the evaluation and judgement of women's bodies and appearances. The female body is seen as women's source of power, which simultaneously is in constant need of monitoring, discipline, self-surveillance, and improvement to adhere to the impossible standards of female attractiveness (149-50).

This notion correlates with the postfeminist theme of the sexualization of culture. The sexualization of culture means "the extraordinary proliferation of discourses about sex and sexuality across all media forms, […] as well as […] the increasingly frequent erotic presentation of girls', women's and (to a lesser extent) men's bodies in public spaces" (Gill

2007, 150). It is important to note that the discourse surrounding sex and sexuality is unevenly distributed towards girls and women. They are responsible for presenting themselves as desirable subjects, pleasing men sexually, doing emotional labor such as protecting men's egos and their own reputations, taking care of birth control and safer sex practices, etc. (150). Part of the sexualization of culture is the 'porn-chic' era: it describes the infiltration of representations of pornography into mass culture, thereby becoming an accepted, even idealized, cultural element of the mainstream. Most importantly, this sexualization of culture is gender specific, and first and foremost constructed from a male perspective (Steffen 2012, 95-103).

Another theme in contemporary postfeminist media is that women are not objectified and sexualized in the same ways that they have been in the past. Now women take on the role of "active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so" (Gill 2007, 151). This shift is central to the understanding of postfeminism as a sensibility. Gill characterized this shift as the modernization of femininity by sexual knowledge and practice as well as a shift in power dynamic as the lens shifts from the external, male judging gaze towards a self-policing narcissistic gaze. However, this new gaze is considered a deeper form of exploitation where "the objectifying male gaze is internalized to form a new disciplinary regime" (152). This practice excludes a lot of women who do not fit the standards of female attractiveness or heterosexuality. The author pointed out the neoliberal character of the sexual objectification now being presented as something that women choose freely on their own accord. This transforms them into active, confident and assertive subjects (152-53).

Individualism and choice are central ideas in postfeminism. Issues that have just recently been politicized such as racisms, homophobia and domestic violence are now made private and personal again. Gill called this the "total evacuation of notions of politics or cultural influence"

(153). Additionally, the idea that all practices and doings are chosen freely is crucial to the postfeminism discourse. Women are portrayed as free of any inequalities or power imbalances. This correlates with the image of the liberated free woman as a sexual subject. Women are presented as acting out of their own choice and their own pleasure regarding beauty standards, appearances, desirability, sexuality, dating, etc. However, this thinking fails to reflect on how women have internalized ideals of beauty, and traditional and strict rules or standards (153-54).

In contemporary postfeminist media the focus on self-surveillance over all areas of women's life has increased significantly. The belief that people's, mainly women's, lives are flawed and that one can transform and reinvent oneself with the expertise of certain 'experts' and especially through modified consumption habits receives a lot of traction. Simultaneously, women are expected to see this constant monitoring as fun and as an investment in the self. Again, discourses about self-help are unevenly distributed: the subject of this neoliberalism notion is feminine. Generally, this phenomenon is called the makeover paradigm and shows of this genre play a huge part in postfeminist media (155-56).

As mentioned before, postfeminism is constructed through both feminist and antifeminist ideas. Gill noted that the postfeminist discourse is characterized by the notion of 'girl power' whereas female bodies are still reinscribed as sexual objects (163). As this study aims to highlight the persistence of patriarchal norms regarding womanhood, motherhood and femininity in *The Real Housewives*, postfeminism as part of the theoretical framework is most relevant.

3.1.3 Internalized Oppression, Internalized Sexism, and Internalized Misogyny

Internalized oppression is understood as "the incorporation and acceptance by individuals within an oppressed group of the prejudices against them within the dominant society" (Pheterson 1986, 148). Both internalized sexism and internalized misogyny can be categorized withing the framework of internalized oppression.

Internalized sexism posits that individuals are socialized and subjected to patriarchal views and gender norms from a young age, which leads to internalized beliefs about their worth, capabilities and roles. Ramos David (2014) contended that internalized sexism mostly takes place when women believe themselves to be inferior and undeserving of equality and base their own and other women's worth and value on their sexual attractiveness and appeal to men (193). Internalized sexism manifests itself in various forms, such as self-objectification, passive acceptance of traditional gender roles and expectations, unconscious adaptation of cultural, institutional, and individual sexism, or the denial thereof (McKinley and Hyde 1996).

Misogyny, which is considered a cultural practice that maintains the patriarchal power structure through the subordination of women, is the core of all forms of sexism. Internalized misogyny refers to women's internal adaption and acceptance of negative beliefs towards women. It manifests itself in the same ways as internalized sexism. Women who have internalized misogynistic beliefs and attitudes not only apply these upon themselves, but they also express misogyny in interactions with other women. This includes devaluating and mistrusting other women, showing favorable bias towards men, competitive commentary, self-objectification, observance to traditional gender roles, linking women's value to their sexual attractiveness and appeal to men, defining women by their relationship to men, and placing men as a top priority (Szymanski and Kashubeck-West 2008; Saakvitne and Pearlman 1993).

This framework of internalized oppression suggests that individuals, particularly women, adopt and internalize patriarchal and sexist beliefs about themselves and others and contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequalities and harmful messages. This premise will be helpful for determining the patterns of internalized sexism and misogyny in *The Real Housewives* and how these representations reflect and reinforce the patriarchal notions that lie underneath.

Collectively, these frameworks frame the comprehensive analysis of how the female cast on *The Real Housewives* represents womanhood, motherhood and femininity and how it reproduces already established traditional societal views. Additionally, it serves to reveal internalized sexism and misogyny inherent in the messages that are being passed down.

3.2 Empirical Literature

The following overview of literature will summarize research about the history and representation of women in media. To situate this study within the context of media gender representation as a mirror to prominent societal beliefs and attitudes it is crucial to first look at the history of representation of womanhood, motherhood and femininity.

3.2.1 Womanhood, Motherhood and Femininity in the Past

A groundbreaking source that paints a picture of how the feminine was constructed throughout history is Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1977). Friedan highlighted the existence of a belief system, a myth that she called the feminine mystique, in which women's value relates to the fulfilment of their femininity. This myth is central to heteronormative ideas of the nuclear family and women's 'nature' to become mothers. Friedan illustrated how historically women have always been told that their natural role is to be a wife and mother and to essentially find fulfilment in their femininity. In the 1950s and 1960s, finding a husband and bearing children was the epitome of the true feminine, while careers, political rights and any type of higher education was considered unfeminine (11-12). Although professional work suffered from the low number of women entering the workforce, a woman's goal was to be the typical American suburban housewife fulfilled by her femininity, which constituted the essence of American culture (13). Even though many women were slowly starting to feel unsatisfied with their lives and duties, it was not an option to be unhappy with the life of a housewife. Women were left feeling alone and bought into the notions of something being wrong with them rather than with

the system (14). Friedan coined this phenomenon ‘the problem that has no name’ (15-16). Feelings central to this problem included that women did not have a personality, sense of self, or self-fulfillment outside of the house, their husbands and their kids. ‘The problem that has no name’ shattered the perfectly cured image of the happy suburban housewife in the 1960s and was soon discussed everywhere, in the popular media of the time and in social circles (21). Friedan argued the problem could not be denied, ignored or blamed on the loss of femininity (24). While Friedan stressed all the different but rather obvious factors that lead to these feelings of despair, she pointed out that the housewife’s issue was much deeper than that and alluded to society’s constructed norms around womanhood and femininity and the difficulty of not conforming:

> “… the chains that bind her in her trap are chains in her own mind and spirit. They are chains made up of mistaken ideas and misinterpreted facts, of incomplete truths and unreal choices. They are not easily seen and not easily shaken off” (26).

This logic is closely connected to what I will describe elsewhere as the ‘intensive’ and ‘child-centered’ character of contemporary Western cultural ideas regarding socially appropriate childrearing (Hays 1998).

Popular media representations of women in the 1950s reflect this notion of the female identity solely being a housewife and mother. For example, the most popular program of the 1950s was the show *I Love Lucy*. *I Love Lucy* allowed the representation of marriage, family and other domestic topics on national prime time television by displaying a middle-class nuclear family with a housewife and mother at home and a father working in skilled employment. The presentation of these topics idealized the institution of marriage, family and the home. A common theme in the show was that the husband Ricky stopped his wife Lucy’s career aspirations in show business. Although with this storyline the show represented the idea of ideological containment, which constituted that married women should not pursue any ambitions outside of the private sphere, such as careers or higher education, *I Love Lucy* was

unique for its time as it continually discussed Lucy's ambitions to work and venture outside of the home (Kaaronen 2023, 5-19). However, Davies and Smith (1998) illustrated how the show portrayed Lucy's attempt to escape her domestic confinement only for her to return to the status quo. A pregnancy storyline functioned to redirect Lucy's desire for self-improvement, autonomy and aspirations to work outside the home towards narratives focused on self-improvement for the family and centered around being a good mother and the education of the child (37-48).

