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Visual and Verbal Images of a Woman in
Two Britney Spears' Music Videos

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ABSTRACT:

Tutkimukseni käsitteli Britney Spearsin vuosina 1999 ja 2002 julkaistuja musiikkivideoita. Tavoitteenani oli analysoida musiikkivideoiden esittämä naiskuva ja verrata sitä kyseisten laulujen sanoituksista koostuvaan naiskuvaan. Tutkimukseni päätavoite oli selvittää, mikä on tyypillisin naiskuva ja kuinka yhtenäinen se videoissa sekä sanoituksissa on. Jaoin molemmat musiikkivideot otoksiin sijainnin muuttumisen perusteella ja analysoin kussakin otoksessa esitetyn naiskuvan Roland Barthesin semiologisten koodien mukaan kiinnittäen huomion pienmpiin merkityksellisiin elementteihin, kuten naisen vaatteiden väriin, katsekontaktiin tai hymyyn. Tulokset osoittivat, että naiskuvat Spearsin ensimmäisessä musiikkivideossa ovat stereotyyppillisen passiivisia, kun taas uudempi video haastaa samaiset stereotyyppit esittäen naisen dominoivana ja itsevarmana. Tulokset myös osoittivat, että naiskuva molemmissa videoissa oli ristiriitainen sanoitusten muodostamaan naiskuvaan verrattuna. Tämä tutkimus tukee osittain Judith Butlerin näkemystä naiseudesta ja sukupuolesta: naiseus ei ole biologiseen sukupuoleen sidoksissa oleva normi. Se, että on syntynyt naiseksi, ei edellytä tiettyä käyttäytymistä. Spearsin uudempi musiikkivideo ja sen esittämät naiskuvat tukevat tätä ajattelutapaa, naisstereotyyppit haastaen.

KEY WORDS:

Dentaatio, konnotaatio, musiikkivideo, naiskuva, naisrepresentaatio, naiseus, semiotiikka, stereotyyppia.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's society we consume several hours of television every day, look at magazines, surf the Internet, pass billboards and are generally unable to avoid popular culture and advertising. Every medium provides us with a constant flow of images of men and women. Advertising in particular presents images of an idealised female body; it is used to attract attention and associate the product with certain feelings, thoughts and values. (Heiskala 1991: 46 – 47.) With the media containing diverse images of men, women and sexuality today, it is highly unlikely that these images would have no impact on our sense of identity (Gauntlett 2002: 3).

One of the most controversial, and perhaps most influential, media which provides idealised images of women is Music Television and its 24-hour flow of music videos. Music Television – MTV – is one of the most effective contemporary media for popular music and a channel for creating trendy images of both sexes. Since the launch of Music Television in the United States in 1981, it has spread into 342 million homes. Broadcasting of European Music Television began in 1987, adding more than 1.6 million households to Music Television's subscription list. (BBC NEWS 2001 [online].) On average, American youth listen to music and watch music videos four-five hours a day. Even less time is spent with friends or just watching television. (O'Toole 1997 [online].) The popular and trendy MTV has been the subject of negative publicity in the headlines too. Experts have debated over its provocative nature, broadcasting violent and overly sexual music videos and lyrics (O'Toole 1997, Gauntlett 2002). MTV has also been claimed to enhance stereotypical gender roles for women, who are still underrepresented as either 'good' or 'bad' girls (Modinos 1994: 27), women are attractive but passive sex objects, something to be looked at (van Dorston 1990 [online], Gauntlett 2002).

Despite the fashionable but controversial nature of popular music, the range of images it offers and its impact on the audience, research on the field was rare until in the 1990s. Images of both women and men and their different roles have been widely studied in advertising, films and television programmes (for example, Peach 1998, Mulvey 1997 and van Zoonen 1994), but interestingly popular music and music videos have not been taken seriously until now. If images and representations of women in advertisements affect one's understanding of womanhood and femininity, surely music videos and popular music have an impact too.

Music videos are made to raise the sales of an album, to advertise the artist. Researchers have also mostly concentrated on analysing *either* verbal *or* visual images. The verbal and visual are usually combined, particularly in popular music, which makes a study of images even more challenging. Due to MTV's popularity, extensive availability and influence on viewers, popular music and the images it provides need to be studied more. The controversial MTV itself provides an interesting field of study, so do artists who are themselves popular and provocative. This thesis studies what kinds of images and representations of their gender they provide in their music videos and whether these images are similar to the images in their lyrics.

My aim is to examine the images of a woman presented in the music video and lyrics of a popular music song. I will concentrate on the consistency of the images provided, this is whether the lyrics and music video give the same image of a woman or if they possibly even contradict each other. Furthermore, as music videos often repeat certain images and since lyrics have a chorus repeated, I shall also analyse which gender representations are the most common ones. I study whether women are still typically feminine rather than masculine action figures, and whether femininity still represented as reticence. As Finnish researcher Tuija Modinos has pointed out, women in popular music are often represented as man's other, or either as good or bad girls (Modinos 1994: 27).

One of the most influential pop singers at the time of this study is Britney Spears, which is why I chose to analyse her work. As she is both young and very popular, the image she promotes is likely to be in the media constantly, also affecting the fans. In this research I shall study Spears' two songs: *...Baby One More Time* (1999) and *Toxic* (2003), concentrating on the images of a woman she portrays.

