Women in Science Fiction:
Opportunities and Constraints of Representations in Postfeminist Worlds

Pippa Adams
CMNS 498: Honours Project
Supervisor: Dr. Kathi Cross
August 8th, 2012
Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

Popular Culture and Gender ...................................................................................... 3

Theoretical Basis: Postfeminism [Feminism and Anti-Feminism] ......................... 6

Postfeminism in Popular Culture: Science Fiction Television .............................. 8

Case Study Literature Review: The Star Trek Universe ........................................... 10

Methodology .............................................................................................................. 14

Critical Discourse Analysis ...................................................................................... 15

Project Methodology ................................................................................................. 17

Project Constraints .................................................................................................... 19


Overview ................................................................................................................... 20

Specifics: Character Analysis ..................................................................................... 21

Themes and Conclusions .......................................................................................... 25

Analysis: *Dollhouse* (2009) .................................................................................. 26

Overview ................................................................................................................... 26

Specifics: Character Analysis ..................................................................................... 27

Themes and Conclusions .......................................................................................... 28

Main Themes and Overall Analysis ......................................................................... 30

Conclusion and Next Steps ....................................................................................... 35
Abstract

Popular Culture plays an important role in society including helping to shape our perceptions of groups and frames of different groups. This paper looks to the ways in which women and gender are portrayed in part of popular culture: the science fiction television genre. Drawing from academic studies of women’s representation in other areas of popular culture, including an in depth literature review of academic work on Star Trek, the representations of women in the science fiction television programs Battlestar Galactica (2003) and Dollhouse (2009) are explored. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, conclusions are drawn about the impact of themes such as Power, Highlighted Sexuality, Appearance and Beauty, and Motherhood on the narratives and representations of women in postfeminist worlds.
Women in Science Fiction: Opportunities and Constraints of Representations in Postfeminist Worlds

Introduction: Popular Culture and Science Fiction

Popular culture in the form of literature, music, art, film, and television serves as a mirror to convey aspects of the human condition; especially in the case of science fiction. The science fiction genre is arguably a medium where concerns are magnified, where themes and issues are explored in a futuristic or hyper-developed space. Extrapolating from our present culture, technology, and society, writers of science fiction present issues in worlds that are at the same time familiar and unfamiliar to their audience. One of the most interesting elements of this extrapolation is how it pertains to notions of gender. Gender remains a fluid and socially constructed concept and it follows that gender is one aspect of present society that has the potential to be represented differently in an imagined future (or imagined present) – for this project in the genre of science fiction. This research project will examine narratives from the realm of science fiction television, to see what opportunities and constraints are afforded to this type of popular culture. To do so, I will be drawing on postfeminist theory, starting with the definitions offered in the work of Rosalind Gill, as well as theories of popular culture in order to look at how these cultural texts can be interpreted and what implications they have for our present society’s view of women and gender.

Popular culture is an integral part of how our society negotiates identity. It is a space that both reflects and suggests ways in which our world operates. Popular culture exists to be consumed as part of our economic system, but it has social implications beyond just
consumption. Through this project I will be examining what kind of potential impact the images and stories told through popular culture can have on our greater understanding of gender. I have chosen science fiction particularly because of the nature of the stories it tells. Science fiction is a part of popular culture where the rules are slightly different, a space where disbelief is suspended, and as such, a space with the potential to tell more radical stories, or depart further from the social norms of present day society, and yet at the same time, a place that often reinscribes traditional and status quo notions of gender, gender roles, and femininity. In order to evaluate this genre I will be working with the concept of postfeminism, which Rosalind Gill (2007a) describes as a “tendency to entangle feminist and anti-feminist discourses” in popular culture. Much of the examination of this postfeminist sensibility focuses on popular culture or television that is set in our modern day world. I was intrigued as to whether a similar sensibility existed in science fiction television. Science fiction is a genre in which creators can choose to represent a world that exists past the concerns of the present, a world where women no longer need the feminist project, but to what extent does this sentiment hold true in today’s popular culture? Is there evidence of a problematic postfeminist sensibility present in contemporary science fiction television or are there other themes in the ways women and gender are represented in these works of fiction?

In order to answer this question, I conducted a literature review of scholarship on popular culture and gender as well as work specifically done on science fiction and gender. My literature review also went in depth on the subject of postfeminism in order to gain a greater understanding of how Gill and others argue it has become entangled into the stories told in contemporary television programs. The final piece of my literature review involved a case study on research about the way gender was presented, represented, and dealt with in the Star Trek science fiction
television franchise as a model for my own research. After conducting my literature review, I examined the ways in which Discourse Analysis can be used to evaluate the presence of postfeminism in the television programs I have chosen to focus my research upon. My discourse analysis focuses on two case studies of the television programs *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) and *Dollhouse* (2009). Throughout examining these two programs I was able to draw conclusions about the representation of gender in contemporary science fiction television.

**Popular Culture and Gender**

Andi Zeisler (2005), Co-Founder and Creative Director of Bitch Magazine, describes popular culture as “America’s common language” (p.55). Popular culture surrounds us in society from television, magazines and movies, as we walk through our lives we are constantly exposed to this cultural text. With this in mind, we can look to popular culture as an element of society’s process of meaning making and a major player in how members of society negotiate their identity, and how we see ourselves reflected on screen. In terms of women’s experience specifically, popular culture is a site of increasing complication of the role of women and the place of feminism within society (Zeisler 2008). Zeisler goes on to emphasize this point by writing that “more media and pop culture exists now than at any other time in American history. It’s not a good thing or a bad thing; it just is...pop culture has more and more come to define us” (Zeisler, 2008, p.144). Therefore if popular culture in part defines us, what does it say about gender and what is the impact of that gender construction?

Kendall (2011), in examining the representations of class on television programs in North America emphasizes the impact of framing in popular culture and its effects on how we view
representations of ourselves and other members of our society through popular culture. Kendall (2011) argues that:

Although most often discussed with regard to the news media, the concept of framing also applies to the processes television entertainment writers use to create story lines for dramas and situational comedies...As we watch a television entertainment show, we are influenced by the tacit theories that guided the writers of that program, whether we are aware of them or not.” (p.9)

In Kendall’s view then, television and other forms of popular culture play a significant role in how we view the world through the lens of the media we consume. Kendall’s (2011) research is specific to the representations of class in American television, but her observations can be applied to the construction of gender and the presentation of female characters in popular culture.

Similarly, Zeisler (2008) argues that popular culture is “absolutely crucial to how people understand and live in the world” (p. 4) and this is increasingly tied to how people frame women and gender. The images that we see on our screens have the power to shape our imagination and contribute to our vision for the future. This is particularly true within both women’s experiences and within the context of science fiction – which goes a step further from representing our present, as in other types of popular culture, to imagining our future. Futuristic worlds in science fiction are often hailed as postfeminist texts, worlds where women fight and fly spaceships on an equal level with men. Characters such as Kara Thrace (Battlestar Galactica), Captain Janeway (Star Trek: Voyager), and Ellen Ripley (Alien) are held up as proof that we can imagine a future of gender equality. But upon a closer examination of these narratives, an entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist elements is visible.

Furthermore, left out of many science fiction texts are the paths between now and the future. Writing specifically about Star Trek, Johnson-Smith (2005) asks the questions of how this gender equity was achieved, writing that “the comfortable future of all the Star Trek series
Postfeminism in Science Fiction

depicts an admirable, almost utopian society, but crucially we do not see how it has been
achieved.” (p. 93). There are many elements contributing to the utopian universe in which Star
Trek exists, from a (lack of war), to a non-capitalist economic system, chiefly to this project is
the question of gender; can science fiction worlds be utopias or is something missing?