While 1950s television shows mostly revolved around the home life and family and the domestic sphere functioned as a haven from work stress and anxieties, later on media allowed more space to reimagine potential alternative lifestyles. But this was rare. For example, Scerri (2021) argued that the author Helen Garner reimagined single motherhood in her 1977 novel *Monkey Grip* and *Other People's Children* from 1980 (1). While single mothers had become an increasingly more common image in literature in the 1970s, Garner was one of the first novelists to address single motherhood in detail in *Monkey Grip*, which is considered one of the first second-wave feminist fictions. Garner's work examined romantic love as a cultural construct, how it was formed by female sexual desire and to which extent it limited women's agency. Her characters' single motherhood did not deny their sexual freedom, desire, or agency outside of the patriarchal family. Garner considered single motherhood as something natural and saw it as breaking down the social constructs of monogamy and patriarchy (2). One major theme in Garner's work was the challenge of breaking down old structures and how individuals in different households took up that challenge. At the forefront of this theme was always the notion of "rejecting traditional nuclear family models and sharing everything" (3). While historically, single mothers have been singled out as the 'other' and either considered victims or been denied agency, "[…] Garner's single mothers [were] neither the victims of historical moral nor modern economic vilification" (5). Monumental was the fact that Garner's single mothers had a sense

of self and identity outside of motherhood and made proactive sexual decisions outside the monogamous ideology, which was uncommon for the time (6-7).

In the 1990s, scholars noted a clearer shift towards a portrayal that reflected and remodeled societal trends in the representation of families (Sandell 1998, 144). For example, media representation of femininity, womanhood and motherhood was influenced by the feminist movement. The popular sitcom *Murphy Brown* incorporated post-feminism ideals in the storyline, such as the main character Murphy Brown deciding to have a baby outside of marriage on her own while remaining to work in a professional career. The post-feminist and liberal feminist implications of the show are clearly portrayed through Murphy not knowing anything about motherhood, childbirth and lacking in 'maternal instincts,' which is what gives the show its comedic effect. Any maternal or familial topics are portrayed as either disruptive or add-ons to Murphy's career and the struggles of pregnancy and motherhood in a patriarchal work environment are highlighted. The show depicted Murphy as a mother without being defined by motherhood and thus rejected the strict distinction between the domestic and the public sphere. While the character Murphy Brown was used to naturalize the working mother, it was still heavily criticized for trying to 'glamorize' single motherhood (Davies and Smith 1998, 51-57). At the same time, a new genre of shows was introduced that centered around alternative families made up of friends and kinship as a substitute to the traditional domestic homelife, the most popular show being *Friends.* This genre challenged the myth of the nuclear family by prioritizing friendships and introducing the concept of a 'chosen family' (Sandell 1998, 142-53).

3.2.2 Womanhood, Motherhood and Femininity in the Present

The previous chapter illustrates how historically women's identity has mostly been constructed on being a wife and mother, including a slow movement towards more progressive ideals over time. Today's Western societal landscape implies a trend away from traditional views on

womanhood and motherhood. Data suggests a rejection of traditional values and lifestyles. For example, the number of single-person households in the US has significantly increased from 6.9 million single-person households in 1960 to approximately 37.89 million single-person households in 2022 (US Census Bureau, 2022). Furthermore, the percentage of births to unmarried women in the US from 1980 to 2022 as well as data about single parent households reflect a shift away from the nuclear family. In 1980 the percentage of births to unmarried women was at 18.4% with the biggest increase from 1985 to 1990 and continuous growth since then. Since the year 2007 the percentage of births to unmarried women has been around 40% with the year 2022 marking 39.8% (CDC, 2024). Additionally, data shows that the US has the highest share of single parenting in the world. In 2018, 23% of children younger than 18 lived in single-parent households in the US (Kramer, 2019). Furthermore, data shows that the number of mothers with child(ren), younger than 18, who do not work outside the home in the US has decreased significantly from 1970 to 2000. However, the same statistic indicates a slow rise in this number from the year 2000 to 2012 (Pew Research Center, 2014). At the same time, data suggests that the birth rate in the US over the course of the last decades since the 1950s has continually declined and that women are having babies much later in life. While teen pregnancies are at an all-time low, the birth rate for women in their forties is slowly rising (UN DESA, 2019). Although a low number, this trend of higher birth rates for women in their forties can be considered a combination of advancements in fertility treatments, changing social norms and women prioritizing personal fulfillment over motherhood.

This context of statistics suggests that today's societal landscape has surpassed the limited image of women having to be mothers and housewives. In fact, research by Ramspott, Medina Bravo and Rodrigo Alsina (2011) on the representation of womanhood in fictional television series showed that new models of femininity are represented in media as well as a gradual and slow shift towards female characters taking on roles of action and leads. The authors argued that female lead characters in shows reflect and mirror concerns and anxieties,

desires and realities, and the paradoxes of what it means to be a woman. The focus seemed to be on the difficulty of balancing the demands of the private and the public spheres, while also incorporating notions of traditional womanhood as well as a resistance to new progressive forms. For example, a new model of femininity showed free and autonomous women, who can experience love without putting romance at the forefront of their identity and remain successful and fulfilled in their professional lives without having to give up their personal identity (7-15). However, the women still acknowledge and struggle with the demands of their professional life and their relationships. Most important to note is that love does not play a superordinate role in their lives, it takes on a shared place with other factors of their lives such as work, friends, personal fulfillment, etc. (14) Additionally, the authors noted a trend of portraying the desire of women to become mothers and parents in the show while touching on the difficulties of navigating being a mother and remaining in the workforce as well as not losing their personal identity (15). Still, the domestic sphere is mostly traditionally represented with only a slight modification of old gender roles, which often shows through minor redistribution of chores, unbalanced show of support or women having to give up their career to some extent (17).

Although female representation has evolved over time and can offer new models of femininity, contemporary media portrayal of women remains riddled with gender stereotypes, traditional feminine imaginaries and heteronormative ideals. The majority of women in media fit the prevalent norms: white, skinny, involved in age-appropriate monogamous romantic relationships within the concept of the nuclear family (Lemish and Muhlbauer 2012, 167-68). In addition to heteronormative beauty standards and the ideal female embodiment, other patriarchal biases remain omnipresent in contemporary media. For example, the creation of the Bechdel Test by Alison Bechdel reveals the influence of the patriarchal notion of making the quest of finding a husband a woman's main life goal. The test serves to determine whether movies and television shows include at least two female characters talking about something other than a man. Although this seems like a rather easy undertaking in television that includes

more sexually liberated and career-focused women than ever, the pass rate for this test is quite low (Selisker, 2015).

Of course, motherhood remains a central topic in media representation and a part of female identity. Ramspott, Medina Bravo and Rodrigo Alsina (2011) noticed that trough the idealization and normalization of the motherhood ideal the private and domestic sphere regained some of its importance and value on TV. The fact that this notion of womanhood and more specifically motherhood is still relevant in contemporary TV exemplifies how deeply this myth of the natural desirable female destiny is rooted in society. The authors argued that when this notion returns to the forefront of media and society, women run the risk of feeling a new sense of guilt when they desire to become mothers and also remain in the public-professional sphere (14-15). Subsequently, Feasey (2012) argued that women in the 21st century are still judged and ridiculed for their choices regarding motherhood:

> "Such scrutiny is in relation to those issues surrounding what is perceived to be the 'correct' and 'appropriate' path to motherhood, so that those lone, working, teen, mature, lesbian or feminist mothers who do not fit the idealized image of the white, heterosexual, self-sacrificing, middle-class, 'good' mother or perform in line with the ideology of intensive mothering, tend to be judged, ranked and found wanting within and beyond the media environment" (2).

Although it is far from the lived realities of mothers in real life, this outdated, unrealistic and unattainable image of motherhood remains omnipresent in popular media (5). The media landscape still romanticizes and idealizes the traditional conservative image of the selfless and fulfilled 'good' mother. The author suggested that the 'good' mother myth emerged due to women's growing social, sexual, financial and political independence (8). A 'good' mother adheres to the accepted ways of dressing, is attractive, serene and selfless. Once the child is born, the 'good' mother takes on intensive mothering (Hays 1998). This means she is the sole caretaker for her child and bears the sole responsibility for its emotional and intellectual development. She always puts her child's needs above her own and will feel nothing but unconditional love towards the child. Never will the 'good' mother feel any type of regret or

unfulfillment about motherhood. Additionally, a ‘good’ mother does not forget to maintain a spotless and nurturing home and a successful marriage (Feasey 2012, 2-3). The ideology of intensive motherhood, which goes hand in hand with the traditional patriarchal gender roles and expectations, conditions people to think that motherhood is a natural or biological function. However, this is not true: Motherhood as a social construct is a cultural practice responding to economic and societal factors. This also means it is continuously changing. New impossible and unrealistic standards and expectations regarding motherhood seem to appear every year. The ‘good’ mothers who adhere to the impossible standards are praised, while women who either fail to fulfil these expectations or who purposely condemn them are portrayed as ‘bad’ mothers, shamed and ridiculed (3-7). This coincides with the media portrayal of single mothers who do not fit into to the ‘good’ mother image. Bergnehr and Wahlström Henriksson (2021) noted how contemporary media representations of single mothers remain negative. Single motherhood is still represented as a ‘social other,’ something undesirable and deeply related to adversity and struggle. Especially in the US negative stereotypical images about single mothers prevail and dominate the media discourse. The single mother is mainly portrayed as poor, dependet on societal and governmental support, and “morally, socially, and financially pos[ing] a threat to society” (134). This image is often represented by young mothers and African American mothers, who are further stereotyped and stigmatized in this context. Single motherhood is never pictured as a potential way of escaping patriarchal norms or as a choice. For example, single mothers who have become pregnant with reproductive technologies are considered to “[have] failed to find a partner with whom to conceive a child and share family life, not as women who prioritize parental solitude or living an alternative family life” (142). However, the authors pointed out that some media, such as reality television and autobiographical novels contribute to more diverse and complex representations of single motherhood (135).