What a woman should look like and how she is expected to act is defined in each culture by its social norms (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1986: 166). The mass media, however, circulate certain images of female and male performance as preferable (Butler 1990: 140). In this research, the concept 'a woman' refers to a woman in a modern Western society. The word 'woman' refers both to a social category and to one's feeling of oneself; it refers to a culturally built and shaped subjective identity (Butler 1990: 6 – 10). A 'representation' refers

to the use of images or language to create meanings (Sturken & Cartwright 2001: 12). In this study 'a representation of a woman' refers to the words in lyrics and images in videos that create and connote meanings, making the audience see a woman in a certain way. For example, a blonde girl wearing white often signifies innocence and purity. 'Modern Western society' refers to the developed Western countries at the present time, especially to the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Europe as Music Television has been broadcast in these countries for years and therefore audiences would be conscious of Britney Spears and her work.

My starting point for this research lies in the storyline. Firstly, I shall analyse what kind of a woman the one talking/shown is, then examine whether the lyrics and video tell the same or different story. Also, I will focus on the consistency of each story, provided that both the lyrics and the video have a narrative. My interest is in the female protagonist particularly but to understand power relations, I have analysed male characters or other significant roles when their contribution has been significant. The aim is neither to analyse Spears herself nor her private life, but the roles she plays in her songs.

My hypothesis is that there is contradiction between the verbal and the visual images. As Dean Abt points out, "... [videos] must gain and hold the viewer's attention amidst other videos...In the struggle to establish and maintain a following, artists utilize any number of techniques in order to appear exotic, powerful, tough, sexy, cool, unique." (Abt 1987: 97, 103). Perhaps inconsistency is used as a means of surprising or shocking the audience. The conflict between the verbal and the visual images may also be due to the fact that usually songs are written first, the music videos are made after that to advertise the new song and the album of an artist. The song text then takes priority. Some composers of bands and music video directors believe that nowadays the visual attracts more attention than the song itself, which is perhaps due to the MTV. (Kaplan 1987: 14.)

I assume that Spears' first song, ...*Baby One More Time* provides more consistent images of a woman than *Toxic*. I chose Spears' work for my analyses as she is young but has already gained the public's interest becoming very popular and influential (Ylä-Kotola 2004). I also assume that, as a young, modern artist, Spears challenges most traditional gender roles,

breaking the traditional viewpoint on women and femininity. I will introduce and discuss the material for this study next.

Material for my study consists of two popular music song texts by Britney Spears and the music videos for these songs. The songs are ...*Baby One More Time* (1999) and *Toxic* (2003). ...*Baby One More Time* was Britney Spears' first song and, along with the music video, it made her famous. She was only 17-years old when the song was released in 1999. *Toxic* was from Spears' newest album at the time the research was done. Like ...*Baby One More Time*, it was the first single released from the album. As there is a gap of several years between the songs, I want to see if the image of Spears and the images of a woman Spears represents have changed.

Even though both the songs describe emotional states, they seem to have a different structure. The lyrics of ...*Baby One More Time* were written by Max Martin and the video for it was directed by Nigel Dick. Also the work for *Toxic*, lyrics and music video, was done by men; the lyrics were co-written by C. Dennis, C. Karlsson, P. Winnberg, and H. Jonberg, and the music video was directed by Joseph Khan. As the purpose of this thesis is to study the representations of a woman, the fact that two sets of song writers and video directors are involved is not significant. Also, my purpose is not to study Britney Spears as an artist, but rather her artistic representation of a woman. Therefore, the fact that Spears has not written the song texts herself does not present a problem.

The lyrics of ...*Baby One More Time* have a narrative, even though they lack the clear beginning, middle, and end which is typical of many pop songs (Modinos 1994: 435). The story in the song text is a first person narrative, but the reader cannot say whether it is a male or a female telling the story. As Spears is the voice and image of the lyrical I, this suggests a female point of view. The narrative, therefore, consists of a girl's feelings, emotions, dreams, and hopes she has for someone, only referred to as 'baby' or 'you'. However, each listener becomes the 'I' of the song, the 'I' is consequently both male and female. The music video of ...*Baby One More Time*, which lasts 3 minutes and 50 seconds, portrays a teenage girl's day at school. The video can be divided into three different scenes according to the change of location; a school hallway scene, an outdoor scene, and a sports hall scene. In each scene the

female protagonist's costume and behaviour connote different roles. The video begins with the female protagonist sitting in a classroom waiting for the lesson to end. When the music starts, two different images are shown: the first image presents a confident woman dancing in the school hallway, the other presents a lonely woman leaning on lockers. The next scene also includes a parallel image of the woman first dancing cheerfully, then sitting and daydreaming in a convertible. The final scene shows two images too; in the first scene the woman dances in a sports hall with her friends, and in the other one she is alone, staring at a boy nearby. The scenes and Spears' different roles change rapidly.

