

The Debasement of Females in *South Park*'

Vera Khodasevich

Although women have made tremendous social advancements throughout the 20th century, sexual inequality is still highly prevalent. With media being such a big part of our society, it is important to study what messages media outlets are sending. Since airing its first episode in 1997 *South Park* became a cult hit earning a fan base that spans all age groups. That being the case, by studying *South Park* an idea of the gender role messages society is receiving begins to form. Through careful examination of episodes, the feature-length film, and reading previous gender role studies, I was able to conclude that *South Park* sends out the message that women are inadequate at their roles in society. The main females on the show include an activist who constantly loses sight of her battles, a feminist who gets breast implants, and a Mayor who makes no decisions. The female's constant failures and characteristic discrepancies, in addition to the great lack of character development further suggest *South Park*'s message of women being inadequate. Although this study certainly doesn't correct the gender role issues society faces today, recognizing the problem, as well as pointing out a specific outlet that is providing this message to the public is a start towards change.

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A show critics believed wouldn't last more than a few years, has now exceeded expectations in its thirteenth season. It is full of toilet humor and foul language that pushes boundaries. Its jokes are aimed at every race, creed, sex, and sexual orientation, singling out none. However, it is also full of introspect and unbiased social commentary. It carries a libertarian philosophy in which one may do as one may please, but that their beliefs should not be pushed onto others. This show is Comedy Central's *South Park*.

Created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, *South Park* aired its first episode on August 13, 1997 giving Comedy Central a top-rated show for the first time in six and a half years.¹ The show itself was born out of "The Spirit of Christmas: Jesus vs. Santa," the cult-hit Christmas video card made by Parker and Stone. After turning down deals from big name companies such as Warner Brothers, Dreamworks, and New Line, the creators finally agreed to create a pilot for Comedy Central.

The show is centered on a group of elementary school boys Stan Marsh, Kyle Broflovski, Eric Cartman, and Kenny McCormick. There's also several other characters that get developed throughout the seasons. However, it is interesting to point out that it is mostly male characters that grow. The females, while fairly prevalent on the show as the boy's mothers, classmates, and authority figures, rarely develop past a specific role. In fact, they are even painted as inadequate at their given roles in the dynamics of society.

¹ Johnson-Woods, Toni. *Blame Canada*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007.

Using common stereotypes for easy definition of character (so that the females never need to be deeply developed) the writers/creators loosely define the women on the show.

Female roles on *South Park* aren't that easily or conventionally defined. It is not necessarily a doctor, a teacher, or a lawyer. It is, however the protestor/activist whose passion wins the battles, yet the result of her efforts are even more catastrophic. It is the feminist who gets breast implants and the anti-sexist who dresses as a whore. It is the political leader of a town that doesn't make any decisions and the most attentive mom who's a promiscuous drug user.

Take, for example: Sheila Broflovski, the stereotypical Jewish mother, with her fiery red hair and big nose. She embodies the description of the stereotype as one who:

hovers over her children, preventing them from achieving autonomy by interfering, cajoling, advising, and manipulating. Whether she is actually holding the spoon and urging them to take "just one more bite" or operating through guilt – that most exquisite instrument of remote control – she is seen as ubiquitous and eternal.²

It is clear that she cares deeply for Kyle, and wants to raise him right as she tries to rid all of the negative impacts from his life. Sheila is the one who often begins protests against some cause or another because the adults simply must protect the children. Her intentions are pure, but in being so determined to reach her goals, she often misses the true effects of her actions, which tend to be negative or counterproductive.

In "Mr. Hankey the Christmas Poo" Sheila desperately wants to make Christmas nondenominational, as she feels it is offensive to Kyle. As she often does, Sheila goes to

² Diane Lichtenstein, *Writing Their Nations: The Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 22-23.

the proper authority to handle her concerns. In this case she goes to the Mayor to protest all things denominational about Christmas. Taking up a cause like this, seems only fair to everyone, as surely most may find something religiously offensive in Christmas. In making the decision of what should be included in the holiday's festivities, the Mayor resorts to surveying which symbols offend each citizen. This inevitably becomes a very long list. Eventually everything that symbolizes Christmas is deemed offensive. Ironically, the Broflovskis are the only Jews in town, while everyone else celebrates Christmas. This goes to prove how determinedly persuasive Sheila is in her usual one-dimensional role as the protestor.