4. Methodology

4.1 Type of Research

The aim of this study is to examine how the messages about womanhood, motherhood ideals and femininity imaginaries are representative of traditional patriarchal norms, and how they contain internalized sexism and misogyny. The following research questions are answered:

1. How do traditional patriarchal notions manifest in the discourse of *The Real Housewives?*

2. How do these manifestations reflect instances of internalized sexism and misogyny?

To achieve this, the study is conducted as a qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is situated in communications research (Neuendorf, 2002) and can be both quantitative and qualitative. It is defined as a

> "generic name for a variety of means of textual analyses that involve comparing, contrasting and categorizing a corpus of data […] including now both numeric and interpretive means" (Schwandt, 2001).

Qualitative content analysis is the most suitable method for this study as it allows for an in-depth examination of both personal and social implications by focusing on detailed and nuanced data rather than quantitative measurement. In qualitative content analysis, the sampling of data is done before the analysis itself, and the material is always interpreted within its context. Central to content analysis is the classification system, in which the objects of the analysis are put into categories to systematically examine the data (Mayring 2014, 39-41).

4.2 Sampling and Data Collection

This study employs a purposive sampling approach, as the depth of understanding takes priority over generalizability. The purposive sampling strategy involves selecting samples based on

specific criteria relevant for the research aim (Andrade 2021, 87). Therefore, this study considers scenes from episodes across multiple *The Real Housewives* franchises in the US that contain discourse or commentary about topics related to womanhood, motherhood and femininity. A protocol was drafted to ensure the scenes' relevance to the research aim, consisting of elements about womanhood, internalized oppression and postfeminism to determine themes and patterns (see Appendix 1).

Obtaining the sample included extensive reviews of episodes across all US franchises from 2006 to 2024 and identifying scenes that fit the study's criteria. In this process, a total of 100 episodes were seen. Despite the universe of episodes spanning from 2006 to 2024, to ensure a comprehensive representation of the subject matter, the analysis sample consists of 18 scenes from episodes across different franchises that aired between 2009 and 2023, which are sorted in Figure 1.

Example	Code for Referencing	Franchise	Season	Episode	Timestamp	Air Date	Contextual Theme
1	R1	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	6	25	34:18-34:47	April 21, 2013	Motherhood
2	R2	The Real Housewives of Orange County	13	19	34:58-37:27	November 25, 2018	
3	R3	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	11	1	25:49-27:56	November 4, 2018	
4	R4	The Real Housewives of New Jersey	10	15	17:06-18:30	February 19, 2020	
5	R5	The Real Housewives of New York City	8	1	20:35-20:43	April 6, 2016	
6	R6	The Real Housewives of Potomac	1	10	29:58-30:27	April 3, 2016	
7	R7	The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills	3	8	28:49-29:46	January 7, 2013	Body
8	R8	The Real Housewives of New York City	14	8	08:09-10:39	September 3, 2023	
9	R9	The Real Housewives of Potomac	6	6	31:27-34:08	August 15, 2021	
10	R10	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	10	19	17:45-18:10	April 8, 2018	
11	R11	The Real Housewives of New York City	2	8	08:34-10:52	April 7, 2009	
12	R12	The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills	3	2	13:59-14:21	November 12, 2012	
13	R13	The Real Housewives Ultimate Girls Trip	1	5	02:29-04:14	November 25, 2021	Relationship status
14	R14	The Real Housewives of New York City	2	2	14:27-17:56	February 24, 2009	
15	R15	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	14	13	04:20-04:54	August 7, 2022	
16	R16	The Real Housewives of New York City	9	14	37:01-39:00	July 4, 2017	
17	R17	The Real Housewives of Potomac	6	6	25:15-31:21	August 15, 2021	
18	R18	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	14	13	37:23-39:07	August 7, 2022	

Figure 1: Selected episodes for analysis

This selection was made because scenes prior to 2009 were less relevant to the research objectives. Applying the protocol to the episodes made evident that a focus on the topics motherhood, body and relationship status expected to provide the most relevant data. Each scene has been codified to facilitate referencing during the presentation of results. Quotes from the scenes will be referenced with the according code and the year of the episode's air date. The

entire episodes are available with the Amazon Prime subscription channel Hayu (see references in Appendix 2). However, I compiled a chart for all episodes that are available for free on YouTube with the corresponding links and new time stamps (see Appendix 3).

4.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed the structure of qualitative content analysis. A protocol was drafted based on the primary examination of data portions to identify important aspects fitting the study's criteria. Throughout the systematical review of the selected scenes the content of the protocol sheet was revised based on the relevance to the research aims and refined into three variables to classify the data. Recurring themes were clustered and formed into categories. The variables and categories were formed based on the distinction into contextual, manifest and latent themes (Santos, Fernández-Planells, and Narberhaus 2022, 88; Andréu-Abela 2000, 1-34). The data was examined through the lens of three contextual categories that frame the data in reference to the research aims: motherhood, body and relationship status. The categories for the manifest themes were designed to provide more information about the content of the messages that are being passed down through the representations in the show. This allowed to cluster the recurring topics discussed in the selected scenes (see Figure 2).

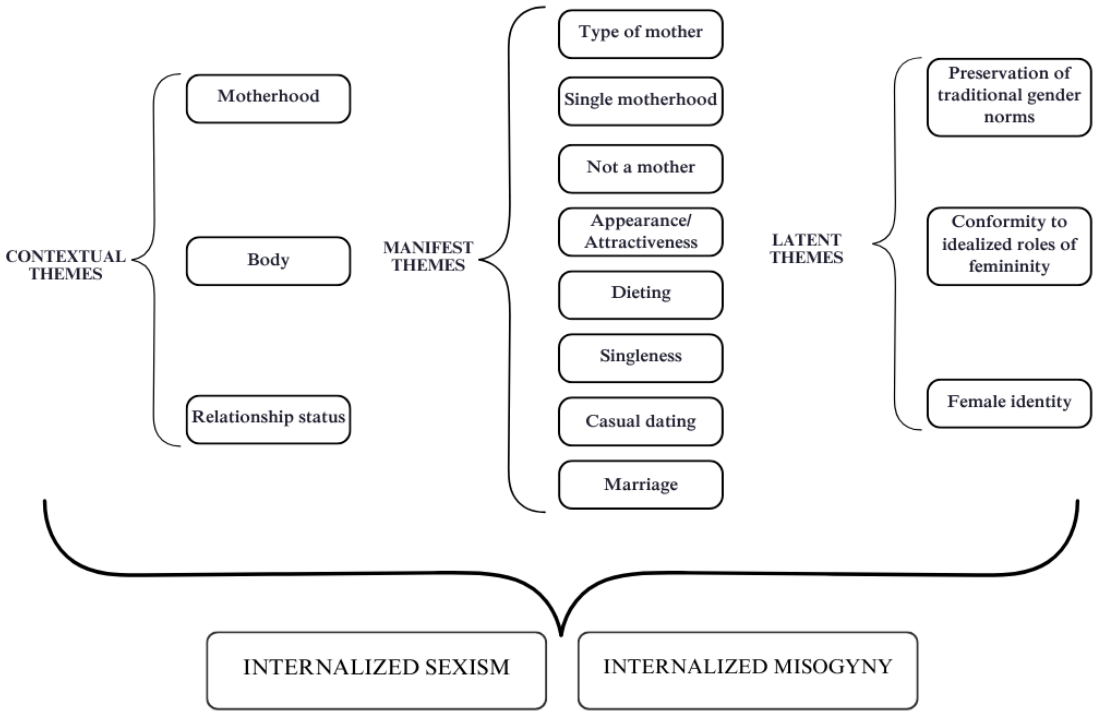

Figure 2: Classification and categories

The latent themes reveal the hidden implications of the messages that are passed down. To establish the latent themes, I chose to focus on establishing categories that incorporate how the representation of womanhood, motherhood, and femininity mirror and perpetuate traditional patriarchal views (see Figure 2) in order to answer my first research aim. While internalized sexism and misogyny are part of the theoretical framework that outlines my analysis and provides context to understand the deeper implications of the observed representations, they are not used as direct categories but rather considered an umbrella arch within the research. This decision was made because the connection to internalized sexism and misogyny emerged from the analysis of these categories. In Figure 3 the overview of scenes from Figure 1 has been extended with the according manifest and latent themes.