Science fiction has been explored as an academically relevant part of popular culture by
many academics, especially when it comes to the presentation of women within the genre (Inness
science fiction programs, I first looked to how the various iterations of the Star Trek story have
been discussed and studied in this academic tradition. Star Trek is one of the longest running
science fiction franchises on television and as such it has been the site of several intellectual
inquiries. Beginning with the original series which ran from 1966 to 1969 (Star Trek, 1966) Star
Trek presented a utopian future where war on earth had ended and money was no longer a
concern, where humans were able to explore the galaxies meeting aliens and having adventures,
all the while dealing with issues relevant to the time in which the show was created – the 1960s.

Just a few years earlier, a similarly long-running show had begun on television in the
United Kingdom, the television series, Doctor Who (1963), began airing in 1963 on the BBC.
Both programs have been studied extensively by communication scholars (for example: Tulloch
study of science fiction television. These two television programs, Star Trek (1966) and Doctor
Who (1963) are an important starting point in the study of contemporary science fiction texts
primarily because of their longevity and the resulting wealth of information and academic
engagement over of the years they have aired.
They marked a shift in the accessibility of science fiction on television (Tulloch & Jenkins) and explored our society through journeying to other worlds and other times. Observations such as those by Johnson-Smith (2005), arguing that “contemporary social and cultural issues have always been at the heart of Star Trek: this is true of most sf [science fiction]” (p.79), ring true for many observers of science fiction and popular culture. Tulloch and Jenkins (1995) [referring to both Doctor Who and Star Trek] make the argument that “it is precisely because the grand narrative of formal science is male-dominated that popular science fiction matters to feminists” (p. 37). Tulloch and Jenkins are writing primarily about fan experience and reaction rather than the discourse of the programs themselves, while my research does not focus on fan interaction with the television programs there are parallels, as fans are also viewers of the discourse of these shows.

Theoretical Basis: Postfeminism [Feminism and Anti-Feminism]

Grounding my analysis of contemporary science fiction television will be the theoretical analysis of postfeminism specific to the work of Rosalind Gill. While the term postfeminism has been used over the past few decades to refer to a wide range of meanings (from critical to liberal definitions), Gill’s is the definition most relevant to my analysis. Gill (2007a) explains the term postfeminism as a “sensibility that characterizes increasing numbers of films, television shows, advertisements and other media products” (p. 148). This sensibility, Gill (2007a) elaborates, includes a “tendency to entangle feminist and anti-feminist discourses. Feminist ideas are at the same time articulated and repudiated, expressed and disavowed. Its constructions of contemporary gender relations are profoundly contradictory” (p. 163). Before going further it is
important to define what is meant by both feminism and anti-feminism. Broadly speaking, feminism (or the feminist project) is the belief that men and women are not afforded equality and that this is problematic, furthermore that something needs to be done about this inequality. Anti-feminism then would be a disagreement with this project in such a way that marginalizes these concerns or denies them completely. The purpose of integrating these ideas into this project is to analyze the representations of gender within science fiction television in order to identify elements of feminism, anti-feminism and then determine to what extent (if any) a postfeminist sensibility is present. While many science fiction television programs and films outwardly portray strong female characters, to what extent are these characters being written in a way that reinforces gender norms?

A liberal definition of postfeminism would use the term to declare that the feminist project is no longer necessary, but for the purposes of my research I will be working from the basis of Gill’s (2007a) critical definition. Other scholars have added to Gill’s definition and analysis of this postfeminist sensibility, from Shelley Budgeon’s (2011) discussion of individualized self-definition, to Gill & Schaff’s (2011) expansion on the ideas of femininity as a bodily property and expanded emphasis on self-surveillance and discipline. Therefore for this project, postfeminism is a sensibility that undermines feminist values while maintaining the dominant veneer of strong women, and like Gill (and the others mentioned) I am critical of postfeminism. For this project I will be defining postfeminism as Gill does, from a critical, pro-feminist perspective as a sensibility that entangles pro-feminist and anti-feminist ideology to the extent that the discourse undermines any progress made by strong female characters, in this way it can also serve as a specific type of anti-feminism.
Postfeminism in Popular Culture: Science Fiction Television

Beginning with Gill’s themes of entanglement of pro-feminist and anti-feminist ideas in postfeminist popular culture we can look to the increasing sexualization of women’s bodies and popular culture in general (2007, 2007a). Gill (2007) uses this term to refer to the problematic and “extraordinary proliferation of discourses about sex and sexuality across all media forms” (p.256). Gill (2007a) and McRobbie (2007) see this as not just a popular culture problem, but also as a political problem. McRobbie (2004) sees important elements of class warfare and symbolic violence in the way that popular culture often serves to reinforce stereotypes of femininity and beauty in her analysis of the television show *What Not To Wear* (2001). McRobbie (2007) writes that “this new kind of sophisticated anti-feminism has become a recurring feature across the landscape of both popular and political culture. It upholds the principles of gender equality while denigrating the figure of the feminist” (p.179). While Gill (2007), McRobbie (2004), and Press (2011) are mainly using their analysis of the sexualization of culture to refer to shows such as *Sex And The City* (1998-2004) and a slew of makeover shows in the realm of reality television, such as *What Not To Wear* (2001), this analysis can also be applied to science fiction.

An examination on the literature concerning depictions of gender in science fiction revealed a plethora of examinations across a number of science fiction programs, from Joss Whedon’s *Firefly* (2003), to *The X-Files* (1993) as well as much more analysis throughout the *Star Trek* universe. Sherrie Inness’s (1999) work helps explains this focus on the study of gender in science fiction, arguing that “because gender roles presented in science fiction can lead to social change, they are a potential danger to the status quo” (p. 104) so this potentially challenging genre lends itself to the study of society, storytelling and perception.
Amy-Chinn (2006), using feminist and postfeminist reasoning concluded that the writers of the television show, *Firefly* (2003), while attempting to reframe popular characterization of the prostitute with the character Inara did not succeed as the show “nevertheless draws on a patriarchal and colonialist discourse to reinscribe the body of a woman of colour as a site of white (predominantly male) hegemonic privilege” (p.175). While Amy-Chinn’s analysis focuses on a nexus of representations including race as well as gender, her observations about the text of *Firefly* (2003) as well as her methods are useful in terms of my examinations of science fiction texts.

Another major site of study within this part of the field is the television program, *The X-Files* (1993). In particular, Badley (2000) focused on the female character of FBI Agent Scully in terms of a postfeminism similar to the postfeminist sensibility to Rosalind Gill. Badley’s (2000) main criticism of *The X-Files* (1993) stems from the series’ failure to adequately address issues that it had to potential to address, noting that “while the series deconstructs television stereotypes, it remains indifferent to the issues that it raises, or the ideologies it appropriates” (p.69). *The X-Files* (1993) is interesting for this project, because it is a science fiction program that takes place in a society contemporary to ours, therefore it is easier at first to apply the work done by Gill (2007, 2007a), McRobbie (2004), and Press (2011) on other, non-science fiction shows that also exist in our current time. In this way Badley (2000) is able to discuss the positioning of Scully by the writers according to her establishment as a character who by virtue of her age (generation X) has benefitted from, but was not a part of the second wave feminist movement. Furthermore, Badley (2000) explores the dynamic of the relationship between the two main characters in the program, Scully and her male FBI partner Mulder, which she says “challeng[es] traditional gender roles as portrayed on television” (p.63). The positioning of
Scully (female) as the skeptical, rational, doctor and lawyer contrasts the way that Mulder (male) is positioned as non-rational and intuitive, Badley (2000) argues, works to subvert traditional gender roles on television. This survey illustrates that while many science fiction television programs can appear pro-feminist, a closer reading often reveals subtle anti-feminist themes, posing problematic contradictions.