Rashly banning everything even mildly offensive (such as mistletoe), Sheila and the townspeople forget what's right with Christmas. As Mr. Hankey points out:

You people have focused so hard on the things wrong with Christmas, that you've forgotten what's so right about it! Don't you see? This is the one time of year we're supposed to forget all the bad stuff. Stop being sad about the state of the world... And for just one day, say "Oh to heck with it! Let's sing and dance and bake cookies!"

The fact that it took a talking piece of poo to point out what Sheila and the rest of the townspeople so clearly missed makes a comment about *South Park*. This frequently is the case with Sheila.

In two of her grander crusades, Sheila attempts the fight most parents dream: to force a cartoon with crude language, toilet-humor, and negative influence off the air. Sheila's first attempt came in "Death," when she tries to censor the extremely popular kid's television program 'Terrence and Phillip.' Quickly calling around to the other parents, she lets them know that the show is naughty and may cause their children to

become potty mouths. This parental concern is nothing new, even in the real world as long as there've been shows that pushed boundaries and created controversies there have been many protests from parents. While Sheila isn't necessarily wrong in her reasoning, the extreme tactic of having her followers catapult themselves to their death against the studio walls is. The pattern that forms is that in her determination to "protect the children" she, along with the rest of the parents, loses sight of that goal.

Despite all of Sheila's followers committing suicide, the company executives didn't budge in their consideration. In fact it was the contagious diarrhea amongst the demonstrators, whose stench from the port-a-potties made the protest a success. As it turns out, getting 'Terrence and Phillip' off the air was pointless as it was just replaced by another show with crude language, toilet humor, and negative influence, proving that the censorship fight is a never-ending battle. This realization begs the question: was Sheila's crusade successful?

As if the regular thirty minute episode didn't do their point justice, Stone and Parker created a full-length feature film surrounding a very similar plotline. In "South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut" Sheila once again leads a crusade to get 'Terrence and Phillip' off the air, only this time she goes to much greater measures. Enlisting the help of the U.S Government, and U.S troops, Sheila announces a war against Canadians and wishes to kill Terrence and Phillip instead of simply taking them off the air.

Sheila went on this same crusade a second time because she wasn't going to stand for her son, and the rest of the children, using foul language. To combat this, she proposed an implanted chip that would send an electric shock through the child if he

spoke a curse. These electric shocks clearly hurt the kids, and were certainly unhealthy, yet Sheila insisted they are implanted in all the children. Obviously that's the way to get them all to stop cursing, right?

Like in all of her protests, she is so focused on getting what she wants, that she pays no attention to the children, who are the very reason why she is fighting her current battle.

SHEILA: Canada will no longer corrupt our children!

KYLE: Mom, can I talk to you for a second?

SHEILA: Kyle, what are you doing here? You are grounded! Now get back to the house, and stay there!

SHARON: You too, Stanley!

STAN: Mom, we think you're going too far. You can't kill Terrance and Phillip.

SHEILA: *[addresses the crowd again]* We must fight for our children's futures!

STAN: You started a war. You have to stop it.

SHEILA: To make them safe again!

STAN: Hello?

SHEILA: Our children are precious!

STAN: Hello-o?

SHEILA: We must make a stand now! Stop at nothing!

KYLE: I told you my mom wouldn't listen.³

It is no surprise that Sheila's incessant protesting didn't have a desirable effect. Her protests so riled up the Canadians and the Americans that they went to war with each other, losing lives on either side. While the boys, who were there empathetically pleading with Kyle's mother, found themselves caught in the middle of the trench warfare. Never minding all that was going on around her, Sheila pulls the trigger to kill

³ South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut. Dir. Trey Parker. Paramount Pictures, 1999.

Terrence and Phillip. Meanwhile Satan had been waiting for the blood of the innocent (Terrence and Phillip) to spill to return back to earth. So he does, with Saddam Hussein by his side.