Example	Code for Referencing	Franchise	Season	Episode	Timestamp	Air Date	Contextual Theme	Manifest Theme	Latent Theme
1	R1	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	6	25	34:18-34:47	April 21, 2013	Motherhood	Single motherhood	Preservation of traditional gender norms
2	R2	The Real Housewives of Orange County	13	19	34:58-37:27	November 25, 2018			Preservation of traditional gender norms
3	R3	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	11	1	25:49-27:56	November 4, 2018		Type of mother	Preservation of traditional gender norms+Female identity
4	R4	The Real Housewives of New Jersey	10	15	17:06-18:30	February 19, 2020			Preservation of traditional gender norms+Female identity
5	R5	The Real Housewives of New York City	8	1	20:35-20:43	April 6, 2016			Female identity
6	R6	The Real Housewives of Potomac	1	10	29:58-30:27	April 3, 2016		Not a mother	Preservation of traditional gender norms
7	R7	The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills	3	8	28:49-29:46	January 7, 2013	Body	Appearance/ Attractiveness	Conformity to idealized roles of femininity+Female identity
8	R8	The Real Housewives of New York City	14	8	08:09-10:39	September 3, 2023			Conformity to idealized roles of femininity
9	R9	The Real Housewives of Potomac	6	6	31:27-34:08	August 15, 2021			Conformity to idealized roles of femininity+Female identity
10	R10	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	10	19	17:45-18:10	April 8, 2018			Conformity to idealized roles of femininity+Female identity
11	R11	The Real Housewives of New York City	2	8	08:34-10:52	April 7, 2009		Dieting	Conformity to idealized roles of femininity+Female identity
12	R12	The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills	3	2	13:59-14:21	November 12, 2012			Conformity to idealized roles of femininity
13	R13	The Real Housewives Ultimate Girls Trip	1	5	02:29-04:14	November 25, 2021	Relationship status	Casual dating	Conformity to idealized roles of femininity
14	R14	The Real Housewives of New York City	2	2	14:27-17:56	February 24, 2009			Conformity to idealized roles of femininity
15	R15	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	14	13	04:20-04:54	August 7, 2022		Singlesness	Female identity
16	R16	The Real Housewives of New York City	9	14	37:01-39:00	July 4, 2017			Conformity to idealized roles of femininity+Female identity
17	R17	The Real Housewives of Potomac	6	6	25:15-31:21	August 15, 2021		Marriage	Preservation of traditional gender norms+Conformity to idealized roles of femininity+Female identity
18	R18	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	14	13	37:23-39:07	August 7, 2022			Preservation of traditional gender norms+Conformity to idealized roles of femininity+Female identity

Figure 3: Selected episodes with contextual, manifest and latent themes

While establishing the latent themes, I developed a list of exemplifications of how internalized sexism and misogyny manifest themselves in the examples (see Figure 4). This list is based on the concepts of internalized oppression described in the theoretical framework.

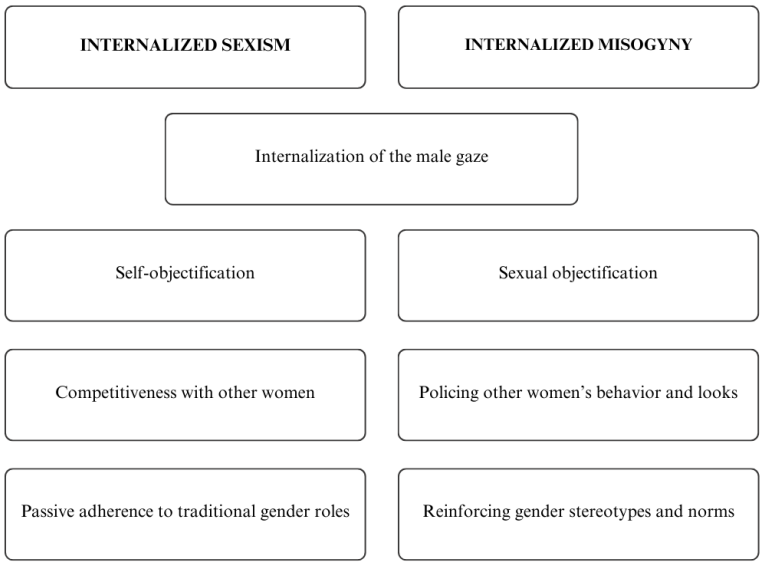

Figure 4: Manifestations of internalized sexism and misogyny

4.4 Ethical Concerns

This study focuses on reality TV content and does not include research participants. Therefore, ethical issues regarding misconduct and impropriety do not need to be considered. Nevertheless, ethical issues surrounding the reality TV genre should be taken into account. Potential exploitation of the cast's privacy during filming as well as the influence of production on the

representation of the cast need to be considered. Additionally, subjectivity as a limitation of the study is a possible ethical concern. To counter this concern, connections to previous research and the theoretical framework will be of importance.

For transparency, I declare that I used the AI tool ChatGPT, Version ChatGPT-4, to improve my style, grammar and vocabulary as well as to improve own content and ideas by refining and checking cohesiveness.

5. Results

The analysis of the messages about womanhood, motherhood and femininity in the show revealed a reflection of patriarchal ideas in accordance with traditional societal beliefs. How these notions manifested per latent theme in the scenes are illustrated in Figure 5. In this chapter, the findings are discussed by dissecting the instances that reflect these manifestations as well as ones that depict potential for progress. The ways in which these manifestations reflect instances of internalized sexism and misogyny are discussed as well.

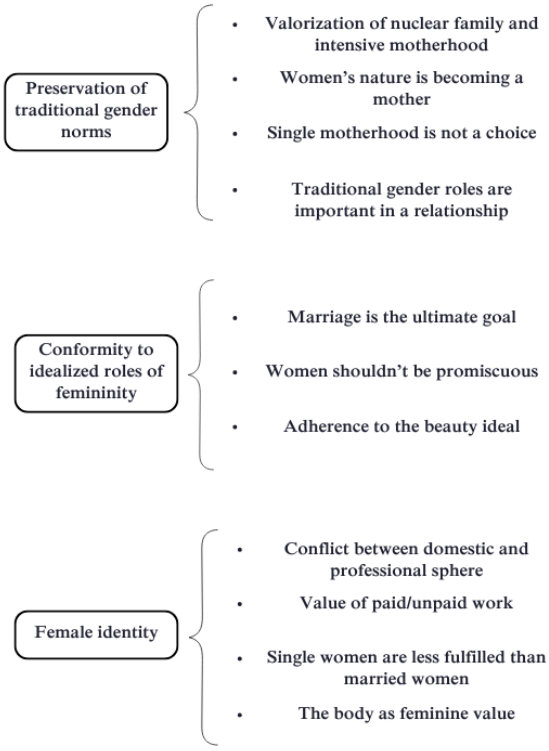

Figure 5: Findings per latent theme of messages about womanhood in accordance with patriarchal views

5.1 Reflection of Society's Patriarchal Views

Preservation of Traditional Gender Norms:

One way *The Real Housewives* mirrors patriarchal views is through the preservation of traditional gender norms and roles. My analysis revealed that the show perpetuates traditional notions about what women's role in society should be. This manifests in **the valorization of the nuclear family and intensive motherhood**, the belief that **women's nature is becoming a mother**, **single motherhood is not a choice**, and in **the importance of retaining traditional gender roles in a relationship**.

For example, the argument between two *housewives* about co-parenting in scene R2 perpetuates **the valorization of the nuclear family and intensive motherhood**. *Housewife* Vicki calls her now separated castmate Kelly a 'bad' mother because she co-parents with her ex-husband and sees her daughter every other week. Accusations like "You're never with Jolie. [...] You travel more than you're with Jolie" (R2, 2018) reinforce the belief that a 'good' mother needs to be constantly present and prioritize her children above everything else. Kelly highlights the fact that before the divorce she was a stay-at-home mother while her husband was often absent. Still, Vicki does not acknowledge this and instead compares Kelly's mother role after the divorce to the now ex-husband's role, which reflects the uneven distribution of childcare and the expectations of women having to be the primary caregiver: "Michael has her more than you do." Kelly's emotional response and defensive statement, "That's a lie. Wow, I'm never with my daughter? [...] I want to be with my daughter," reflects the guilt that is associated with mothers not meeting the societal expectations of being a 'good' mother or not conforming to the intensive motherhood ideal. At the same time, during the argument Vicki states she misses her children who have move out and expresses emotional distress about not being with her family. This situates the nuclear family in an idealized context.

When *housewife* Robyn opens up about struggling with depression during a cast dinner, castmate Gizelle immediately wonders whether Robyn is neglecting her children (R17, 2021), which shows the deeply ingrained internalization of intensive motherhood. Even despite mental health struggles, women are expected to prioritize their children over their own mental well-being.