Case Study Literature Review: The *Star Trek* Universe

The work on the various iterations of *Star Trek* is has ranged from race and gender in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987) and *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995) to cursory examination of gender issues in The Original Series (1966). Casavant (2003) begins her work with a very useful observation about *Star Trek* as a whole, writing that

> Each *Star Trek* series resist dominant discourses, critically engaging conventional representations of race and gender. Although the white male ideal remains constant in each series, it is consistently challenged. Hence, *Star Trek* both reaffirms and interrogates dominant ideologies." (p.ii)

I found this observation to be extremely useful to this project, as the task of examining the body of scholarship across years of *Star Trek* series is daunting, Casavant's work lays out a clear set of examinations about gender (and race) throughout the four series which had run in their entirety at the time of her research. We can see from the literature that *Star Trek*, as a widely watched science fiction television program, developed a reputation for questioning such status quo ideologies throughout its various incarnations.

Gene Roddenberry, the creator of the original *Star Trek* series, is credited with challenging 1960s social norms from the beginning of his endeavour. As Johnson-Smith (2005) writes,
A desire for equality was clearly integrated within Star Trek from Roddenberry’s pilot episode, although representations of gender do not always fare particularly well — in the first instance because of network and audience objections. (p. 80)

In this passage, Johnson-Smith is referring to altering by the network, Paramount, of Roddenberry’s original pilot script, which saw a female character, “Number One,” as second in command on the Enterprise. In Gene Roddenberry’s pitch to Paramount, this character is referred to as “an extraordinarily efficient officer... probably [the captain’s] superior in detailed knowledge of the... equipment systems, departments and crew members” (Roddenberry, 1964).

However, somewhere between the original pitch and airing, this role was subsequently switched at the insistence of the network to the role of Spock, a male Vulcan (alien) crew member played by Leonard Nimoy.

In reading through the literature it became apparent that the two most examined series of Star Trek in terms of gender are Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987) and Star Trek: Voyager (1995). Roberts (2000) argues that this is because of the job they do of reflecting the specific time periods in which they were created in terms of both race and gender. Of course, as Roberts (2000) writes, the examination of gender in Voyager is in part due to the character of Captain Janeway, “Star Trek: Voyager is remarkable not only for the first female captain in a major role but also for the series’ depiction of the intersection between science, gender, and race” (p. 203).

Roberts (2000) makes several interesting points here, especially in suggesting how far away from society the writers of Voyager have to go in order to have women characters rewrite the system of power structure within the Star Trek universe.

Roberts (2000) suggests that this physical and narrative distance from Starfleet and the established Star Trek universe is partially responsible for the presence of so many strong female characters. However, there are many possible contributing factors, ranging from the social
context in which the series was written, the need for a new and different narrative structure. In other words, these are not necessarily causal factors, but may be only correlative. Roberts (2000) does place special significance on the physical and narrative distance, writing that

To do so, however, Star Trek: Voyager literally leaves our world behind... The Delta Quadrant is not mapped by the Federation; it is Star Trek's version of outer space, an unexplored territory. In this space women can create new rules and new understandings among themselves... and work out how to practice science without being constrained by a white, male-dominated hierarchy such as Starfleet. (p.204)

This argument is important in understanding just out far away from normal places and ways of thinking science fiction shows such as Star Trek can take us away. Roberts (2000) is arguing that even in the Star Trek universe norms much shift due to circumstance in order to have the characters act in a way that does not conform to our present society’s notions about gender, race, and many more constraining societal constructs. If the premise of much of the literature on the expanded and changing roles of women in science fiction is largely based on the suspension of disbelief, the distance from our own reality providing a space where we can conceptualize norms differently, it is especially interesting that Roberts (2000) is suggesting that even within this distance from our own society, we need further distance to further represent women in different ways. This argument suggests that the state of pro-feminist themes in contemporary television is less developed than many claim.

While not explicitly linked in the literature, the observations about female characters and Star Trek are representative of Gill’s (2007) postfeminist sensibility. For example, Star Trek: Voyager (1995) has been the site of much examination in terms of gender with the study of the female characters of Captain Kathryn Janeway, B’Elanna Torres, and Seven of Nine. These characters fit the category of ‘strong female characters’ but scholars like Inness (1999) argue that the constant reminders of these characters’ femininity erode their strength. Returning to Gill’s
Postfeminism in Science Fiction

(2007) observations, the work of much of the work on Star Trek does parallel the entanglement of pro feminist and anti feminist themes that Gill talks about in other examples of popular culture.

In her examination of Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987), Casavant (2003) makes important observations about the overall tone of the series, writing that:

Every member of the crew is heterosexual, and almost every alien race the Enterprise encounters except a minute few, is heterosexual. Further, alien races without the female/male dichotomy are almost non-existent. There is rarely a race, for example, with one or three genders. There are two episodes, however, that entertain the possibility of different understandings of gender and sexuality: “The Outcast” and “The Host.” But these episodes are two among hundreds and the plotlines of each are relatively conservative.” (p.59)

Casavant’s point here is brilliant for its simplicity. Science fiction is a genre where writers do not have to subscribe to standard practices when it comes to creating new characters, because they are tasked with creating alien races. Yet across hundreds of episodes in the Star Trek franchise, even just in the run of Next Generation, only two episodes choose to step outside of an assumed gender binary when dealing with alien races. If creators cannot step out of traditional norms of gender representations when imagining other species, this has implications for the constraints placed on representations of gender when it comes to representing women in science fiction.

Kerry’s (2005) analysis includes Star Trek: Enterprise (2001), allowing for some expansion on this point. His research includes an examination of six species across all of the Star Trek shows except Deep Space Nine (1993) which are either multisexed, multigendered or androgynous in nature, with the most (3) encountered in Star Trek: Enterprise (2001) (p.704).

In a genre where audiences are already prepared to suspend their disbelief to travel to the future and across the universe, why not look to challenge these sorts of contemporary assumption and see where they take the show? Obviously there are constraints based on the time and place of
the writing, but by asking these questions we can find out more about contemporary audience
and storytelling. Kerry’s (2005) work in a similar area is useful here as well. He argues the point
that despite the constant emphasis on “Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations” the characters
hold to be important across each series, so much of the plotlines do not reflect this to the extent
that it could be. Kerry (2005) then affirms that “it cannot be ignored that Star Trek is a product of
contemporary pop culture and is meant to reflect contemporary social issues” (p.699). What is
left out of this analysis however, is the larger context of popular culture, these programs are
created in order to be profitable and profit, especially for large network shows is their primary
determiner. In order to challenge norms and representations in popular culture, shows need to be
part of the popular culture, this creates a tension between challenging and conforming that
cannot be ignored in the context of the study of popular culture. Therefore, Star Trek, as a piece
of popular culture and a piece of science fiction, is firmly grounded in our society’s issues,
norms, and ultimately our context, which includes the overwhelming logic of the market.