It is undeniable that Sheila's heart is in the right place. She never intentionally does harm to anyone, she is just a victim of her own inadequacy. There's nothing more she wants in this world than to see her little boy prosper, and yes, that means prosper by her rules. Sheila won't stand to see her son discriminated against, or negatively influenced. She will, without hesitation, and often with discontent from Kyle and his friends, be nosy in other people's business. Sheila will go to whatever lengths she sees fit to achieve her concerns. Headstrong to a fault, she is blind to how inadequate and counterintuitive her protests are.

Sheila isn't the only mother on the show to overlook the needs of her child. Sharon Marsh is the mother in the arguably most 'normal' family on *South Park*. The Marsh's are the quintessential nuclear family of two parents and 2.5 children (that .5 in this case comes in the form of a suicidal grandfather). As stated by Toni Johnson-Woods, "most cartoon females rarely achieve their own personalities; they are usually defined by their relationships with their children and/or their husbands."⁴ Being the wife and mother, Sharon's relationship to her family should be one of the caregiver and the glue that holds it together. Through her inability to maintain normality and order, *South Park* shows that Sharon is inadequate at being the cornerstone of the Marsh family.

⁴ Johnson-Woods, Toni. *Blame Canada*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007. 179

As a mother, Sharon's primary concern should be her little boy Stan; however, she often leaves him alone, without her guidance, to fend for himself. There have been instances where Death itself has been after Stan and the boys, and even when contacted, Sharon did nothing to help.

SHARON: Oh, thanks. What is it, Stanly hon? Did you break something?

STAN: Mom, Death is here and he's trying to take all of us away with him.

SHARON: Stanly honey, you need to leave Mommy alone, I'm doing something very very important for your little well-being there.

STAN: Yeah, but mom –

SHARON: Here honey, talk to your father.⁵

She even allows for her son to be exiled for not voting in “Douche and Turd.” Sharon does indeed cry and seem affected, but if that's the case, why doesn't Sharon do anything to protect her eight-year-old son, even if it meant leave with him? This surely demonstrates a lack of maternal instincts.

With Randy (her husband) as wild and easily led astray as he is, Sharon should be working double duty at mothering. Yet she lets Randy do the child-rearing, or to be more precise, she allows Randy (as well as herself) to slack on the child-rearing. In “Bloody Mary,” when Randy learns he is an alcoholic, it is Stan that is dragged to accompany his father to be healed. Why didn't Sharon have anything to say about this? An eight-year-old boy has no place driving his drunk alcoholic father anywhere, and he especially shouldn't be placed in greater danger driven around by said drunken alcoholic father. The mother needs to be the adult in this situation. Sharon should have been making sure Stan

⁵ “Death.” South Park. Comedy Central. 17 Sept. 1997.

had a safe way home from karate practice. Just as Sharon should have been the one taking care of her husband's drinking problem but instead, it was Stan.

As if it wasn't made clear by her actions that Stan isn't most important to her, Sharon vocalizes her priorities in "Clubhouses" when Stan is upset by her and Randy's divorce.

SHARON: Stanley, you know you're the most important thing to me, right?

STAN: If that's true, then get back together with Dad for me!

SHARON: Now Stanley, you have to understand how divorce works. When I say, "you're the most important thing to me," what I mean is, you're the most important thing after me and my happiness and my new romances.

STAN: Oh.⁶

Given the dynamics of their relationship, it comes as little surprise that Sharon and Randy got a divorce. Where Sharon is quiet, polite, and supportive; Randy is dim-witted, irrational, and naïve. While Randy is off on his escapades, or getting caught up in the latest craze Sharon is never there to stop him. By not being there she allows him to become obsessed with consumerism in "Something Wall-Mart This Way Comes," and in "All About The Mormons" he even converts the family into a new religion. As his devoted wife, she should be discouraging his foolish acts, instead of enabling him by not stopping him.

Very much in contrast to the previous two mothers, Liane Cartman is a crack whore, a prostitute, and a dirty slut, as revealed in "Cartman's Mom is a Dirty Slut." All of these attributes inevitably spell out a train wreck, right? Well, no. As Toni Johnson-

⁶ "Clubhouses." South Park. Comedy Central. 23 Sept. 1998.