During a family dinner in scene R3, *housewife* Kandi and her family discuss if Kandi and husband Todd should have more babies as they still have frozen embryos. When daughter Riley quickly rejects this idea, her comments highlight the expectation of mothers to be constantly present and engaged in their children's lives:

> Kandi: "You used to say you wanted a little sister."
>
> Riley: "Yea that was until I saw how y'all were with children. When I was younger, you were around 24/7. I didn't even think you had a job" (R3, 2018).

The normalization of intensive motherhood is further perpetuated by Todd's argument about 'daddy daycare' thriving. This normalizes the belief that fathers' involvement in taking care of their children is babysitting rather than their actual responsibility as a parent and positions women as the primary caregivers. Kandi's comment about how Todd's childcare lasts about 30 minutes a day highlights the minimal and superficial involvement of fathers in childcare responsibilities within the concept of intensive motherhood. The joking and lighthearted discussion about this reinforces the notion that women being the primary caregivers is normal and that there is nothing wrong with the unevenly distributed division of responsibilities.

In scene R4, *housewife* Jennifer and castmate Margaret get into a heated argument over their mothering skills. Stay-at-home mom Jennifer perpetuates the 'good' mother myth by insinuating that Margaret is not a 'good' mother due to her working outside of the home. Jennifer's emphasis on her active role as a mother reinforces the ideology of intensive

motherhood: “I don’t know what type of mother you were, but I’m a very hands-on mother” (R4, 2020).

This notion about intensive motherhood goes hand in hand with the patriarchal belief that **women’s biological nature is becoming a mother**. For example, in scene R6 *housewife* Karen accuses her childless castmate Ashley of not being a ‘real woman’ due to her not having children: “[…] until you become a woman, a real woman, a mother […]” (R6, 2016). This exemplifies that if Ashley does not adhere to the expectation of becoming a mother, she is not considered a ‘real’ woman. The sentiment that **single motherhood cannot be a conscious choice** but rather must be a consequence of not having found a male partner is portrayed in scene R1 when *housewife* Phaedra ridicules her castmate Kenya for her effort to become a mother through sperm donation. She says that nothing is happening in Kenya’s life and highlights that she herself has children with her husband:

> “Because she has nothing else going on. And while she’s sitting around, running around talking about my husband and my – the father of my children, and she spends her weekends paddling through sperm banks, looking through catalogs to try to find a donor – Honey, you don’t know if your baby daddy will be an ax murderer or a child molester because what you will know is that he needed $10 to get him a medium sized pizza, so he ejaculated in a cup so you could have a kid. Now check that” (R1, 2013).

Additionally, by portraying the sperm donor as a potential poor criminal, she mocks sperm donation and disregards it as a dubious reproductive technology. She thus places the traditional way of becoming a mother in a superior position.

That **women should not deviate from traditional gender roles** is communicated in scene R18. *Housewife* Marlo ridicules castmate Kandi about taking care of her husband financially: “You take care of a man” (R18, 2022). She thereby suggests that men should be the providers and women should care for their families. Similarly, Marlo’s comment “You don’t want a husband. […] You really want a wife,” which she frames as an insult not only ascribes the role of the provider to the man and the role of the caretaker to the woman but also insinuates

that venturing out of the established gender role in a heterosexual marriage is inappropriate. Furthermore, Kandi herself upholds the notion that the man is supposed to take on the role of the provider by defending herself against the accusations: “I do not take care of Todd! […] My husband always had a great job before he met me.” Kandi’s strong need to defend herself and her husband illustrates how these traditional gender roles are tightly connected to social respectability.

In a similar manner, in scene R17 *housewife* Candice admits to feeling uncomfortable with her husband taking on the traditionally feminine role of cooking. Her statement “Sometimes I feel weird that Chris cooks, and our gender roles are very reversed” (R17, 2021), reflects the societal belief in female and male tasks. Although she puts air quotes around the word gender roles, insinuating that gender roles are made up, the statement implies that it is unusual for men to participate in domestic tasks. Her discomfort with the reversed roles further reinforces the importance of traditional gender roles. This is highlighted when castmate Gizelle implies that Candice’s husband could potentially feel emasculated because he is not the primary breadwinner and when Candice’s mother expresses worry about the situation. This scene sends the messages that being the provider as a woman is not worth striving for and met with scrutiny because the tradition that men control the finances should prevail. The skepticism about Chris being Candice’s manager further implies that it is wrong for men to prioritize their wives’ professional advancements over their own, which is something that is traditionally expected of wives.

Conformity to Idealized Roles of Femininity

The analysis of the sampled scenes made apparent that the show perpetuates conformity to idealized roles of femininity according to traditional societal notions. These ideals of femininity manifested themselves in rendering **marriage as the ultimate goal**, the belief that **women**

should never act promiscuously, and in the *housewives'* attempts to **adhere to the beauty ideal**.

The belief that women's value is connected to their marital status and that **marriage is the goal** can be observed in scene R18. Kandi uses "You ain't even got a husband. Get a husband – and then tell me what to do with one" (R18, 2022) as a clever comeback in a fight with Marlo. Her comment highlights the belief that having a husband gives women value. Similarly, in scene R17 Robyn's attractiveness and the prospect of getting married is prioritized over her mental health when she admits that her fiancé perceives her struggles with depression and productivity as unattractive and castmate Gizelle comments: "You have not made any changes? Is he not wanting to rush down the aisle because of this? No man wants to marry unattractive" (R17, 2021). By urging Robyn to prioritize marriage over her own well-being, Gizelle upholds the expectation of having to conform to the role of the perfect woman, who always remains attractive to men even when facing mental health struggles.

During a group conversation about dating and sex in scene R16, *housewife* Luann says to the group that she feels lucky to be married. The group's reactions to that statement reflect the patriarchal view that women's value is tied to their relationship status:

> Confessional of Ramona: "None of us right now are married, okay? None of us are in like the best relationship, and she's trying to sound like, superior, I think, like she has something over us and rub it in our faces that she's married and we're not."
>
> [...]
>
> Luann: "Don't make me feel bad about being married and being happy."
>
> [...]
>
> Dorinda: "[...] You all make us feel bad sometimes. By just being married and speaking about it makes her special. We get it."
>
> Bethenny: "It can be belittling is what she's saying" (R16, 2017).

This exchange reflects the women's feelings of inferiority and lack of self-worth about not being married. The single women's choice of words shows that they see marriage as the

primary goal for women and places those who have 'made it' in a superior position. This can also be seen in scene R14 when *housewife* Ramona shows Bethenny the article she wrote on dating rules. The rules imply that women have to adhere to specific strategies and rules in order to 'catch a husband' (R14, 2009). The pressure to conform to these norms is emphasized when Bethenny says she is single because she failed most of the rules. However, Bethenny reads the rules with a hint of sarcasm and states that she is not specifically looking for a man, which suggests some resistance to these expectations.

Some of Ramona's rules to dating, such as "Don't do 'it' right away, even when you're lusting for him" (R14, 2009), promote the belief that **women should not act promiscuously**. The message that promiscuity is shameful and something to avoid is further communicated in scene R13 when Ramona judges Luann for sleeping with her husband the first night she met him (R13, 2021). This reflects the patriarchal belief that women who engage in casual sex are considered morally questionable and should rather conform to the traditional expectations of chastity. However, Luann makes clear that this is her choice, which offers the potential for progress by promoting agency over her own sexual decisions and challenges the idea that women should feel shame about their sexual choices.

In scene R9, *housewife* Wendy's authenticity and professionality is questioned when her castmates judge her for her newfound sexy look. The following exchange highlights the ingrained patriarchal belief that women should not be overly sexual in their appearance, especially if they want to be respected professionally:

> Gizelle: "It [her newfound sexy look] is way different from Professor Wendy, 'Substance Wendy.'"
>
> Wendy: "We are often put in a box, that you cannot be sexy and have substance."
>
> Mia: "I disagree with that. Because you would never see Michelle Obama with her boobies out. [...] Like if you're a professor, you have to embody that."
>
> Wendy: "No you do not. That's a lie. I stand before you as someone who still has multiple degrees, who is still a professor at one of the highest institutions, who is still a

> commentator, who still does all of those things. And that does not take away from any of my accolades" (R9, 2021).

The castmate's opinions about Wendy's appearance reinforce the notion of a limited female image, one in which sexiness and intellect or professionality are mutually exclusive. However, Wendy's rebuttal of those comments challenges this binary thinking, which shows that women have the right to express themselves however they like and can still demand respect. This marks an instance of progress as Wendy redefines her femininity while refusing to conform to the traditional ideas of femininity.

Although Wendy states that she alone defines her sexiness, she still succumbs to the pressure of **adhering to the beauty standard**, as she admits to having had breast augmentation after giving birth. Her statement "No woman at this table two months postpartum is the woman she was before she had the baby" (R9, 2021) emphasizes the challenges of the postpartum experience and the pressure for women to 'snap back' to the ideal body in its pre-pregnancy form.