Methodology

Norma Fairclough (1993) describes the function of language in contemporary society as
both social shaped and socially constitutive (p. 134). This approach to Critical Discourse
Analysis is a sentiment echoed by Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (1997), who write that “texts
are communicative practices, shaping and being shaped by them.” (p. ix). In terms of the study of
the discourse of television programs this includes the context and process of communication
through dialogue, images, and plot. For my project I will be applying discourse analysis to case
studies of the television programs Battlestar Galactica (2003) and Dollhouse (2009). Using the
work done in this manner with critical readings of the various iterations of the *Star Trek* franchise as a model, I viewed representative episodes of the television shows *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) and *Dollhouse* (2009), to study how female characters were framed and portrayed on screen.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis lends itself to this type of research because of the nature of communication present in television programs. Television is a text produced towards a specific purpose (specifically profit through advertising revenue) but which also has an effect on its viewer beyond a vehicle for profit. As I established earlier in this paper through a review of the importance of popular culture, television programs influence us and the way we view and interact with the world. An integral part of this influence is closely tied to the socially constitutive nature of language as described by Fairclough (1993), Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (1997). If language both shapes and is shaped by society, then elements of our common language, or widely viewed aspects of communication, such as television programs, also contribute to this two sided, mutually determining cycle. Just as language helps shape society, popular culture’s role in reflecting and representing society back towards viewers, should be examined as part of this shaping and shaped language. It is because of this aspect that a close reading and discourse analysis of popular culture texts is vital to further understand how we view ourselves in a societal context. In terms of gender, this includes looking closely about what is said and what fails to be said about women in our popular culture.

With this project I was interested in the overall look and feel of the show as well as the dialogue. In the study of communication, it is not necessarily just the words being spoken, but
Postfeminism in Science Fiction

also: storyline, actions, motivations, and above all, context. Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (1997) highlight the importance of context within Critical Discourse Analysis, writing “interpretation is not simply a matter of the individual, mental activity. In trying to derive a text’s meaning, language users actually relate the text to the situation, environment, or context in which it is found” (p. 15). This focus on context was emphasized again, by Mary Talbot (2007), when she describes discourse as follows: “Discourse is not a product; it is a process. To analyze it we need to look at both the text itself and the interaction and context that the text is embedded in” (p. 10). It is this element of context that I argue is most important to the study of popular culture, and specifically television programs. Throughout my analysis, I am being sure to do this work within the context of the process and purpose of the television programs themselves. Developed by networks, through the collaboration of individuals from executives, to producers, writers, directors, and actors, and produced to generate wealth for the corporations involved in their production, as well as those paying for advertising space, television programs are rooted in a very specific context between the producers and the consumers of this aspect of popular culture.

To this aim one of the models for my analysis is the work of Diana Kendall (2011) in her book, Framing Class. In this work Kendall examines a number of print and television media in American popular culture in order to determine ways in which different classes are presented. She proposes that popular culture continuously presenting certain ideas about class serve to then internalize the audience’s understanding of class in the United States. Similarly, Mendes’ (2011) discourse analysis of the way feminism is represented in the news media is helpful in terms of how I will categorize the representations I find in these television shows. In viewing these episodes and shows critically I will be looking for categories and patterns of gender
representations in the texts in order to see to what extent postfeminist sensibilities are reflected in these particular science fiction and popular culture texts.

A Critical Discourse Analysis of these cultural texts is the best choice for this project for a number of reasons. I was picked episodes both relevant to the topic and representative of the series in order to examine the overall tone of the show. Due to the time constraints on this project, this is an important element as I had more time to devote to analysis, subsequently drawing clearer and more detailed conclusions. Furthermore, as I am looking at the problem of gender representations from a macro level, discourse analysis will allow me to examine the bigger picture as opposed to audience or reception research. The idea with this project is to look at the overarching themes of contemporary popular culture and society, rather than a close examination of what, if any, effect this has had on individuals being influenced by the shows in question. My aim is to identify and problematize key moments of gender representation within these case studies. Their is a relationship between the viewing world and the narrative world (Matheson, 2005), and this relationship is one that deserves further study, in the context of this research project, this is best done through critical discourse analysis looking at both the nature of the language used, but also the context of these cultural products as well.

Project Methodology:

For a project on this sort of timeline and scale, I found an effective way to use discourse analysis was to use case studies as representative examples of a larger group. For my project I have chosen the television programs Dollhouse (2009) and Battlestar Galactica (2003). These television programs fall into two categories, with Battlestar Galactica (2003) taking place in a futuristic world and Dollhouse (2009) set in our contemporary world (though with advanced
technology). This is both an advantage and disadvantage to my research design. While *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) will be more easily compared to work done on *Star Trek*, as both exist in future worlds, *Dollhouse* (2009) will be more easily integrated into the literature on other forms of popular culture, while still including advanced technology along with the resulting problems and conflict. The shows are similar in that they both tackle contemporary issues through their plot and they both exist in dystopic worlds.

After selecting my case studies, I chose a similar number of episodes from each program in order to conduct my analysis. In both cases I picked episodes from across the seasons, for *Dollhouse* (2009) this meant episodes from seasons one and two including both the first and last episodes of the series. Similarly from *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) I chose episodes from seasons one to four including the first and last episodes of the series. I watched the episodes, taking notes on specific aspects of characters and their portrayals on screen. After each episode I synthesized my notes into a collection of themes and points of note. For each series I went through all of my notes to assemble themes throughout the run of the series, focusing on the portrayals of specific characters. In this way my analysis mainly focused on the way three specific female characters were portrayed: From *Dollhouse* (2009), Adele DeWitt; and from *Battlestar Galactica* (2003), Kara Thrace and Laura Roslin. By paying close attention to these certain characters within my case studies I was able to develop a set of character types evident in each series, as a model from which to apply my analysis of postfeminism. From the analysis focused on these three characters, I then pulled together overall themes evidenced in the programs.
Project Constraints

Choosing to use this type of discourse analysis does result in some constraints in terms of the conclusions I can draw through this research. Two science fiction programs, one set in our current time, and one in the future, do not fully illustrate the range of programs within the tradition of science fiction television. The time available was an issue, as well as reducing each multiple-season show to less than ten episodes to represent each program. As I was familiar with the shows before beginning my analysis, to the point of considering myself a fan of the shows in question, I tried to mediate my bias by distancing myself from my pre-formed opinions of the shows. However I remain aware that fresh eyes may have drawn slightly different conclusions. Furthermore, using discourse analysis narrows the conclusions to just my own views, no matter how much I integrated others’ methodologies and strategies. It would be very interesting to see what an audience or reception research take on a similar issue or project would have uncovered. However, despite the constraints, I believe that *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) and *Dollhouse* (2009) are an excellent starting point into this analysis, as they are examples of contemporary science fiction television, both involve input from prominent writers who still work in the industry, and cover a wide range of topics and storylines. Both have an array of female characters through which to analyze the presence of postfeminist sensibilities in their representations, and thus have merit for this type of analysis.