The song *Toxic* is from Spears' recent album (released in 2003) and the whole theme of *Toxic* is very different from *...Baby One More Time*, showing a more grown-up, independent artist. The lyrics of *Toxic* do not necessarily tell a story but describe a moment and a feeling of obsession. The narrator, the lyrical 'I', is talking to someone referred to as 'baby' or 'a guy'. Again, as the artist is female, I assume the lyrical I is a woman. She is trying to get a man's attention (see appendix 3. "Baby can't you see, I'm calling"), and highlighting her addiction to the man's attention ("I'm addicted to you / Don't you know that you're toxic").

The *Toxic* music video, however, tells a different story. It is 3 and half minutes long, and it can be divided into seven different scenes according to the change of location. Spears is first seen as an air-stewardess serving drinks. She suddenly drags a male passenger to a toilet and kisses him. From time to time Spears is briefly shown in a glittering, transparent dress writhing on the floor and talking to the cameras. The setting changes and Spears dressed in black leather is shown riding a motor bike with the actor-model Tyson Beckford. The setting changes again, and Spears is shown in a tunnel where flames flare behind her back. She steals a bottle of poison which she uses in the final scene to kill her ex-lover.

I shall next introduce the methodology applied to the analysis of the music videos and lyrics in this research. The theoretical background used in the analysis is discussed into detail in chapter 3.

Music videos advertise both the song and the artist; they function as promotional tools (Abt 1987: 102.) Even though lyrics are usually written first and the music video filmed afterwards, the visual seems to take over the verbal. Moreover, the images seen in a music video are likely to come into one's mind even when the song is heard in non-television contexts (Abt 1987: 101). As a music video provides the audience with straightforward images to be thought of when the song is heard without the video, my starting point for the image analysis is the video. I shall analyse a music video first and compare the images of a woman it provides with the images of a woman in the lyrics of the same song.

My method for analysing both the verbal and the visual elements is drawn from semiotics, also known as the science of signs. Semiotics is ideal for analysing images, especially visual, as the focus of semiotics is not only on the images displayed, but also on that what other meanings an image creates and how. Moreover, semiotics examines communication as a process of creating meanings, significations, which is also how song texts and music videos function. As everything cannot be said directly to the listener or viewer, meanings have to be communicated to the audience in various ways.

When reading media texts, both verbal and visual, the reader makes associations in their minds to make sense of the reading. These associations and interpretations are based on previous experiences and the cultural background. As experiences and backgrounds may be very different, media texts can be interpreted differently. What is more, people can still interpret the world differently even if they have the same culture of meanings (Hall 1997: 17-18). Semiologically, this is due to the process of connotation and denotation.

Van Zoonen clarifies the process with the example of a black cat. The denotative meaning of these two words only refers to a cat of a certain colour. The connotative meaning of this animal can be understood as bad luck. Whether a black cat is seen as bad luck depends on the cultural background of the reader. For instance, in the Netherlands a black cat is believed to bring bad luck whereas elsewhere it can mean the opposite. (van Zoonen 1994: 76.) In order to understand how we read images and what they signify, it is important to take a look at the main concepts of semiotics.

According to French linguistics, the basic unit of language is a *sign*, and the sign is composed of two components: the *signifier* and *the signified*. The signifier is a sound or image which is linked to the signified. The signified, then, is the idea or concept attached to the signifier. (Barthes 2004: 81 – 82.)

A written word, a picture, traffic lights or even a haircut can be a signifier. A signifier is a physical, concrete object, a thing one can see or hear. A signified is a concept, a mental image or an association. (Branston & Stafford 2003: 11). For example, Marlboro advertisements signify masculinity: the word Marlboro or the picture of a cowboy with a cigarette is a signifier. This word or image signifies masculinity. Together they form a sign; Marlboro as masculinity. These advertisements with a cowboy relaxing with a cigarette connote the idea of freedom and real men. (Struken & Cartwright 2001: 29.) Likewise, the word 'cat' is a signifier; the word itself does not look like a cat or sound like a cat, but still an English speaking person can picture a certain animal, a cat, in their mind when they hear or see the word. What comes to their mind then is the signified: the one might think of a black cat or a striped cat when hearing the word or seeing a picture of the animal. However, two English-speaking people would probably picture two very different kinds of cats even if they share the same culture. This is because people still interpret the world differently due to their age or sex, even if they have the same cultural background. What unites the word with its meaning is arbitrary, but within a culture people know what the meaning of a word is (Barthes 1986: 50)

As popular music can mean different things to different audiences, I have chosen a reading method which enables more than one way of understanding the elements. I will apply Roland Barthes' semiotic system of five codes. Barthes introduced these five codes in his study of Balzac's novel *Sarrasine* in 1970, and his purpose was to point out the plurality of a text, and provide several possible ways of interpreting. The codes are loosely defined, and their purpose is to bring out significant elements rather than to give a strict analysing method.

The five codes used for the analysis consist of the code of semes, the hermeneutic code, the symbolic code, the proairetic code, also known as the code of action, and the cultural code – the reference code – as defined by Barthes (Barthes 1992). John Fiske defines a code as a system of signs governed by culturally bound rules. The codes are used as a tool to generate

and circulate meanings in and for the culture in which they are shared. They operate as links between texts, producers, and audiences. (Fiske1987: 4.)