Woods puts it, "women who smoke crack should live in squalor and be incapable of anything except seeking out their next high; however, Liane functions as an upright member of the community."⁷ It is in the *South Park* twist of things that, although being a crack whore, Liane makes for a normal (if you will) member of society. As for family matters, while the rest of the *South Park* community enjoys the comforts (or lack thereof) of a nuclear family, Liane Cartman is a single mother. Surprisingly, however, it is Liane that takes the best care of her child, always cooking and baking for Eric, and keeping the house immaculately clean.

MRS. CARTMAN: Hello Eric.

CARTMAN: Hi Mom.

MRS. CARTMAN: How are you doing?

CARTMAN: Well, I'm pissed off.

MRS. CARTMAN: Here, I made you powder doughnut pancake surprise.

CARTMAN: I don't want powder doughnut pancake surprise! All the kids at school call me fat!

MRS. CARTMAN: You're not fat, you're big boned.

CARTMAN: That's what I said.

MRS. CARTMAN: You can have an eency weency bit can't you?

CARTMAN: NO!

MRS. CARTMAN: Just a weency eency woo woo.

CARTMAN: NO leave me alone mom!

MRS. CARTMAN: How about a nice chocolate chicken potpie, then?

CARTMAN: What? Well that does sound pretty good.

CARTMAN: Uh, Mom?

MRS. CARTMAN: Yes, hon?

CARTMAN: If anybody calls or comes over - I'm not here, okay?

MRS. CARTMAN: Sure, hon. You want some Cheesy Poofs too?

⁷ Johnson-Woods, Toni. *Blame Canada*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007. 180

CARTMAN: Yea I want Cheesy Poofs!⁸

It is undeniable that she spoils her poopiekins, as she so affectionately calls Eric. Liane's extreme spoiling of Cartman, is precisely her single-mother stereotype, as well as her downfall, rendering her inadequate.

The lack of a male figure in the family inevitably puts more pressure on the mother, so that she now, in a sense becomes both the mother and the father. In that case, it is natural that the mother wants to over compensate for that fact, and in turn spoil the child with affection and attention. This explains why Liane is so overly sweet and nurturing; she just can't stand to know that her Eric is suffering. In "Fun With Veal" the boys protest against eating baby cows, and stage a sit-in. The adults in the meantime refuse to give in to their demands, calling it a battle of wills. Liane clearly demonstrates how weak her will is.

RANDY: Well we tried everything. We can't get through the door without tearing apart the house.

GERALD: Dear God, it's been over thirteen hours!

LIANE: Oh, but my poor little poopsie must be getting so hungry. Maybe we should get them a little food.

SHARON: Ms. Cartman, this is a battle of wills. We need our boys to know that we're not gonna cave in, at all.

LIANE: Oh, all right.

SHIELA: Let's all just go to bed and let them play their little game for as long as they can.⁹

A couple of scenes later, Liane provides the boys with a picnic basket full of food.

⁸ "Cartman Gets an Anal Probe." South Park. Comedy Central. 13 Aug. 1997.

⁹ "Fun With Veal." South Park. Comedy Central. 3 Apr. 2002.

SHARON: Ms. Cartman, what are you doing?

LIANE: Oh, I just can't stand to see my baby suffer

SHARON: Oh dear God, you've ruined everything.¹⁰

This exchange proves just how susceptible Liane is to Eric's needs, or wants. "Children, says Egan [Jim Egan, a clinical psychologist], are like computers in that what goes in comes out. And each child gets only one floppy disk"¹¹ Therefore, by always giving in to Eric, Liane is teaching him that being spoiled is okay. It is easy to say that it is Liane to blame for Eric's misbehavior, for his bratty ways, and selfish mannerisms. By not setting any boundaries, or commanding respect and authority, Liane is inadequately rearing a self-sufficient, well liked human being, and is therefore creating just the opposite. She realizes, however, that she has no control over her little boy in "Tsst," where she hires super nannies to come and train her son. While the female nannies are incapable of changing Cartman's behavior, once Cesar Milan, a male dog whisperer shows up and dominates Eric, his behavior does a complete turn-around.

CESAR: So tell me what are the problems you are having with the child?

LIANE: Well, he's just... out of control. I mean, he never listens to me, and he pretty much runs my life.

CESAR: So the child needs to learn that he's not the most important person in the house.

CARTMAN: You can stop talkin' behind my back; I'm right here, fruitcake.