Overview

The television program, *Battlestar Galactica* (2003), rebooted by Ronald D. Moore from the 1978 show of the same name, takes place in a futuristic world that is struck by a major catastrophe. At the beginning of the series viewers get a glimpse at life on the Twelve Colonies (planets) before a massive enemy attack by a species of robot called the Cylons results in the destruction of life as the characters know it. The attack reduces the human race from a massive population living on twelve planets to close to 50,000 people living on a fleet of space ships on the run from a future attack. *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) is specifically interesting as a site of study because of this reduction of society to a microcosm. The show revolves around this small group of people trying to reinvent their society after catastrophic events, which leaves space for many contemporary issues to be addressed and explored on the screen.

While the images and stories portrayed on the screen are enough to merit analysis on their own, an added level occurs on the production side of things. In the process of updating *Battlestar Galactica* (1978) for a contemporary audience two of the male characters from the original series, Boomer and Starbuck, were instead written as female characters for the 2003 series. Originally this is where I saw the most space for Gill’s (2007) concept of the postfeminist sensibility. Here are two characters whose ability to fight in the military and fly spaceships is not questioned throughout the show, but whose choices as women are often challenged or conflated. While I did not end up focusing specifically on the character of Boomer, Starbuck provided an excellent character examination.

The methodology I chose involved focusing on specific characters from which to draw conclusions about the presence (or lack thereof) of postfeminism within *Battlestar Galactica*
Postfeminism in Science Fiction

(2003). However I was presented with a problem while working on my analysis of *Battlestar Galactica* (2003), as there are several interesting examples of female characters, ultimately too many to cover adequately in the time I had. Therefore I made the decision to focus my analysis on the characters of Starbuck (Lieutenant Kara Thrace) and President Laura Roslin. Towards that end I chose episodes to analyze that focused on or involved important instances for these two characters. They spanned across the four seasons of the program and found the characters in different situations and dealing with different challenges. While I focused specifically on these two characters, I did also pay attention to the actions and positioning of other female characters with whom these two interacted, or who appeared in the episodes and I have included relevant analysis of these characters when it was particularly helpful to my analysis.

Specifics: Character Analysis

Kara Thrace, callsign ‘Starbuck’, is our primary military character in *Battlestar Galactica* (2003). She is a soldier, career military, fighter pilot, top gun, and tougher than most of the other characters. She is physically capable, extremely good at her job and does not back down from a fight, often she instigates them. Starbuck’s character is arguably there to prove that anything boys can do, girls can do better. From the beginning of the series, Starbuck’s character helps to establish that in this fictional world there are no limits on the type of military role women can have. We see Starbuck in combat over and over again in this first episode and throughout the first half of the series. Starbuck is an overt challenge to the traditional female role or view of women in our contemporary society. She is placed in charge of training new pilots (Act of Contrition, Scar) and is central to the strategic decision making process, with her input being taken into strong consideration by the military brass (Daybreak). She even holds the title of ‘Top
Postfeminism in Science Fiction

Gun’ throughout the beginning of the series until it is passed on through a challenge of skill to another female pilot (Scar). The audience is continually shown that Starbuck is well trained and has considerable military skill.

In contrast to this affirmation that women can and often participate in traditionally male spaces such as the military structure, Kara Thrace’s personal life is often shown to be a disorganized mess. She is constantly mired in failed or failing relationships, while making poor decisions in this aspect of her life. While her other poor life choices, smoking too much, drinking too much, instigating physical fights, are portrayed as character flaws that fit in within the military structure and storyline, Starbuck’s relationship problems strike me as a particularly interesting character flaw, especially when contrasted against the plotlines of some of the prominent male characters in the program. While many other characters struggle with their relationships and their personal lives, Starbuck’s relationships often interfere with her ability to do her job, while sometimes costing her the respect of her peers (Daybreak, Act of Contrition).

In the five episodes of Battlestar Galactica (2003) that I examined as part of my analysis, we see three major relationship arcs for the character of Kara Thrace. All three relationships further damage Starbuck in some way, some end in death, heartbreak, all involve cheating and infidelity on her part. In these episodes, and largely throughout the series we don’t see much diversity in the stories that centre on Starbuck, we see stories about duty, about battle, about love but there is a lack of stories about friendship, about family. While this could be a product of the episodes examined, the fact that these important episodes have the focus that they do illustrates the problematic elements of writing characters that supposedly challenge traditional gender portrayals. This contrast between her physical strength and the focus on her failed romantic relationships is at the core of the presentation of her character.
Laura Roslin, President of the Twelve Colonies and former teacher and Education Minister is the other character from *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) I have chosen to focus on. Roslin fulfills the role of a motherly leader. Her character is in tune with her emotions and we see many instances where she breaks down in tears. She has an intensely emotional reaction to the initial catastrophe (Miniseries), which is twinned by her own personal emotional trauma of an advanced-stage breast cancer diagnosis earlier that morning. Her sadness and fear morph into practicality once she is informed that she is the highest-ranking member of the government to survive the attack. After being sworn in as President Roslin takes on the leadership role with resolve, immediately standing up to the commands of the military leadership and standing by her convictions. Her power is rooted in the people and what is best for them. She keeps her illness secret from the masses for as long as possible, even from other higher ranking members of the government, but is often shown in sickbay or being informed of the state of her health by military doctors. We see her constantly acting as a mother-figure to the fleet, often shown interacting with children (Miniseries, Unfinished Business), and keeps track daily of how many people are left alive in the fleeing fleet of spaceships she is responsible for. One of her first plans for the survival of the human race is for everyone “to start having babies” (Miniseries), which is eventually what provokes the military leadership to agree that the war is lost and it is time to start running from the enemy.

Along with this portrayal, her power is often questioned by other prominent characters. The first complaints raised against her taking charge of the fleet are on the basis of her being a former teacher, a traditionally feminine role (Miniseries, Unfinished Business). She is also challenged on her lack of knowledge about the military (Miniseries, Unfinished Business). In the middle of the series she is voted out of office and returns to teaching, this time on a planet found
and briefly settled upon, during this time she talks about building a cabin by a stream and growing herbs. (Unfinished Business). During this softer, more relaxed period in the portrayal of Roslin’s character, we see a greater depth to her relationship with Admiral Adama, though they do not act on their feelings until much later in the series.

Roslin makes brave choices throughout the series, from her decision to go into politics after the death of her sisters and parents (Daybreak), standing up to the military power structure (Miniseries) to volunteering for what amounts to a suicide mission into the enemy’s base to rescue a child. Her death from cancer in the end of the series could be described as problematic or troubling, as she dies in the midst of Admiral Adama’s monologue about the new planet they’ve settled on. In one way her death serves to highlight this speech and the progression of Adama’s now solitary storyline. On the other hand, I would argue that all deaths serve to further the stories of other characters. It is the end of one character’s storyline, but also an important plot point in another character’s story. There is something to be said about the way that Roslin’s story is written to highlight the divide between the military and civilian power structure and ways of thinking. While the military power structure is mostly comprised of men the higher up you go, the civilian government allows more room for powerful women.

While Roslin’s power throughout the series echoes the progress in gender equality we see in Starbuck’s position in the military structure, it is important to note that her power style follows traditionally acceptable portrayals and involvements of political women. Her focus is on health, well being, children and education, all traditional areas for political women to acceptably be involved in or experts on. However, I would argue that there is a lot of hope in the portrayal of Roslin’s character. While many characters in *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) make poor decisions
throughout the run of the series, Roslin is one of the few characters who remain steadfast in prioritizing the survival of the fleet before everything else.