An exchange about getting back on a diet between *housewife* Yolanda and daughter Gigi, who aspires to be a model, in scene R12 gives insight into women controlling their diet to maintain a skinny body (R12, 2012). The use of the phrase being 'good' and 'bad' in relation to food consumption and the expectation of strict self-monitoring emphasize the societal attitude that women need to conform to beauty standards and therefore constantly monitor and control their bodies. Furthermore, the conversation reflects the responsibility to prioritize appearance and attractiveness that society puts on women. Scene R7 exemplifies this further. Gigi confides in her mother about wanting to play volleyball again, to which Yolanda insists that Gigi is not able to play volleyball and model at the same time. She describes female volleyball players as having "big and bulky" bodies because they "eat like men" (R7, 2013). In doing so, Yolanda urges Gigi to adhere to the beauty ideal and the societal expectation that women should maintain a slim and delicate body. Furthermore, Yolanda reveals society's perception of female

appearance and the beauty standard when she makes an assumption about Gigi's sexual orientation based on her outfit choices:

> Gigi: "[...] Remember, I used to wear basketball clothes to school every day?"
> [...]
> Yolanda: "I thought that my daughter was a lesbian" (R7, 2013).

In scene R11 Luann speaks to a group of young girls about self-esteem. When a ten-year-old girl expresses her desire to become a model, Luann implies that the girl's current body is a work in progress. She says, "You have a beautiful face. [...] Losing weight is easy" (R11, 2009). This statement suggests that losing weight is necessary and easily achievable. It also exemplifies the pressure women face to change and conform to the skinny body ideal. Although, the three previously mentioned examples happen in the context of modelling, they still apply to the broader societal implications of conforming to the standard of beauty. The modelling industry is notoriously known for setting an unattainable standard of beauty for the 'normal' woman.

During an argument in scene R10, Marlo makes a harsh comment that targets Kenya's skin. She describes her as "Bright yellow over there with the bad skin [...]" (R10, 2018). Using Kenya's physical appearance as an insult, Marlo highlights the importance of flawless skin as a part of the beauty standard. Kenya's response that her skin is perfect indicates her concern about adhering to this ideal of perfection. At the same time, there is also potential for progress as the next scene encourages a more inclusive idea of beauty. In scene R8 *housewife* Jenna speaks about her genetic disorder which affects the skin, teeth and hair, and the shame and stigma attached to it. Thereby, she brings attention to the difficulties people with visible deviations from the traditional beauty ideal experience. Jenna admits that she feels insecure and immense pressure to conform to the beauty standard. Her fear of being judged for her appearance and the sacrifices she makes to conform reflect how this beauty ideal dictates women's behavior and emotions:

> Jenna: “I’m not going to be in a bathing suit. It’s not happening. I’m literally going to be wearing tweet pants and like a blazer at the pool. [...] I remember every summer I would hibernate away from everyone else and get a tan. [...] Maybe I should travel with one of those airbrush things” (R8, 2023).

Female Identity

In patriarchal society, female identity is often based on motherhood, domestic responsibilities, women’s physical appearance and their relationship with men. These beliefs manifested in the show in discussions about the **conflict between the domestic and professional spheres**, arguments about the **value of paid and unpaid work**, statements that communicate that **single women are less fulfilled than married women**, and the notion that **the body is central to women’s value**.

Kandi’s family dinner in scene R3 is an example for such discourse about the **conflict between the domestic and the professional spheres**. It sheds light on Kandi’s struggle with balancing her career and her parental responsibilities (R3, 2018). Although she is excelling in her career and there for her children, her daughters criticize her for not being present enough at home. When asked about this critic during the confessional statements, Kandi says to the camera: “But even though I work all the time, I’m there for my kid’s doctors’ appointments, I’m there for other events – “ Before she can finish her sentence, a text interrupts her saying she missed her son’s parent teacher meeting (R3, 2018). The scene portrays the challenges working mothers face while trying to juggle it all. The impact of Kandi’s professional commitments felt by her daughters and the confessional scene’s implication that the text Kandis receives about missing her son’s meeting negates her statement about being there for her kids, exemplify why women usually have to sacrifice their professional success or parts of their careers in order to conform to the societal expectations of putting family first. Additionally, in scene R18, Marlo comments on Kandi’s work and its impact on her mothering ability to suggest that Kandi cannot have multiple identities as a successful artist and a mother. She says, “You can’t be a mother like that and work as hard as you do” (R18, 2022). This comment underlines the internalized

patriarchal belief that women should prioritize family over career. The take-away is that women have to choose between their identity as a mother or their professional identity, that they cannot do both.

How demanding it can be to juggle multiple female identities is discussed in scene R17. Robyn admits to struggling with the demands of being a businesswoman, a mother, and an attractive romantic partner. She says,

> "Because I don't know what it is, but I've been like, unmotivated lately. [...] But I'm also trying to figure out why can't I just get up because I have a ton of shit that I need to do. It's like affecting my relationship, because Juan is like, 'that's not attractive'" (R17, 2021).

Other women in the group share similar struggles with feeling overwhelmed, which highlights the pressure and systemic disadvantages that women experience while juggling multiple identities and expectations. This recognition of shared experiences offers the potential for progress as it validates women's struggles to excel in both the domestic and the professional sphere as well as serves as a space to discuss female mental health.

Another example of how *The Real Housewives* offers potential for progress regarding multi-faceted identities is through the normalization of outsourced help for domestic and caregiving responsibilities. This promotes a female identity that includes autonomy and fulfillment for women outside of motherhood and helps with the demands of domestic and professional tasks and is reflected by *housewife* Jules in scene R5 who acknowledges that she has a live-in nanny and a housekeeper. Her mentioning this without any guilt challenges the stigma associated with not 'doing it all' and seeking help. It also shows the reality of different ways of being a woman and a mother. In her confessional statement she recognizes her need for multiple roles and identities, which at the same time challenges the notion that a woman's identity is solely defined by her role as a mother: "My job is to be a mom, but I can't play one role in life" (R5, 2016).

Part of the sample also shows discourse about society's perception of the **value of paid and unpaid work**. Jennifer and Margaret argue about their mothering skills in scene R4. Their argument reflects that society values work with economic contribution over the unpaid but crucial work stay-at-home mothers do. Margaret puts emphasis on the fact that Jennifer does not work outside of the home, which she herself does not consider 'real' work. This statement minimizes the effort and hard labor of stay-at-home mothers. It also reflects a patriarchal bias which deems domestic tasks less valuable, less significant and not worthy of financial compensation. At the same time, Jennifer defends her work and highlights the demanding nature of her job. She says, "I work a 14-hour day, honey. It doesn't end until my kids go to sleep, and then I'm off the clock" (R4, 2020). Her husband challenges the dismissal of Jennifer's work by calling it a profession, and castmate Dolores acknowledges the legitimacy of unpaid domestic work by stating that "being a stay-at-home mother is the hardest job in the world." These recognitions counter the notion that unpaid domestic labor is less valuable than paid work and highlight that being a stay-at-home mother is undervalued. Therefore, the scene can be considered a step away from the devaluation of domestic labor and a step towards an acknowledgement of the work and significance that being a stay-at-home mother entails.

The notion that female identity is linked to a woman's relationship status constitutes a key aspect of patriarchal logic. This correlates with the belief that **single women are not as fulfilled as married women**. This view is perpetuated in scene R14 when Ramona feels the need to help Bethenny find a man, which implies that being single is undesirable. The following rule from Ramona's dating advice paints the picture of an unhappy single woman who is spending her weekend alone because she did not settle: "Overly discriminating women wind up spending Saturday night with a container of Haagen-Dazs" (R14, 2009). The societal pressure to be coupled can also be seen in scene R15 when *housewife* Kenya talks to her castmate Drew about the requirement of bringing a plus one on a cast trip. Just this requirement alone implies that being in a relationship is more desirable than being single and that partnership

is the ideal. In combination with Kenya feeling stressed about potentially attending the trip alone, this instance reflects how social situations reinforce the societal pressure on women to be in a relationship. Drew says, "[…] she [castmate who organized the trip] was really pushing that 'Who are you bringing?'" (R15, 2022). The pressure to bring a date implies that women's value and completeness is tied to being coupled, which can lead to women prioritizing romantic relationships over other aspects of their lives. It also implies that single women are incomplete without a partner. However, in their conversation, Kenya and Drew challenge this expectation and emphasize a female identity that prioritizes autonomy and independence. For example, Kenya notes that it is assumed that single women long for male companionship. She then opposes this assumption by saying "My happiness is not dependent on a plus one," which challenges the negative perception of single women being incomplete while highlighting that singleness can be a fulfilling choice. Drew's support of Kenya emphasizes a female identity that does not cater to societal pressure. While this scene mirrors the idea that women's worth is tied to their relationships, it also marks the potential for progress of the show as it simultaneously challenges these norms and validates women's autonomy.

Another instance in which this idea of undesirable female singlehood is perpetuated are the women's reactions to Luann when she expresses relief about being married in scene R16. The women's choice of words reflects a bias towards marriage as something superior. Phrases such as 'rubbing it in' and 'makes us feel bad' also imply that being married promises great fulfillment in life and that singleness is a source of insecurity for women, which reinforces the belief that single women are less fulfilled than married women (R16, 2017).