On the verbal level, I will analyse the song texts line by line, using Barthes' code system as a tool for identifying the significant elements in the creation of the representation of the woman. The pronoun 'you' may be a significant element, for instance, because it often reveals the power relation between the lyrical I and the addressee. Significant also is the way the female protagonist speaks is also significant; way of speaking may be commanding, suggesting confidence, power and authority. The way of speaking may also be apologetic or intimidated. For example, in ...*Baby, One More Time* Spears sings "...show me how you want it to be". As she is asking for the other person, 'you', to take control and tell her what to do, and as her tone of voice at this point in the song is rather sad than commanding, this gives an impression of a woman yielding to someone else's power.

A single line may carry important information about the image of the woman, but only together do the lines suggest an overall reading of the song. I therefore base my analyses of the images of women on the strophes rather than single lines. The chorus is considered as a strophe as well. It is also important to notice that in lyrics one individual word may carry multiple meanings. For instance, in ...*Baby One More Time* Spears sings '...hit me baby one more time...' (Spears). The word 'hit' can be said to carry more than one meaning and thus raises several associations. In colloquial language, hit does not only mean verbal abuse, but can also be understood as a reference to the game of blackjack. It also may be a reference to make sexual advances to someone.

Unlike the lyrics, the music videos offer more than one area to analyse. On the visual level I will examine such elements as colours, lighting, camera angles and Spears' body language, as these all contribute to the image of a woman. Body language as such is a wide area to study and I will restrict my analysis to the forms of non-verbal communication that indicate the power relation between the characters in the video. As my intention is to examine the different roles a woman has in the music videos *Baby One More Time* and *Toxic*, gestures and facial expressions which indicate dominion or submission are important. For example, a woman staring at someone in a challenging way or crowding another's space is usually seen as a powerful, dominant person. (Henley 1977: 147.) The videos are likely to include

numerous gestures and facial expressions, especially in dancing scenes. I have excluded from my material dance movements as such, as they would have extended the scope of the study too much. However, this does not deny their significance, as, although stylised, they do contribute. If the dance movements in Spears' music videos are evident signs of submission or domination, such as crowding another's space, I will take such scenes into account.

Dress and costumes also play an important role in the videos. As Henley puts it, women's clothing often emphasises their bodies. Frail materials, such as chiffon, or the design restrict women's movements. (Henley 1977: 89 – 90.) For example, a miniskirt not only prevents a woman from running, but it also can reveal some sections of society. In Spears' music videos clothing is one way of constructing different roles. To emphasise one's submission or domination, camera angles and lighting are vital. For instance, the angle of a camera is normally horizontal and on the level of the eyes (Berger 1987: 38), but if a person is filmed from below, she looks bigger and more powerful. In music videos too, posture and size can be emphasised with the help of camera angles. The main light coming from below makes a person look bigger and therefore makes her dominating, or even threatening (Modinos 1994: 37). For my purposes, considering light and gaze will be useful, and Arthur Asa Berger (1997: 114) provides useful tools for this. I will introduce his theory of using camera techniques to emphasise one's posture in chapter three.

I will divide Spears' music videos into scenes and analyse the images of women according to the roles the woman, in this case Spears, has in each scene. In this research, the division into different scenes has been done according to the change of location. In both music videos the change of location has a significant role; the change often indicates a change in a woman's role, too. Barthes' code system is then applied to each scene to detect those actions, colours and forms of body language which indicate a woman's role.

In the next chapter I shall discuss music videos and their role in popular culture more. Music videos are not only a tool for promoting an artist's career today, but also a means of promoting certain values within society or even criticising it. Music videos have become a phenomenon in modern Western society.

2. THE MUSIC VIDEO PHENOMENON

As the music video has become the most powerful tool for an artist to promote their career, it is vital to take a close look at the ways music videos function (Grossberg 1989: 260). Like advertisements, music videos shape our values and gender roles. Since the rapid growth of American cable television in the 1980s and one of its most attractive outlets, Music Television, music video has become an important part of popular culture (Lull 1987: 25). According to James Lull, a music video is “an artistic phenomenon”, combining many art forms into one. Video is not only a visual conceptualisation of a song and its performance, but also involves dance, choreography, fashion, costuming, acting, story telling, lighting, editing, directing and producing. (Lull 1987: 27.) Videos have become experiences to be shared (van Dorston 1990 [online]).

2.1 Purpose of Music Videos

The music video itself is a secondary product to the album itself, and its main purpose is to establish and maintain an artist’s image (Abt 1987: 97, 102). Since 1981 and the launch of the American MTV, an artist has not been just a singer but a star on television as well. One of MTV’s main goals was breaking the records that had not been able to make the play lists of radio stations (Straw 1993: 8). Music videos enabled artists to maintain themselves in the public’s consciousness. Cyndi Lauper was one of the first female artists to achieve mass popularity due to her exposure on MTV in the early 1980s (Lewis in Firth, Goodwin & Grossberg 1993: 132).

For many viewers, however, the video is perhaps the first contact with an artist, and if the video is impressive, it will stay in the public’s consciousness. (Abt 1987: 97, 102.) To be able to make a memorable music video that differs from the mass usually requires an artist’s ability and willingness to adapt an image that appeals to the target audience at any given time. The various images of artists are not left without a notice; fans especially are aware of the image change of celebrities, and they copy the styles of their idols. Certain well-known artists, such as Madonna and Britney Spears, have had an enormous effect on their fans.