Themes & Conclusions

In the world of *Battlestar Galactica* (2003), the audience begins with the assumption of gender parity. The first images presented to the viewing audience of this world involve women in all levels of the military, industry and government. This is affirmed throughout the series with the presence of many tough military women characters, all of whom are extremely competent at their jobs, professional, and respected by their male and female counterparts. While this starting point is ahead of many other science fiction television programs in terms of general representations, the deeper story is not necessarily as equal as it appears on the surface.

After examining the characters in *Battlestar Galactica* (2003), is there evidence of what Gill (2007a) critiques as a postfeminist sensibility? Not extensively. There is a diversity of female characters throughout the military and civilian structures, women wield power, are respected, have a range of struggles and triumphs in their personal lives, there is even military-run daycare facilities. While the female characters are often challenged on the basis of their relationship and life choices, in many cases so are the male characters. Starbuck and Roslin are both challenges to the typical role of women in popular culture perhaps in part by virtue of the nature of the show itself. Gender is not high on the list of most characters’ priorities when faced with a catastrophic event destroying almost all of familiar society.

While *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) is in many ways a utopic world in terms of the involvement of women in places of power throughout society, it is by no means perfect in its portrayal of women. Key to this problem in my opinion is the lack of explanation of how the
society developed this way. By writing a program in which the feminist project is seemingly complete, many more complex issues are glossed over in terms of what struggles still remain, or what possible solutions could be offered. This being said, *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) is in many ways a positive portrayal of many of its female characters and despite some elements of anti-feminism this show overall presents a more positive portrayal of feminism and female characters than the other program I focused my analysis on, *Dollhouse* (2009).

Analysis: *Dollhouse* (2009)

Overview

*Dollhouse* (2009) set in modern-day Los Angeles, explores the potential of technology created to replace personalities and memories within humans. The technology, owned by a company called Rossum, is used in several ‘Dollhouses’ around the world. Wealthy clients can pay large sums of money to have people, called ‘Dolls,’ or ‘Actives,’ programmed with any sort of personality or character they wish. The Actives have signed five-year contracts with the Dollhouse to be used this way for reasons ranging from escaping debt, being monetarily rewarded in the future, or escaping from their past lives. The Actives are programmed with innocent, docile, empty, Doll personalities while in the house, and through the technology are transformed into whatever the client wants before their engagement. Throughout the two-season run the main character Caroline, or Echo, is programmed with a personalities included a FBI profiler, bodyguards, a dead woman solving her own murder, and a mother. While sexual engagements are prevalent, they are not the only sorts of engagements the Actives are hired and programmed for.
Of *Dollhouse’s* (2009) 26 episodes over the course of two seasons, I examined 7 episodes especially relevant to the topic of this research. In addition to episodes I found particularly representative, I have decided to include the first and last episodes of each televisions series I am examining in my analysis. The first (aired, rather than pilot) episodes serve an important purpose in introducing the characters to the audience as well as setting up the tone, themes, and conventions for the show, as well as the continuity to be followed by subsequent episodes, and in some cases, different writers. Similarly the last episodes of the series serve to wrap up and leave a lasting impression of the show. The audience will have stronger impressions of the last episode as they walk away from a series or it ends, therefore the actions of the characters in the last episode, as well as the lessons or representations will have an important role in the overall arc of the show.

**Specifics: Character Analysis**

In examining the female characters, I came across some difficulty with my analysis, as many of the female characters, as Actives or Dolls, are imprinted with different personalities each episode. The female Dolls as a group are presented mostly in traditionally defined gender roles. They are meek, malleable, sexualized, vulnerable, and while their personalities are changed when they go on engagements, these personalities are not of their own making, but rather are requested and made to fit specific requests from wealthy clients. The presentation of female characters is done mostly to highlight the narrative metaphor of a brothel/prostitution.

Because of the Dolls’ lack of defined character from episode to episode, I chose to focus my character analysis on Adele DeWitt. In charge of this particular Dollhouse, Adele fulfills a role best described as a modern-day Madame. Adele is in charge of the house and as such is
responsible for making sure all of the clients are happy with their Dolls and that her Dolls remain safe. By this combination of roles we see Adele as ruthless, emotionless, and focused on profit. Her power is drawn from her ability to manipulate people, but as we see later on in the series, she is also being manipulated by her corporate superiors. Adele DeWitt uses the bodies of others to make money and while she shows concern for her Actives it is largely the concern of an investor, with a few exceptions later on in the progression of her character (Epitaph One, Epitaph Two).

Later on in the series (Epitaph One, Epitaph Two) we see a different, arguably more (traditionally) feminine version of Adele DeWitt. An Adele who is repentant, who sees problems with the way she used to interact with the world, with what she used to believe. In the episodes at the end of each season, which take place ten years in the future from the majority of the series and flash back to the intervening time, Adele is shown to regret her role in the rise to power of the Dollhouse and the corporation, Rossum, after the technology was used to begin a world wide war. She is shown to be a mother figure to those seeking shelter in the Dollhouse, and later in a place called Safe Haven. She farms, she looks after the technical genius, Topher, who has suffered from some sort of mental break after his technological advances were used to start the war. Adele’s story then is split into two halves, the powerful, emotionless Madame climbing the corporate ladder, and the regretful, guilt-filled, mother of refugees from a war she helped create.

Themes & Conclusions

Analyzing Dollhouse (2009) was difficult for me. When the show was on the air, I enjoyed watching it, where others found fault and uncomfortable portrayal I saw creative intent to draw attention to these extrapolated societal issues through the screen of primetime television.
Upon finishing this discourse analysis I am less sure of what I came into this project thinking. Without an examination of the motives of the creative production team on this show, we cannot discuss intent, but the portrayals of women and their role in the story of the show is uncomfortably problematic. This is a dystopia, a world where things have gone so wrong that there is less and less evidence of our own world within the fictionalized one. A sliver of truth remains; in a large part of our contemporary popular culture women are their bodies and not much else.

The parallels of *Dollhouse* (2009) to prostitution are easy to see, while some engagements were not as simple as sex, it is still the use of bodies to gain profit, where those with the power gain more from the exchange than those being used as currency. In this case, the anti-feminist themes were much clearer to see than in *Battlestar Galactica* (2003). Particularly evident to this conclusion was the lack of easily examined characters; I focused my analysis mainly on Adele DeWitt mostly because she was one of the only female characters who was not a Doll. Adele DeWitt’s character arcs were her own, whereas many other of the women on *Dollhouse* (2009) changed personalities from week to week and even within episodes. While many of the female characters served to advance the plot, they did not grow as characters throughout the show, except within the two episodes set in the future (*Epitaph One*, *Epitaph Two*). This is extremely problematic, from their lack of agency to their existence as just bodies to be used for profit and contributes to elements of the postfeminist sensibility being evident throughout the program.
Main Themes & Overall Analysis

Laura Roslin's leadership is written in a way that positions her as not just the president but also as a mother to the fleet and civilian population. Despite her military skill, Starbuck's personal stories and the source of much of her character's emotional journey revolve around the poor decisions she makes in her romantic relationships. Adele DeWitt runs a successful company and is respected by her peers - for selling the bodies of others at a profit. These women, all at the centre of the plot of their respective television programs both challenge traditional portrayals of women on screen and in some ways reinscribe problematic elements of how society views and values women. In examining the representations of female characters in both Dollhouse (2009) and Battlestar Galactica (2003), I looked for themes in the way that women are represented on screen, examining which themes and frames were in line with the feminist project and which undermined or worked against feminist representations on screen.