The scene in which Luann discusses self-esteem and positive self-image with young girls offers potential for progress. The initial intention of the event encourages girls to appreciate different characteristics and traits about themselves that do not center around physical appearance but value personal qualities, character and intellect (R11, 2009). This helps

to promote self-worth beyond the physical. However, during the scene Luann also refers to physical attributes as 'the basics.' This reinforces the notion that the foundation of young girls' worth are the physical attributes and **reduces women's value to their bodies**. Similarly, the conversation between Yolanda and Gig about volleyball in scene R7 reinforces the same notion. While Gigi's wish to return to volleyball indicates that she considers this interest part of her identity, Yolanda's statement that "Volleyball is a very masculine sport. Modeling is a very feminine thing" (R7, 2013) underlines which interests are appropriate for women. In defining modelling as something feminine, Yolanda places significance on the body as shaping female identity.

The fight between Kenya and Marlo about Kenya's skin in scene R10 reflects how women's value is often judged on physical appearances. Especially Kenya's comment reinstates the notion that women's self-worth and value is tied to their looks. She says, "You can't come for me with my beauty" (R10, 2018). Furthermore, when Marlo insinuates that Kenya has to pay her husband to stay with her, she perpetuates the idea that a woman is only of interest for a man due to her physical appearance. This reinforces the notion that women's value is tied to their bodies. In a similar manner, scene R9 ties women's value and worth directly to their body and appearance, when her castmates say that Wendy's sexy look does not embody her identity as a professional and insinuate that a woman who dresses in a revealing way is not deserving of respect (R9, 2021).

5.2 Internalized Sexism and Misogyny

The findings discussed above exemplify how *The Real Housewives* mirror already established traditional societal views, which manifest in the perpetuation of gender norms, the pressure to conform to idealized roles of femininity, and notions that reinforce female identity. These messages about harmful beliefs about women's worth and roles in society are communicated through the *housewives'* commentary and self-perceptions. Not only do these conversations and

interactions mirror the conventions of patriarchal society, they also demonstrate that the women have internalized patriarchal and sexist beliefs.

For instance, engaging in harmful dieting, like Yolanda advises her daughter to do (R12, 2012), or beauty practices to fit the societal beauty standard, like Wendy getting plastic surgery (R9, 2021), reflect the women's **internalization of the male gaze**. Similarly, Jenna's effort in fighting her genetic disorder to meet the beauty ideal exemplifies this internalization (R8, 2023). Other examples of the internalized male gaze are the women's need to be constantly attractive or sexually appealing to men and modifying their behavior or appearance to avoid male disapproval. For instance, this becomes evident when the women's main concern about Robyn's mental health struggle is how attractive she is to her fiancé and whether this could possibly keep him from wanting to marry her. Gizelle encourages Robyn to change her attitude because "no man wants to marry unattractive" (R17, 2021) instead of telling her to seek help because she wants Robyn to be mentally well. Another example are Ramona's dating rules, which tell women to change their behavior to appeal to men (R14, 2009). Luann's advice to a young girl to lose weight (R11, 2009) shows that the social importance of physical appearance is learnt from young girlhood on and that girls are taught to internalize the male gaze and the beauty standard that derives from it.

This internalization of the sexist outside observer also leads to **self-objectification**. Self-objectification manifests itself in believing that one's worth is tied to how attractive one is to men. This can be seen in the scenes that place married women in a superior position and perpetuate the belief that marriage should be the ultimate goal for women (R14, 2009; R16, 2017; R17, 2021; R18, 2022). Self-objectification also shows up through viewing oneself primarily through the lens of physical attributes and appearance, as the scene in which Luann tells the girl that the physical is 'the basics' (R11, 2009) depicts. Tightly connected to self-objectification, **sexual objectification** manifests itself as viewing other women primarily as

sexual objects. This can be observed in the fight between Marlo and Kenya. Marlo insinuates that Kenya's only value is her sexual attractiveness and appearance when she states that Kenya has to pay her husband to stay with her because her skin is bad (R10, 2018). Sexual objectification also figures prominently in the scene in which Gizelle and Mia express that they do not consider women who dress provocatively smart or worthy of respect (R9, 2021).

The use of derogatory terms to describe other women's bodies, as can be seen in multiple examples, indicates internalized misogyny and sexism through the **competitiveness with other women** as well as the **policing of other women's looks and behaviors**. Instances in which the cast criticizes their castmates for their looks and behaviors (R7, 2013; R9, 2021; R10, 2018), for not conforming to traditional norms of femininity, judgment about other women's sexual choices (R6, 2016; R7, 2013; R9, 2021), undermining other women for not having husbands (R10, 2018; R18, 2022), and slut-shaming (R10, 2018; R13, 2021) all illustrate the internalization of patriarchal notions.

Lastly, internalized sexism and misogyny are also detected in the **reinforcement and passive adherence to traditional gender roles**. The analyzed discourses reflect the acceptance and promotion of traditional gender roles, which limit women's opportunities, freedom, choice and agency. For instance, the scenes surrounding motherhood perpetuate the 'good' mother myth, the ideology of intensive motherhood and the belief that becoming a mother is a woman's biological destiny (R1, 2013; R2, 2018; R3, 2018; R4, 2020; R6, 2016). The belief that certain activities, professions and looks are inherently male or female (R7, 2013; R17, 2021; R18, 2022) further entrench traditional gender roles. The vehement dissemination of these beliefs by some of the *housewives* and the pressure to conform to these norms indicate that most of them have internalized these gender roles and norms.

6. Discussion

Prior research has highlighted the role of reality TV in reflecting societal values and norms and emphasized its power to unveil the level of conservatism and regression in society (Durkheim 2002, 55-58; Gerbner *et al.* 1986, 17-40; Lindemann 2022; Montemurro 2008, 84-106). *The Real Housewives*, with its all-female cast, served to explore how the show mirrors traditional societal views on womanhood, motherhood, and femininity and how internalized sexism and misogyny manifest within this context.

This study showed that the franchise mirrors society's patriarchal beliefs through the *housewives'* perpetuation of internalized patriarchal ideologies and societal prejudices against their own gender. The findings revealed that the franchise both reflects and reinforces the traditional notions inherent in patriarchal society, particularly emphasizing patriarchal ideals surrounding women's bodies and appearances, their role as a mother, and their relationships with men. This manifested in the preservation of traditional gender norms, the pressure to conform to idealized roles of femininity, and patriarchal notions that shape female identity. The *housewives'* commentary and self-perceptions showed instances of internalized sexism and misogyny such as self-objectification, competitive commentary, internalization of the male gaze and the adherence to traditional gender roles. This illustrated how the internalization of sexist and patriarchal beliefs fosters a hostile environment in which sexist practices and beliefs circulate among women, even in the absence of men. Therefore, traditional patriarchal beliefs, which limit women's freedom, choice and agency are perpetuated. This helps to maintain sexism via a system of social expectations and pressures imposed upon women. These findings of the study align with the frameworks of internalized oppression, sexism and misogyny used to contextualize the study. The frameworks suggest that women, the oppressed group in patriarchal society, internalize harmful beliefs about themselves, which maintains patriarchal

power (McKinley and Hyde 1996; Pheterson 1986; Ramos David 2014; Szymanski and Kashubeck-West 2008).

The study's findings correlate with the previously discussed literature on the representation of women and femininity in media by showing that popular contemporary media, here represented by *The Real Housewives*, still perpetuates the 'good' mother myth and the feminine mystique today. However, it is important to remember Derenzo's (2011) argument, that the *housewife* persona on the franchise embodies a modern, successful and wealthy woman that generally does not live up to the traditional role of the housewife (27). Although the *housewives* perpetuate patriarchal views on gender roles and the name of the franchise suggests a focus on housewifery, their persona rarely represents the exact image of what a woman's role traditionally should be in patriarchal society.

While the study demonstrated that the *housewives* regularly uphold the status quo and perpetuate harmful beliefs about women's roles and their value in society, it also revealed instances of potential progress. The findings showed that some of the women on *The Real Housewives* break through the idealized images of femininity and the romanticized version of motherhood by resisting to conform to idealized version of femininity, challenging binary thinking and advocating for choice and agency. Additionally, despite their (financial) privileges as wealthy, successful and accomplished women, the *housewives* rarely measure up to the unrealistic expectations set for women and mothers. Although it is important to remember that due to production and editing, the representations on reality TV are seldom an accurate reflection of reality, this can serve as a reminder and as proof that the standards and ideals women are expected to conform to are unattainable, even for those with substantial resources at their disposal.

Even though it was not my objective to compare the franchise over the years, due to my sample spanning over a long period of time I found that although the harmful patriarchal messages continue to be perpetuated over the years, more recent scenes show increased criticism and rebuttal from the women. This suggests a shift over time towards more awareness of internalized sexism and misogyny and a rebellion against the expectations and roles patriarchy imposes on women.