According to Mauri Ylä-Kotola in MTV3 news, the impact Spears and her music videos have had on the viewers and youth fashion has been greater than one could have imagined a few years ago (MTV 3 News 2004). It can be said that Spears has created a new trend with her public image and dressing style.

2.2 Music Video Imperatives

Music videos have cultural relevance. They offer glimpses of a certain value set, these portrayals of values are somewhere between real and ideal. According to Joe Strandberg (2007 [online]), all these portrayals in music videos are driven by different imperatives, such as political, social, economic and individualist.

A music video driven by a *political imperative* incorporates political messages, such as power structures within society, questioning authority or war (Strandberg 2007). The American punk rock band Green Day, for example, made a music video for their song *Wake Me up When September Ends* in 2005, showing the horrors of the Iraq war. Many rap artists question authority in their music videos, showing the artist confronting and then escaping from the police.

Using a *social imperative* is particularly common in female artists' videos. According to Strandberg (2007), a common theme in a music video driven by the social imperative is a fantasy encounter with a beautiful girl. Such scenes would not happen in reality, he points out. A good example of such a video is Jessica Simpson's recent single, *Public Affair* (2007). In the music video we see a group of attractive and successful women (Eva Longoria, Christina Applegate and Christina Milian) roller skating and having fun together. A man, portrayed as a less attractive and unpopular, fantasises about all the four girls. Such music videos mainly address male audiences aged 19-30, (Strandberg 2007), but obviously also female viewers will see music videos like Simpson's. Female or male, viewers may find such music videos empowering or degrading.

Another important and very common imperative is the *economic imperative*, also known as the 'life style' video. These videos exemplify a certain way of life that is different from the

way most people live. (Strandberg 2007.) Such videos often promote a luxurious life style. Examples of these music videos are Fergie's *My Humps* or Madonna's *Material Girl*, which playfully question today's materialistic way of living, showing the artists boasting about their expensive jewellery and lifestyle, which their wealthy admirers provide. Several rap artists, such as 50 Cent and P. Diddy, as well as the female singer Mariah Carey, seem to prefer promoting such a lifestyle in their videos. They are often shown in bright white luxury yachts gambling and sipping champagne. Golden necklaces, shiny diamond rings and attractive women add an extra wealth factor to the life style and video. Strandberg rightfully questions to whom such a lifestyle appeals, the artist, director or producer of the video. Another example of a different kind of *economic imperative* is J Kwon's music video *Tipsy* (2004). It portrays the artist at a drinking party having fun with other drunk youngsters. Such videos have raised concerns, and even MTV has been criticised: viewers see an artist they idolise performing certain behaviour and they see it as an acceptable way of behaving as it is on MTV (see O'Toole 1997, Gauntlett 2002 and Strandberg 2007).

The fourth and last imperative Strandberg identifies, *individualism*, is perhaps the least provocative music video. Such music videos mainly promote the artists themselves, the record label or possibly even a film, and are a good example of a music video functioning as an advertisement. All the imperatives introduced above help maintain an artist in the public's consciousness, in a positive or a negative way. One thing, however, is certain: music videos give record buyers something to think and talk about, something to recall, visualise and to associate with (Abt 1987: 108).

Spears' music videos are driven by these imperatives too, in particular individualism and the social imperative. She has several different roles in her videos and she offers more than one representation of a woman. It should be kept in mind, however, that Spears herself is also an 'artistic creation' and her public image a representation of a woman. As media researcher Sam Inkinen points out, the persona Britney Spears should be separated from Britney Spears the product (MTV3 news 1.7.2004). She has been the subject of negative publicity when she became changed her image from a 'good' girl to a 'bad' one, becoming a sex symbol (Britney Spears – MTV 2003 [online]). This may be a pattern in the music industry. For instance, Madonna and Kylie Minogue have changed their images during their careers dramatically.

Record companies and artists work together to create and present a popular image for the intended target audience. Artists utilise a number of techniques to look sexy or unique. (Abt 1987: 103.) Changing one's image could also be due to the sociological fact that when a girl is over twenty years old, it is more acceptable to appear as a 'bad' girl. However, as E. Ann Kaplan points out in her study of MTV, a star's image is constructed on the basis of what is most marketable at that time, (Kaplan 1987: 58.)

The next chapter introduces the theoretical background applied to my study, including two important reading methods; five semiotic codes and gestures of dominance and submission in nonverbal communication. The concepts central to this study are also fully explained in chapter 3. In chapter 4 I shall first examine and analyse the verbal and visual images of women in ...*Baby One More Time*. Similarly, I will analyse *Toxic* in chapter 5 and will finally compare the two songs and the images they provide in the Conclusions in chapter 6.

3. FEMINISM AND SEMIOTICS IN THE INTERPRETATION OF FEMALE IMAGES

My aim is to find out what are the most common images of a woman which Spears' lyrics and music videos construct. To understand how women have been represented and seen in Western culture, it is imperative to have a brief insight into the most important turning points of feminism.