While science fiction is a noticeably more feminist-friendly space than other places in popular culture, the mix of feminist and anti-feminist representations is an indicator of a troubling postfeminist sensibility. From the episodes and characters I analyzed throughout this project, there are several themes in the representation and framing of characters that have become apparent throughout both Dollhouse (2009) and Battlestar Galactica (2003). The following are themes that highlight the way gender is represented in these science fiction texts. These themes and frames used in portrayals of women in Dollhouse (2009) and Battlestar Galactica (2003) illustrate both feminist representations, and those that are not. By examining common elements and themes in women's representation I will look to evaluate to what extent (if any) Gill's (2007a) postfeminist sensibility is evident within these texts.
Women Wielding Power: Adele DeWitt (Dollhouse) and Six (Battlestar Galactica) gain most of their power through manipulating those around them, either sexually or emotionally. These characters know what they want and what they need to accomplish but they do so by manipulating others. Adele is the one responsible for getting many of the Actives to sign on with the Dollhouse and in one scene in particular (Ghost) we see a calm Adele convincing a distraught and crying Caroline that the Dollhouse is her only option. In Battlestar Galactica (2003), we have many of the female Cylon characters controlling the humans around them through manipulation, from Six’s power over Dr Baltar to Boomer/Athena convincing Helo by appealing to his emotions and feelings for her, that she is not a Cylon, in order to return with him to the Galactica.

However, the women in these two shows wield power in other ways as well. In Dollhouse (2009), Caroline becomes a leader because of her unique skill set and ability to use the technology to her advantage (Epitaph One, Epitaph Two), which others recognize and respect. Roslin’s unwavering dedication to acting in what she believes to be in the best interests of the fleet and this resolve is respected throughout civilian and military hierarchies while Starbuck’s power is drawn from her knowledge and skill as a pilot. That there are so many female characters who hold power over others and in so many different ways is largely a positive contribution to the representation of women in science fiction.

Highlighted Sexuality: Either a product of the profitability of an edgy, sexy television program or an inability to write (or sell to advertisers) female characters who aren’t sexualized, in both Dollhouse (2009) and Battlestar Galactica (2003), the female characters are routinely marked as sexualized women. Starbuck’s military character is softened or countered by her routinely being
shown in sexualized scenarios, whether exercising in only a sports bra and shorts, or often having sex with numerous other characters. DeWitt earns a living through selling the bodies of others, while herself engaging an Active for sexual purposes [cite]. The Actives in Dollhouse (2009) while sometimes shown in other forms of engagements, are largely being hired to act out sexual fantasies for clients. Six is routinely sexualized, dressed in skimpy clothing, using sex to get the military defense codes to bring down humanity in the opening episode, and later showing up as Baltar's highly sexual hallucination. Both television programs were aimed at an adult audience, originally airing in the evenings and as with many shows in this context, do involve adult themes. The pattern here is that in the majority of the cases, it is the women who are sexualized more than the men. This is one of the key elements of postfeminism or anti-feminism that Gill critiques in her analysis of popular culture (2007, 2007a).

Appearance and Beauty: Along with the theme of highlighted sexuality, we can also look to the way the female characters in these shows are portrayed in terms of their appearance and concepts of beauty. The way the Dolls are presented to the audience is a key aspect of this. While not on engagements, the Dolls remain in the House, with multiple activities to occupy their time, they paint, do yoga, swim, take showers, and run on treadmills. While performing all of these tasks they are dressed in what is most accurately described as yoga clothes, form fitting tank tops and pants that show off the figures of these characterless Dolls. This underscores what they represent in terms of the show, their bodies are the most important aspect of these characters, as they have no other purpose except to be rented out to the highest bidder. When sent out on engagements the Dolls have a staff to provide them with the correct clothes, makeup and accessories. The Dolls are all young, thin, attractive individuals, fitting the traditional concept of beauty. Even Adele,
who is older than the majority of the Dolls is conventionally beautiful and well put together, whether overseeing security matters or meeting with potential clients. Rakow and Kranich (1991) discuss the limiting nature of presenting a homogenous face of women in media. While referring to women in television news, by portraying only this segment of women in this context it is also indicative of not being able to fully imagine or present a diverse range of women in the setting of other aspects of television.

*Battlestar Galactica* (2003) is a bit different in terms of the characters’ appearances. While the majority of the female characters are young, thin, and attractive (Starbuck, Boomer, Six), there is less emphasis on their clothing and grooming. This can be attributed to the situation the characters find themselves in, on the run from hostile forces and trapped in a finite number of spaceships - no one is producing new fashions or even new uniform shirts for these characters. We also have an interesting example in the prominent character of Laura Roslin, who is older than many of the women on the show, though still well put together and who obviously puts effort into her appearance (after a lengthy career in the public eye we might assume). However later on in the course of the show we see her bald from her cancer treatment, wearing a wig, without it detracting from her character or her position of power in any way.

Here I see a sharp distinction between the shows, with *Dollhouse* (2009) placing much more emphasis on appearance and beauty than *Battlestar Galactica* (2003). This is a space in which we can see the feminist elements present in *Battlestar Galactica* (2003), which takes place in a world that is supposedly moved on from some of the contemporary tensions women face in terms of their appearance (both before and as a result of the Cylon attack and subsequent upheaval). Whereas the world of *Dollhouse* (2009) is much more grounded in the contemporary emphasis on beauty and appearance, in fact they could be considered in part to be in the business
Postfeminism in Science Fiction

of beauty.

Motherhood: I also found it interesting that motherhood was a theme throughout these television series. In *Battlestar Galactica* (2003), we have Laura Roslin positioned as the mother of humanity (the fleet) in her role as president. Her largely nurturing style of leadership is meant to contrast the leadership of Admiral Adama, who is much more rigid in terms of following military code even in situations in which it seems no longer applicable. While Roslin has no children of her own, Adama is positioned as a father and his relationship to his sons Lee and Zak (who died before the series began) is a major part of his storyline throughout the series. There is also the character of Athena, whose major contribution to the plot of *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) is in giving birth to the world’s first Cylon/Human hybrid child. (The child, Hera is central to much of the plot for the last two seasons of the show). Six is obsessed with motherhood, from trying to have her own Cylon/Human hybrid child to participating in the kidnapping of Athena’s child Hera, to even killing a baby she sees in a public market before the first bombs go off at the beginning of the Miniseries.

This is also a representation that appears in *Dollhouse* (2009), one of the Dolls, November, agrees to enter the Dollhouse when her child dies. DeWitt convinces her that they can erase the pain of those memories in exchange. Finally, as part of her redemptive arch after becoming disenchanted with the Dollhouse, DeWitt becomes a mother figure for those hiding in the Dollhouse from the outside world and for the character Topher, who’s technical advances resulted in the terrifying results of the technology. Furthermore in the second season one of the Dolls is programmed with the personality of a recently deceased new mother (Instinct). The way this episode is written results in the conclusion that the ‘mother’ imprint is stronger than the
technology itself, as the once again empty Doll escapes from the House to return to the home of the child she had previously been caring for.

In terms of representation, this frame of motherhood in many ways serves to illustrate the range of roles that women have within each of these societies. While it is a familiar frame to the audience, the many ways this frame is articulated I would argue actually contributes to the feminist aspects of these shows. If feminism involves a space for accurately portraying a wide range of possibilities for women’s lives, then this series of types of motherhood, all important aspects to the plot of both these shows, serves to illustrate that openness of women’s roles.