CESAR: See I'm not looking at the child, I'm not acknowledging the child, I'm just letting the child know I'm not interested in him.

CARTMAN: Not interested in me?

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Will, George. "Mothers Who Don't Know." "Bad" Mothers: The Politic of Blame in Twentieth Century America. Ed. Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umanskiy. New York: New York University Press, 1998. 282

CESAR: See the child thinks your world revolves around him, because it does. Because everything he does gets a response from you.

CARTMAN: Yeah, well I don't see why-

CESAR: [pinches him on the neck] Tsst.

CARTMAN: Hey!

CESAR: Don't look at the child; just keep looking at me. Let, let him know we are having a conversation

CARTMAN: Mom, this guy doesn't-

CESAR: [pinches him on the neck] Tsst.

CARTMAN: Ah! Quit it!

LIANE: What, what is it that you're doing?

CESAR: Dogs show their dominance by nipping each other on the neck, but it works equally well on a child. I just use two fingers, nip at the child's neck, doesn't hurt the child, just let him know I am dominant.¹²

The fact that it took a man to teach Cartman and keep him in check speaks volumes about *South Park's* view of a single-mother. Once Cesar has established his dominance over Cartman, and Liane learns to do the same, there is a remarkable difference in Cartman's behavior. He suddenly becomes well mannered, self-sufficient, healthier (losing at least ten pounds), and Liane's son instead of her best friend. Problem solved, correct? Not at all. Once Cartman is behaving, Cesar announces that his work is done and he will be leaving South Park. Instantly, Liane reverts back to her old self: spoiling Cartman with whatever he wants, letting him dominate the relationship, and turns it back into a mother-friend dynamic as opposed to mother-son.

LIANE: Eric, how would you like to go with me to see Madame Butterfly Friday night?

CARTMAN: No, that's okay. Besides, I told Stan and Kyle we could work on our science project then.

¹² "Tsst." [South Park](#). Comedy Central. 3 May 2006.

LIANE: Well, what if I took you to Kentucky Fried Chicken afterward? And then we'll go to Target and buy you a Mega Ranger.

CARTMAN: Could I... perhaps have... two Mega Rangers?

LIANE: Yes, darling. You can have whatever you want ¹³

Having no one else in the house, she desperately needs a friend, and with Cartman being the only close person to her, he naturally becomes the shoe-in. While it is possible she is not to blame for her parenting skills, the fact that *South Park* has rendered Liane, the single mother, inadequate at raising her child in a productive manner certainly can't be ignored.

The mothers, being the closest to the boys, hold the most influence over them. All of their misguided actions are reflected in their children. However, there are other females that are around the boys on a day-to-day basis that hold power over the boys as well. Among the more influential are the girls of the class. They are their peers and representations of the opposite sex.

The girls of *South Park* have been in the background for most of the series, never really developing their characters. "The girls have been prone to disappearance. The creators acknowledge the paucity of female leads, 'I guess there could be a show about girls, but this isn't it.'" ¹⁴ However, there are two girls that are more prominent than the rest, Wendy Testaburger and Bebe Stevens.

Wendy Testaburger is a feminist who passionately stands up for what she believes in, taking down who ever may oppose her. In "Breast Cancer Show Ever," she is adamant

¹³ "Fun With Veal." *South Park*. Comedy Central. 3 Apr. 2002.

¹⁴ Johnson-Woods, Toni. *Blame Canada*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007. 173

about raising awareness about breast cancer, and when Cartman makes a big joke out of it, she threatens to beat him up.

WENDY: Thank you Mr. Garrison. Fellow students, October is Awareness Month for one of the leading causes of death among women. A terrible disease that takes the lives of American women every day. I'm talking, of course, about breast cancer. *[Cartman tries to contain his laughter, but it comes out anyway.]* An estimated one in six women will deal with cancer in their lifetime, and breast cancer is the most common- *[Cartman again tries to contain his laughter]*

CARTMAN: She said it again.

WENDY: Is there a problem?! Because breast cancer isn't funny! Breast cancer is killing people!

CARTMAN: Mr. Garrison, do we really need all this potty talk in the classroom?

MR. GARRISON: Eric, for the love of Jesus...

WENDY: This is a serious issue, Eric! What you're doing is very offensive!