Defining feminism is difficult as there are so many different theories and viewpoints about women, their roles and femininity (Freedman 2001: 1). Loosely defined, feminism can be said to be an ideology that focuses on the power relations between men and women, criticising the way men have been considered superior to women for centuries (Liljeström, Anttonen & Lempiäinen 2000: 14). The feminist way of thinking can roughly be divided into three movements: first-, second-wave and third-wave feminism. First-wave feminism refers to the feminist movements in the late-19th and early 20th centuries, which were concerned with gaining equal rights for women. (Freedman 2001: 4.) Second-wave feminism stretched from 1920 to 1980, third-wave feminism arose as a response to second-wave feminism and its failures in the 1990s. Second- and third-wave feminist viewpoints are more relevant to my study than the first-wave feminism.

The starting point for the second-wave feminism was the assumption that culture is emblematic of patriarchal social attitudes (Hollows 2000: 21). In patriarchal society women were seen as unequal to men; they had secondary status in society, and this discrimination was encountered by women because of their sex (Freedman 2001: 1). Second-wave feminist theorists argued that women had been defined by men for centuries (for example, see de Beauvoir 1952, Cixous), and that the roles given to women had not changed even though society had. In the mid-1980s, a change in feminism occurred. This phase is also known as "French feminism" mainly due to two essential theorists, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous. Cixous argued that gender representation is an oppositional one in which woman is always portrayed as man's other, as secondary to the rational male gender. According to Cixous, women were seen as passive, whereas men were active. Women were driven by the heart rather than the head; they were seen as mothers caressing and nurturing; 'pathos' would

describe women whereas 'logos' would be linked with the male gender. (Rivkin & Ryan 2004: 348.) Even though Cixous's theory needs updating and division between genders is not very straightforward, certain traits of determining women as man's other are still noticeable. Whereas second-wave feminism gave a push towards gender discussion, it still had failures. Third-wave feminism in the 1990s arose as a response to the second-wave feminism and its failures.

Third-wave feminists challenge second-wave feminists' essentialist definitions of femininity and womanhood. In Western culture, for example, femininity has traditionally been considered to consist of features such as kindness, gentleness and softness. Such qualities were ideally associated with women and girls in Western society. (Gauntlett 2002: 10.) Third-wave feminists want to challenge such a view of essentialist, fixed, characteristics. They seek to challenge common definitions of gender, sex and sexuality. One of their most notable contributions to feminist discussion has been separating biological sex from social sex, gender.

3.1 Sex and Gender in Defining a Woman

The concepts sex and gender have been used very differently by feminist theorists in different times but gender can be explained as social sex, or as a social classification into masculine and feminine, whereas sex refers to the biological differences between male and female (Modinos 1994). Broadly defined, biological sex means that men and women both differ from each other and complement each other as anatomical-physiological creatures. Social sex, gender, contains those behaviour patterns and identities that function as norms for masculinity and femininity. These norms change along with history and culture (Koivunen & Liljeström 1996: 22). What constructs masculinity and femininity has been challenged by several feminists, especially Judith Butler whose theory I will discuss in section 3.1.

According to second-wave feminists, gender and sex should be distinguished; for centuries biological differences have been used as a justification to create different social roles for men and women (Freedman 2001: 12). Finnish researcher Anneli Anttonen points out that sex is one of the most influential forces that shapes one's life and choices (1997: 24) This is not a

new discovery. Already in the early 20th century, Simone de Beauvoir made a remarkable statement: “one is not born a woman: one becomes one” (1949) According to de Beauvoir, women had an inferior position in society and it was not a natural or biological fact but created and maintained by society.

Gendered identities, and how they were culturally produced and reproduced, again became the main topic of feminist discussion and research in the mid-1970s. The main concern was the way men and women were represented in the media and what kind of an effect it had on audiences. It was a common belief that gender roles were learnt at an early stage – once a child had an understanding of their expected gender identity, they would seek information and attempt to develop their personality in terms of how to act like a girl or a boy (Gauntlett 2002: 35). Such theories have been criticised for being deterministic (Gauntlett 2002: 35), but they also raised the issue of such roles being maintained by what perhaps affected us most; the media.

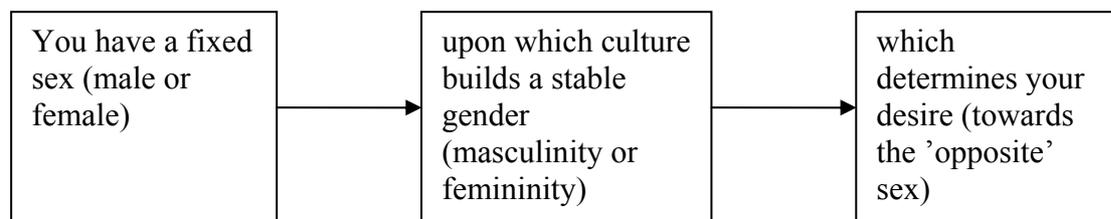
Feminist critics then focused particularly on the images of women, and condemned the stereotypical way of presenting them; the media had not kept up with the social changes. (Hollows 2000: 21). One of the most influential works at that time was Betty Friedan’s *The Feminist Mystique* (1963), which has been said to be a pragmatic version of de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (Hollows 2000: 21). In her research Friedan criticised the way American media created and maintained stereotypical images of women as homemakers and mothers. Friedan argued that the ‘feminine mystique’, the distress of women who had no public careers, prevented women from developing their own identities. (Humm 1994: 39 – 4, Hollows 2000: 21.) The problem with Friedan’s work was the assumption that the media should function as a window on the world, providing reflections of society (Hollows 2000: 22), meaning that being a woman or a man was self-evident and unchanging. Friedan’s work has also been criticised for assuming that audiences would passively absorb media messages as such (Hollows 2000: 13).