The Real Housewives also exemplifies the characteristics of contemporary postfeminist media. The women frequently tie their own and other women's value to physical appearances and relationships with men. At the same time, the women see themselves as successful and independent. This dichotomy reflects the image of the empowered woman who still conforms to patriarchal standards of femininity, illustrating postfeminist contemporary media culture. The many instances of self-surveillance and strict monitoring, the internalization of the male gaze as well as the focus on the female body align with the postfeminist themes of individualism and choice, self-objectification and femininity as a bodily property (Gill 2007). The *housewives* engage in self-improvement and beauty practices they believe are their own choice, yet these choices are heavily influenced by the internalized societal standards of beauty and femininity, as the manifestations of internalized sexism and misogyny in the results have shown.

In conclusion, *The Real Housewives* serves as an example of how reality TV mirrors societal attitudes towards gender norms and roles. The show perpetuates patriarchal notions and reveals internalized sexism and misogyny, while also capturing the contradictory nature of postfeminist media culture. The show reflects and has the potential to redefine and challenge social norms, expectations and opinions about womanhood, motherhood and femininity. Considering television's influence on establishing norms and ideals (Feasey 2012, 178; Bohannon 2023) and the show's popularity within the context of the Sexual Scripting Theory

by Simon and Gagnon (1987), which posits that media portrayals shape and reinforce societal norms regarding acceptable sexual and gender behavior, the findings of this research exemplify the importance of critically analyzing and breaking down messages that reinforce and reflect misogynistic beliefs and attitudes in the field of communications.

7. Limitations

Due to the large number of *The Real Housewives* franchises and the scope of the project, this study cannot give an accurate representation of all *The Real Housewives* franchises and only analyzes a sample of certain franchises. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to the entirety of the show. Although internalized misogyny and representations of society's views about gender can possibly be found across all franchises, this study has selected specific scenes that make the research more relevant. Therefore, a self-selection bias in the sampling process cannot be avoided. Additionally, identifying instances of internalized sexism and misogyny is to a certain extent a subjective interpretation, as behaviors and attitudes inherent in internalized sexism and misogyny may not always be explicit and easily recognizable.

Due to the nature of the researched medium, scenes can be obscured or amplified for dramatic effect. The editing and production processes of reality programs can include manipulated narratives and portrayals and thus lead to a distorted representation of the social dynamics in the shows. Therefore, selective representation should be considered as a possible limitation.

This study does not go into depth about the implications of intersectionality in regards to womanhood, motherhood and femininity. Additional discriminatory forms of social stratification besides gender, such as race, class and sexual orientation and how they intersect and interact within the study's research objective could not be considered due to the study's scope limitations. However, further research could expand upon the scope of this study to capture how different expectations and images are ascribed to women of different backgrounds,

how women navigate and negotiate their multiple intersecting identities in a patriarchal society, and how intersecting forms of discrimination shape their experiences and internalizations of womanhood.

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Appendix 1

Protocol Sheet

1) Franchise and Episode Information
    a. Franchise name
    b. Season
    c. Episode number
    d. Episode title
    e. Air date
2) Scene Information
    a. Scene timestamp
    b. Scene length in minutes
        i. Less than 1
        ii. 1-2
        iii. 2-3
        iv. 3-4
        v. 4 or more
    c. Cast members involved in the scene
    d. Does the scene portray beliefs/internalization of traditional patriarchal views? (If yes, provide details)
        i. Yes
        ii. No
3) Language and Discourse
    a. What topics are discussed regarding womanhood, motherhood and femininity?
        i. Dating
        ii. Attractiveness/Body
        iii. Balancing work and family live
        iv. Finances
        v. Issues regarding ex-partners or divorce (if applicable)
        vi. Motherhood
        vii. Female singlehood
        viii. Co-parenting
    b. What kinds of derogatory or sexist language is used? (If applicable)
        i. Insults and derogatory terms
        ii. Objectifying remarks
        iii. Dismissive comments
        iv. Negative character/personality traits
4) Internalized Misogyny
    a. What themes that reflect internalized misogyny are represented?
        i. Motherhood as sole identity
        ii. Domesticity as primary value
        iii. Emphasis on physical appearance (objectification)
        iv. Dependency on male validation
        v. Women's value equates to her ability to attract and keep a man
        vi. Female singlehood is not considered a choice
        vii. Gendered stereotypes
        viii. Devaluating and mistrusting other women
        ix. Showing favorable bias towards men
        x. Competitive commentary
        xi. Self-objectification

xii. Observance to traditional gender roles
xiii. Placing men as top priority

5) Postfeminism Themes and Attributes
   a. What themes of postfeminism can be found?
      i. Focus on the body
      ii. Women as sexual subjects
      iii. Emphasis on self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline
      iv. Focus on individualism, choice and empowerment

Appendix 2

Reference List for Sample

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Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. Season 11, episode 1, "To Love and to Cherish." Aired November 4, 2018. https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B07K5PCGBZ/ ref=atv_dp_season_select_s11.

Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. Season 14, episode 13, "A Rum Punch to the Gut." Aired August 7, 2022. https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B09PTCH9PM/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s14.

Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*. Season 3, episode 2, "The Higher the Heel the Closer to God." Aired November 12, 2012. https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B08LMBDGB3/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s3.

Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*. Season 3, episode 8, "Vanderpump Rules." Aired January 7, 2013. https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B08LMBDGB3/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s3.

Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*. Season 10, episode 15, "Secrets Revealed." Aired February 19, 2020. https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B07ZZK4RXY/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s10.

Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives of New York City*. Season 2, episode 2, "Hamptons Retreat... But No Surrender." Aired February 24, 2009. https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B08N5S1D6V/ref =atv_dp_season_select_s2.

Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives of New York City*. Season 2, episode 8, "Game. Set. Feud." Aired April 7, 2009. https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B08N5S1D6V/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s2.

Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives of New York City*. Season 8, episode 1, "Start Spreading the News." Aired April 6, 2016. https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B01DYU2HWQ/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s8.

Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives of New York City*. Season 9, episode 14, "A Slippery Slope." Aired July 4, 2017. https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B06Y38DVR1/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s9.

Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives of New York City*. Season 14, episode 8, "Business Classy." Aired September 3, 2023. https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B0C9FQW5VD/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s14.

Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives of Orange County*. Season 13, episode 9, "Reunion, Pt. 1." Aired November 25, 2018. https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B07FM96F2G/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s13.

Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives of Potomac*. Season 1, episode 10, "Rules of Enragement." Aired April 3, 2016. https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B01AU54RN0/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s1.

Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives of Potomac*. Season 6, episode 6, "Land of the Free, Home of the Shade." Aired August 15, 2021. https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B0995HT5V6/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s6.

Bravo, network. *The Real Housewives Ultimate Girls Trip*. Season 1, episode 5, "Stormy Waters." Aired November 25, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= OFXbi6XBcZ4&list=WL&index=67&t=46s.

Appendix 3

Example	Code for Referencing	Franchise	Season	Episode	Link	Time stamp	Air Date	Contextual Theme
1	R1	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	6	25	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLKGXixgIkg&t=163s	2:09-2:47	April 21, 2013	Motherhood
2	R2	The Real Housewives of Orange County	13	19	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keQPians_94	from 1:20	November 25, 2018	
3	R3	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	11	1	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPi0qqzA0LA	from 0:38	November 4, 2018	
4	R4	The Real Housewives of New Jersey	10	15	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=al7krdDQv6Y	1:07-2:25	February 19, 2020	
5	R5	The Real Housewives of New York City	8	1	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QM36DDP3JQE	0:21-0:29	April 6, 2016	
6	R6	The Real Housewives of Potomac	1	10	https://www.youtube.com/shorts/AGpCINrdrEQ	from 0:00	April 3, 2016	
7	R7	The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills	3	8	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVWqEwoyUh0	0:00-0:31	January 7, 2013	Body
8	R8	The Real Housewives of New York City	14	8	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DM51ySGLSM4&t=171s	from 2:06	September 3, 2023	
9	R9	The Real Housewives of Potomac	6	6	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vwk90gjBAk	0:00-2:03	August 15, 2021	
10	R10	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	10	19	not availabe for free	/	April 8, 2018	
11	R11	The Real Housewives of New York City	2	8	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtlcZHVXAtY	0:00-0:32	April 7, 2009	
12	R12	The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills	3	2	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVWqEwoyUh0	0:31-0:58	November 12, 2012	
13	R13	The Real Housewives Ultimate Girls Trip	1	5	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFXbi6XBcZ4&t=254s	2:29-4:13	November 25, 2021	Relationship status
14	R14	The Real Housewives of New York City	2	2	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lHn6Vv7eDhM	from 0:00	February 24, 2009	
15	R15	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	14	13	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNjxJ_8ct08&t=179s	2:40-3:14	August 7, 2022	
16	R16	The Real Housewives of New York City	9	14	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bT3nuOPjzBY	from 0:00	July 4, 2017	
17	R17	The Real Housewives of Potomac	6	6	not availabe for free	/	August 15, 2021	
18	R18	The Real Housewives of Atlanta	14	13	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5c48-BU5Fsw	1:47-3:30	August 7, 2022	

Selected episodes for analysis with the free link to the available scenes with new time stamps