Conclusion & Next Steps:

After conducting my analysis on Dollhouse (2009) and Battlestar Galactica (2003) I have determined that both shows include elements of postfeminism in their representation of female characters. While this is much more evident in Dollhouse (2009) than in Battlestar Galactica (2003), there are themes present in both shows that highlight this element. I am not prepared to fully dismiss them as troubling postfeminist works, but am aware that elements exist in both that present problematic tendencies. What this evidence, presented through analysis of characters and themes from both shows, highlights is that postfeminism is widespread throughout our contemporary society. Throughout this project I have paid careful attention to the context in which these shows exist, largely this includes trends in our society as well as reflecting what networks and producers believe people will watch on television. If these trends exist in science fiction, which is supposed to be a place where we can imagine a better or more advanced future, then the trends must be more fully integrated into our society presently.
Postfeminism in Science Fiction

While only a small slice of science fiction and of popular culture as a whole, both *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) and *Dollhouse* (2009) represent greater trends in entertainment, popular culture and society. In order to gain a more full understanding of the depth of these problematic elements, there are certain things I would change with the research design were I to expand upon or do further work on this project. Firstly, I would expand the television programs examined to include a more diverse range of science fiction television shows. While my original design called for the inclusion of three programs, I reduced the scope of my research to two due to time constraints and to allow for a better analysis of those shows I did include. It would be interesting to continue this research to programs still on the air, rather than completed works, to see what trends exist in science fiction programs now. Furthermore I would like to include a wider range of shows. I chose both *Dollhouse* (2009) and *Battlestar Galactica* (2003) because I originally found them to be shows that existed within the feminist narrative. It would be helpful to include an analysis of shows I already considered problematic to see if upon further examination my thoughts shifted on them, as happened (in the opposite direction) with my analysis of *Dollhouse* (2009).

In terms of the programs chosen, if doing this type of research in the future, I would separate the shows set in the present day with futuristic technology from those shows set in the future. While many themes did cross between *Battlestar Galactica* (future) and *Dollhouse* (present day), I think it would be a more manageable project to separate the two, or if there was room to expand, further separate the two types of shows with more examples on both sides. I would also expand my analysis of the television shows to allow greater focus on more characters from the programs I did analyze. Going into a depth analysis on only three characters, it is possible that what I took to be trends were more aptly characterized as exceptions or anomalies.
By expanding the analysis to include more characters, it would ensure a more accurate picture of the trends and tendencies in the programs analyzed.

In terms of large revisions to the research designs, I think that similar studies could benefit from an integration of audience research as well as the discourse analysis of the programs. In the end, while my opinions are informed by research and by Critical Discourse Analysis methodology, they are the conclusions of one researcher, whereas meaning in society is negotiated by many more actors. To that end, reception or audience research would be a helpful inclusion to this sort of study - to what extent to viewers see these elements as influential or problematic? How do these representations colour their viewing experiences, and do they take things like this into account when choosing what to view on a day to day basis.

Finally, this research would also be complemented by a greater inclusion of contextual elements. For example, my analysis of *Dollhouse* (2009) resulted in a different take on the subject matter than I originally brought to it. The evidence presented in the program illustrate the troubling presence of anti-feminist elements, when upon my first viewing of the show I thought it to be a feminist text due to what I presumed to be the intent on the part of the creative production team. It was my belief upon first viewing that we were being shown these elements in order to see them as troubling and to generate discussion of contemporary issues highlighted by the representations on *Dollhouse* (2009). In analyzing the show in an academic rather than popular culture context, I cannot take this into account, as my discourse analysis cannot speak for the intent of the producers without gaining evidence from them as part of the research design. However, the intent of the producers of this popular culture text is an integral and interesting part of the story when it comes to how we view and produce our popular culture myths. How much of what we see in the texts on our screens is done purposefully, or to prove a point? How much of it
Postfeminism in Science Fiction

is the contribution of the writers, the networks, actors, producers, or pressure from advertisers? I think a large part of the story of popular culture and society is the production side of things and by more fully understanding that element we can draw greater conclusions about the meanings these texts have in the context of society.

Science fiction is a place where our present concerns with society can be viewed in context unfamiliar enough to draw critical thought from audience members. It is evident to me from this research that science fiction television can challenge norms in present society, but that it can also be lacking in it's presentation of a more equal future society. In a world that is constantly changing and adapting to new technological advances, the way we frame gender in the stories we watch about our future in popular culture and science fiction are increasingly important.

Science fiction can be a place of opportunity when it comes to gender representations, but we cannot dismiss the context in which these shows are being produced and viewed. As Inness (1999) argues, "because it thrives on alternative realities, science fiction at first appears to be a genre in which tough women might thrive. It is clear, however, that science fiction can also serve to reinscribe the gender roles that it questions" (p.119). Because of the necessary detachment and suspension of disbelief inherent to the genre of science fiction, there appears to be a natural closeness between critical thinking and science fiction. In distancing ourselves from the daily experiences of our lives, we can look more clearly at the images and representations we see in our popular culture and more fully recognize issues as a first step to forming ideas about how to improve upon them. Along this line of thinking I would like to consider a quote from Johnson-Smith's (2005) work:

There is movement away from technical fascinations towards a more contemplative and open-minded image of the future – a place where much of what we value and treasure
about our lives remains, and a place where much of what we dislike about the worst of humanity can be safely explored. Modern American sf television is neither utopian nor dystopic; it enforces a critique of the Western mythos, whilst renegotiating its finer aspects. It is a place where there is much to do and where there are many faults, but also a place where there is much hope for humanity (p.252-253).

The entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist sentiments that make up Gill’s (2007) analysis of postfeminism are apparent in science fiction, but this is similar to the entanglement of utopian and dystopic elements in many of these science fiction stories. There are problems with gender representations on the screens of our science fiction but with increased questioning of these decisions there is also hope for a clearer and broader picture in future texts.

What is clear from this examination of this small part of science fiction in popular culture is that the feminist project is not over. When there is still problematic positioning and representation of women in popular culture on our screens it is clear that there is still work to be done in the way we view women generally in society. A major part of this project is in the realm of popular culture, as Redfern and Aune (2010) discuss, “making culture less sexist is one of the biggest challenges for feminism today” (p.171). Popular culture is a place of struggle for representation and a place where ideas can be explored and representations can be challenged. While, Casavant (2003) argues, “popular culture can challenge contemporary values…even the most provocative examples remain impacted by the culture from which they come. No representation of popular culture can either completely escape, or embrace the paradigm that gives it life” (p. 193). This emphasis on context is important to keep in the forefront of any analysis on science fiction, the way we collectively imagine what a future world could look like is indicative of the current constraints on views of women and gender. Again, Redfern and Aune (2010) remark that “popular culture is not trivial. It is an unavoidable part of people’s lives today and it is inextricably linked to material forms of social injustice” (p. 172). So while there is
potential for more intricate and varied representations, the failures to fully imagine diverse female characters says more about the current feminist work to be done in our society today.
References


Media References


TLC. (2003). *What Not To Wear* [Television program]. USA: TLC.


Appendix: Episodes Reviewed


- 1.00: Miniseries (2003)
- 1.04: Act of Contrition (2005)


- 1.01: Ghost (2009)
- 1.06: Man on the Street (2009)
- 1.08: Needs (2009)
- 1.13: Epitaph One (2009)
- 2.02: Instinct (2009)
- 2.03: Belle Chose (2009)