The American feminist Judith Butler made her scientific breakthrough with her work *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), arguing that feminism had made a mistake by trying to claim that ‘women’ were a group with common characteristics. For

Butler, representations and roles of a woman are culturally constructed and maintained. By reinforcing a binary view of gender relations, in which human beings are divided into two clear-cut groups, women and men, feminists were closing down options for a person to form and choose their own individual identity. (Butler 2004: 901 – 902) Butler maintains that gender is not biological but performative: “It’s what you *do* at particular times, rather than a universal *who you are*,” (Butler 1990: 25, original emphasis). Butler argues that sex (male, female) is seen to cause gender (masculine, feminine). Gender, then, causes desire towards the other gender. Butler sees this as a kind of continuum, but we should not accept such a pattern without questioning it. Her intention is to break the supposed links between sex, gender and desire so that gender and desire are flexible. (Butler 1990: 9 – 10.)

Butler goes on to argue that the binary nature of sex, division into men and women, is seen as given. By this she means that one is not born with a particular gender, but it is given in a social construction. Certain cultural practices of gender have become natural in Western culture. The way women are portrayed in media, for instance, creates an illusion of what it means to be a woman. (Butler 1990: 140.) Advertising maintains these expectations; men are represented as active and strong, whereas women are soft, tender and passive (Gauntlett 2002: 10). By repeating certain behaviour patterns and social roles, one starts to believe that this is how women should act or look at certain times. The media create an illusion that there are ontological, “core”, behaviour patterns for women: this is what women should be like as they are female, not male (Butler 1996: 6 – 10). Such a gender performance is maintained by imitating and repeating these social behaviour patterns. (Butler 1990: 136, Pulkkinen 2000: 52)

Butler’s gender theory can be simplified in the following diagram:



(Gauntlett 2002: 137)

Butler does not say that biological sex (male/female) is insignificant and meaningless when discussing one's identity. We should not, however, think that a certain gender follows a certain sex, giving us desires. We should try to break this pattern. (Butler 1999: 41 – 43.) For Butler, our view of gender, which is culturally constructed, leads our view of sex. We have an ideal of a man and a woman, an ideal for masculinity and femininity (Kotz & Butler 1995: 266). If one saw sex as a questionable category without any necessary links to any particular gender, identity or personality, and which in turn cannot dictate desire, then it cannot be assumed that one has a certain kind of identity simply because we are 'male' or 'female'. Gender, therefore, is not tied to bodily facts – behaviour is all that our gender is. (Butler 1990: 6 – 10; Gauntlett 2002: 138 – 139.)

The American researcher Lucinda Joy Peach agrees with Butler's theory, stating that even though the images of a woman and a man vary between cultures, in a particular context they are seen as universal, providing role models (Peach 1998: 91). For instance, women are said to be sexually more passive than men, or girls are said to nurture more than boys. Such behaviour patterns are not biological but learnt and maintained within society and culture. (Koivunen 1995: 44.) Therefore, sex and gender adapt to the norm of a certain culture and society. It is imperative, however, to note that adapting to the norm and behaviour patterns is not a choice one makes; femininity and masculinity are norms in the heterosexual gender system which one has to face, whether we want to or not. These norms can also be agonising; even today, it is not acceptable in every culture to desire the same sex. (Butler 1993: 237; McIlvenny 2002: 119.)

Butler has become one of the central researchers of power, sex, sexuality and identity. Her work has also been considered as launching for the queer theory (Gauntlett 2002: 134 – 135). The distinction between sex and gender, and the use of gender as a tool for analysing representations of women and men, has helped feminist theorists to move the emphasis away from the physiological differences between men and women to the social processes which shape masculinity and femininity (Freedman 2001: 15).

3.1.1 The Call for Gender Trouble

Butler provokes us to challenge the traditional views of masculinity and femininity; she calls this gender trouble (Butler 1990: 6 – 10). Even though men still seem to rule the world of business and organisation, only 23 % of businesses in the European Union being owned by women (UN: 2000) , for instance, and women doing more housework than men (Social Trends UK: 2001), there is some evidence of traditional gender roles being challenged. The call for gender trouble is evident in today's mass media: the media work to construct and structure the meaning of gender (*Hollows 2000: 22*). This could be true in the case of popular music and Music Television. As Ann Kaplan points out, an artist should have the image which seems most marketable at a particular moment (Kaplan 1987: 58). One of the most influential female singers, Madonna, has constantly changed her image, offering parodies of the very feminine, bombshell Marilyn Monroe (see *Material Girl*), or by adopting a very male role in her music video *Vogue*, dressed in a man's suit, with short cropped hair, singing “it doesn't matter if you're black or white, if you're a boy or a girl” (*Vogue*). As the purpose of music videos is not only to raise the sales of an album but also to attract attention, it is interesting to see how Spears' gender has been constructed for the song texts and videos, and whether she violates the cultural gender norms.