CARTMAN: Me? You're the one talking about killer titties. Watch out, guys. Wendy said boobs can kill people. GRRR. Gonna get you! Gonna get you, Wendy!

BUTTERS: I don't wanna get killed by boobs

WENDY: Will somebody do something? Every week he gets worse and nobody does anything!

MR. GARRISON: Eric, stop being offensive.

CARTMAN: I'm just trying to engage Wendy in a constructive dialog about breast cancer awareness, Mr. Garrison.

WENDY: No you aren't!

CARTMAN: Wendy, you need to calm down. You're gonna get your boobs all angry and they're gonna start killing everyone. Dude, I'm on fire today! Look out, everyone. There's some killer titties on the loose. Could've sworn I hear them coming through the roof. Pssht! Officer! We need to get an APB out on those titties! They're armed and dangerous!

WENDY: What is your problem?! Breast cancer isn't funny!

CARTMAN: Not at all. Wendy, we're gonna get you Wendy. We're your boobs, we're gonna kill you!

WENDY: You'd better shut up, or I'll make you shut up!

CARTMAN: Oho, really? What are you gonna do about it, Wendy?

WENDY: I'm gonna kick your ass! That's what I'm gonna do!

CARTMAN: HAHA, you're gonna kick my ass?

WENDY: That's right, I'm gonna kick your ass!¹⁵

At the end of the episode, when Wendy wins the fight against a brutally defeated Cartman, she makes a point for the empowerment of women. Wendy mentally empowers women as she exhibits the positive effects of standing up for one's beliefs. She also displays the physical empowerment of women by beating up the biggest male bully.

As for her feminist views, not only does she advocate empowering the voice of women, she also trusts that respect from society comes from the woman herself. Wendy believes that women shouldn't belittle themselves and dress in a tasteless fashion. In "Stupid Spoiled Whore Video Playset," the girls of *South Park* become obsessed with the new trend of dressing and acting as a whore, promoted by Paris Hilton. They start dressing in slutty clothes, and act like whores, inviting the boys to a sex party where they play seven minutes in heaven, and the like. Wendy strongly opposes this idea, saying: "But the idea that we'll be whorish for money is belittling to our gender!" She seems to be the only person to be concerned about this issue. Even when she approaches her parents about it, they were no help.

DAD: Hi, sweetie. What's the matter?

WENDY: Mom, Dad, I'm growing concerned about the role models young women have in today's society.

DAD: Oh?

WENDY: It seems that lewdness and shallowness are being exalted, while intellectualism is looked down upon.

¹⁵ "The Breast Cancer Show Ever." [South Park](#). Comedy Central. 15 Oct. 2008.

DAD: ...Gosh.

WENDY: I think young women are being marketed to by corrupt, moral-less corporations.

DAD: Well, we'll get right on fixing that, sweetie. Wanna watch *The Price is Right*?¹⁶

Although she is strongly against this new fad, once she realizes all of the girls have been consumed by this, and that she is now the reject, her strong femininity (the base and center of her character) wavers. All of the sudden, she wants to be a whore too, just so she may fit in.

This isn't the first time that Wendy compromises her beliefs in order to be accepted. Previously, after Bebe got all of the attention from the boys when she's the first to hit puberty, Wendy got breast implants to gain the attention of the boys, even though that is contradicting the idea of feminism. "Feminism is both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms"¹⁷ The fact that she got so jealous of Bebe, talking behind her back as well, also shows her betraying the feminist movement by attacking a member of the same team.

Although Wendy wished to be in Bebe's place, Bebe herself wasn't happy with her new development.

BEBE: Mom, why is everyone acting so different around me?

BEBE'S MOM: Sweetie, you're just blossoming into a woman.

BEBE: But, I, I don't know if I want to. Sometimes I think I'm not as smart and cool as they say, that everyone just tells me I am because of my hooters.

¹⁶ "Stupid Spoiled Whore Video Playset." *South Park*. Comedy Central. 1 Dec. 2004.

¹⁷ Haslanger, Sally and Nancy Tuana, "Topics in Feminism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/feminism-topics/>>.

BEBE'S MOM: Sweetie, you're a Stevens. And Stevens women are always told they're really, really smart.

BEBE: Mom? What's six times eight?

MRS. STEVENS: Oho, sweetie, those are two completely different numbers.¹⁸

She doesn't like being cast out by the girls and called names like slut and whore, while the boys all of the sudden adore her and fight one another in the hopes of getting her undivided attention.

For the first time, Bebe feels the effects of sexism, and she knows right away that she does not like it. Going to the plastic surgeon to get a breast reduction, she argues that having big boobs isn't a wonderful thing:

“Because if I grow up getting everything I want, having things made easy for me because I have hot knockers, then I'm gonna grow up to be a lame person. If I'm handed everything in life, then my chances of becoming a lawyer or a marine biologist are zero.”¹⁹

She was denied the surgery because the Doctor believed a girl her age shouldn't get a breast reduction due to it being unethical. Ironically, a breast implant surgery was an available option (the one that Wendy opted for).

Starting out so anti-sexist, it is ironic then that only two seasons later she is seen as a prominent whore in “Stupid Spoiled Whore Video Playset.” She is the girl to announce the sex party at her house and turn the tables on Wendy by casting her out for her disapproving of, therefore not partaking in the whorish fad.

¹⁸ “Bebe's Boobs Destroy Society.” South Park. Comedy Central. 17 Jul. 2002.

¹⁹ Ibid.

WENDY: Hey Bebe. I heard you were having a party tonight.

BEBE: You wouldn't be interested, Wendy. My parents are out of town, so it's a Stupid Spoiled Whore party.

WENDY: I'm a stupid spoiled whore.

ANNIE: Right. Please, Wendy, you're like Class President and stuff!

RED: Yeah, and you get straight A's in school!

BEBE: You're not even spoiled, because your parents give money to charity!

RED: You don't want to go to this party, Wendy! We're inviting all the boys, and we're gonna play Spin the Bottle, and Two Minutes In The Closet, and do ketamine.

WENDY: That's okay.

ANNIE: Oh, please, do you even know what ketamine is?

WENDY: Yes.

ANNIE: See? You are too smart.

RED: Yeah. We have no idea what ketamine is.

BEBE: Sorry Wendy. You're just not a whore. Get lost!

GIRLS: Yeah.²⁰

Bebe first establishes her role in the class society as one against sexism, but then proves inadequate in it by compromising those ideas and exploiting sexism for everything she thought she could gain from it. Wendy too, the prominent feminist in *South Park*, proved herself inadequate in that role through her fickle tendencies.

On a feminist note, it is wonderful to see a female playing an authoritative role such as Mayor McDaniels. It is sad to realize, however, that she is just yet another inadequate female on *South Park*. Although she is in a position of high power, ruling over a whole town, she has no back bone. Whenever there is an issue to address, she is not the one to put her foot down. Instead, she turns to the townspeople who seem to do little more than rabble, and yet she goes along with whatever idea they come up with, no

²⁰ "Stupid Spoiled Whore Video Playset." [South Park](#). Comedy Central. 1 Dec. 2004.

matter how ridiculous it might be. Her failure to take control yields her to be inadequate in her position.

Mayor McDaniels is little more than a stereotypical woman in power, exhibiting the "interactive leadership" style presented by researcher Judy Rosener, Ph.D., a management professor at the University of California.

"Rosener identifies three major elements of these women's styles. The first is that they encourage participation by trying to instill a group identity through shared decision making."²¹

In "Child Abduction is Not Funny," Mayor McDaniels is confronted with the threat of child abductors getting the community's children. When the townspeople turn to her for a solution, she simply throws the question back to them and has them come up with the answer. Notice how little input she makes in this decision:

TOWNSFOLK: Rabble rabble rabble rabble rabble rabble rabble rabble...

MAYOR MCDANIELS: People, people, calm down.

RANDY: Well what are we gonna do, Mayor?! We have to stop these abductors from being able to get into our town!

TOWNSFOLK: Rabble rabble rabble rabble rabble rabble rabble rabble...

MAYOR MCDANIELS: Yes, but standing out here yelling "Rabble rabble rabble" isn't going to help anything.

JIMBO: Well we don't know what else to do, Mayor!

TOWNSFOLK: Rabble rabble.

MAYOR MCDANIELS: People, what do you think we need to do?

²¹ Duerst-Lahti, Georgia and Cathy Marie Johnson. "Management Styles, Stereotypes, and Advantages." Women and Men of the States: Public Administrators at the State Level. Ed. Guy, Mary E. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992. 135

GERALD: Uh, well, we need to find a way to close our town off from unwanted strangers!

SHEILA: Yes, we need a barrier to protect our kids.

TOWNSFOLK: Rabble rabble rabble rabble rabble rabble...

RANDY: Wait, that's it. A wall. We could build a huge city wall all around South Park so that we have complete control over who comes in.

RICHARD: That's... not a bad idea, a city wall.²²

Technically, Mayor McDaniels wasn't even necessary for that exchange, her sole purpose there was to get the townspeople on track. Her role was completely interchangeable, as anyone could have easily performed the same task.

"Second, these women also share power and information rather than guarding it. Advantages to this approach are increased loyalty, enhanced communication, catching problems before they explode, and providing the wherewithal to reach conclusions, solve problems, and understand justifications for decisions."²³

In "Volcano" where Mayor McDaniels learns that there is a volcano that is on the brink of eruption, she is quick to call the media to inform everyone of this looming catastrophe, and to enlist the help of others to rescue the boys that are up on the mountain. Instead of wasting this precious time on the media, Mayor McDaniels should have immediately begun putting together a professional evacuation plan. By sharing her power and information with others she is detracting from the influence that a Mayor should have.

NEWS ANCHOR: Mayor, what are you doing to prepare for this inevitable catastrophe?

MAYOR: All we know right now is that some of our children are camping on that mountain, and. I'm sorry can I start over?

NEWS ANCHOR: Huh?

²² "Child Abduction is Not Funny." *South Park*. Comedy Central. 24 Jul. 2002.

²³ Duerst-Lahti, Georgia and Cathy Marie Johnson. "Management Styles, Stereotypes, and Advantages." *Women and Men of the States: Public Administrators at the State Level*. Ed. Guy, Mary E. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992. 135

MAYOR: Well you can edit this, right? Ready? 3,2,1 - "All we know right now is that some of our children are up camping on that mountain. We can't do anything until we get them."

MAYOR: Okay people! Let's go get those kids ²⁴

Through Mayor McDaniels' constantly involving the townspeople, and her tendency to quickly hand over the reigns, she acted in yet another stereotypical fashion as pointed out by Rosener:

"The third element is simultaneously fostered by, and a consequence of, the prior elements: managers enhance the self-worth of others in large by refraining from asserting their own superiority, which asserts the inferiority of others... Finally, these women energize others by expressing their enthusiasm for work, and by developing credibility to do so through achieving easily measured results"²⁵

While this may be good for the South Park community on a psychological level, it is not the Mayor's job to reassure the townspeople of their self-worth. It is, however the Mayor's job to put her foot down, and to take on the challenging role of making decisions that affect the town as a whole. It is the Mayor's job to go with the unpopular vote from time to time, as long as it has the community's best interest at hand. Making Mayor McDaniels so flexible and impressionable innately paints her as inadequate at doing her job. Her main qualities are the complete opposite of those a successful Mayor should have.

²⁴ "Volcano." South Park. Comedy Central. 27 Aug. 1997.

²⁵ Duerst-Lahti, Georgia and Cathy Marie Johnson. "Management Styles, Stereotypes, and Advantages." *Women and Men of the States: Public Administrators at the State Level*. Ed. Guy, Mary E. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992. 135

It is fair to argue that *South Park* has taken a strong stand on women and the roles they play in society. They don't give the females on *South Park* the possibility of developing character or the chance to be three-dimensional. Rather, Stone and Parker keep the females two-dimensional in one specific social role each. "In spite of and, oftentimes, because of its gender stereotypes and offensive language, *South Park* confronts important philosophical questions about autonomy, power, obscenity, sexual commercialization, gender roles, and sexuality"²⁶ Through these confrontations, however, it is clear that *South Park* views females as inadequate in achieving the goals defined for their roles in society.

²⁶ Miller, Ellen. "Raisins, Whores, and Boys." South Park and Philosophy: You Know, I Learned Something Today. Ed. Robert Arp. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007. 177

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