3.1.2 Gender and Power Relations

Even though feminist studies have given different definitions of women and their roles, one key element they all have in common is power; in the past women have been seen as the weaker, submissive gender (van Zoonen 1994: 4). This has also been evident in the media; for decades male protagonists have dominated the genre of action films with characters such as James Bond series from the 1960s until today, the Indian Jones series in the 1980s, and even in the 1990s male heroes such as Superman have dictated the genre. It is only recently, with films like *Lara Croft – Tomb Raider* (2001) and the remake of *Charlie's Angels* (2000) that female gender has been shown as in a different light. Only during the 1990s have gender roles on television become more equal. (Gauntlett 2002: 58, 66.)

The concept of power is a relevant factor in my research, too. The power structure reveals whether the woman in Spears' work is submissive or dominant, in control of her feelings, thoughts and the situation even. Constant repetition and emphasis on passive yielding would

suggest that more traditional gender roles are valued. The aim of this study is to see which characteristics have been valued throughout Spears' career as my material provides the earliest and, at the moment, recently written lyrics and music videos by Spears. As Kaplan points out, viewers quickly tire of the same image, and there is a constant demand for something new (1987: 156). In that sense Hollows is right in saying that what it means to be a woman is subject to change, (2000: 33 – 34).

In this research, the images principally studied are the ones of a 'submissive' and a 'dominant' woman. These are the two most evident roles, but function as a starting point only. Denoting and connoting meanings, on both the verbal and visual level, will obviously reproduce new images. Image can be explained as a form of expression and a way of seeing (Berger 1998: 91), and the meaning of an image depends on the symbolic associations and culture of the individual perceiving it (Peach 1998: 91). In the case of this study, symbolic associations which refer to submissiveness are passivity and dependence. A submissive woman adapts to the needs of others; she is an object rather than a subject, and seen as a man's other. For example, on the verbal level the passive woman is the one who says in the lyrics of *...Baby One More Time*: '...show me how you want it to be...' (Britney Spears Lyrics 1999 [online]). This woman wants someone else to decide for her, take the lead in her life, instead of taking the responsibility for decision-making herself. A dominant woman, then, is more aggressive and prepared to challenge, she wants to be heard and refuses to be silent. On a visual level in *...Baby One More Time*, this could be the woman who dances in the school hall, staring at the camera and challenging the viewer by staring back and locking the viewer in her gaze. She is not afraid to be the centre of attention. In fact, attention is what she wants (see appendix 1, pictures 3 – 4).

The power relation is one dimension in the field of nonverbal communication. Power can be understood as the ability to influence others, and dominance is often understood as power (Henley 1977: 2, 19). A stereotypical woman is often represented as submissive and powerless; she is the good woman. A bad woman, then, wants to be noticed and behaves aggressively to attract attention. Therefore, I consider the characteristics of submission typical of the good woman, and dominating behaviour refers to the bad woman. Henley introduces a category which indicates gestures of both dominance and submission:

*Dominant**Submissive*

stare	looking down, avoiding eye contact, blinking
touching	cuddling under the touch
interrupting	stops talking
crowding another's space	yielding the floor

(Henley 1977: 187)

Henley's dominant and submissive gestures are common in everyday life, and they can be seen in music videos, too. Gestures, facial expressions and, for example, clothing play important roles in music videos; as the verbal communication in a song consists of the lyrics, on the visual level nonverbal communication can then either support the message of the lyrics or break the consistent image. For example, if a shy-looking person looks down and avoids eye contact, still singing in a commanding way 'hit me baby...', it creates a conflict; is she dominant or submissive?

In music videos clothing is one of the most visible ways of attracting attention. It may not only attract attention, but it can also label a person as submissive or dominant. As Nancy Henley remarks, women's clothing can restrict and categorise women's behaviour as well. If the clothing is feminine, a woman is expected to sit with her knees together. If the dress is very revealing, a woman should restrict the use of her body so as not to reveal too much. (Henley 1977: 90)

Nonverbal communication can be emphasised with camera technique and cinematic codes. Cinematic codes include the use of light, framing, shot sizes and editing. The code which emphasises strength and power are crucial in my study. These codes include camera angles and light. For instance, if one lowers one's head and looks away from the camera, one can be said to be shy or submissive because avoiding eye-contact. In contrast, if filmed from below using the so-called worm's eye, people look taller, height indicating power and dominance. Arthur Asa Berger identifies the main camera techniques, which affect the way a person can be seen:

Signifier

Signified

close up (face only)	intimacy
medium shot (most of the body)	personal relationship
long shot (setting and characters)	public distance
full shot (full body of person)	social relationship
pan down (camera looks down)	power, authority
pan up (camera looks up)	smallness, weakness

Figure 1. Camera angles (Berger 1997: 114))

Berger's theory is relevant for my study, as music video making relies heavily on shifting between camera angles and shot sizes. The video must be memorable but, due to its shortness, meanings need to be communicated effectively, often with exaggeration. Many popular music songs express strong feelings such as love and loss. To communicate such feelings visually often involves showing the face of the love interest to suggest intimacy and affection, or conversely, using the camera to look down on the person who has just lost their love to indicate loss and weakness now that the love is gone. As power relations are some of the key signifiers in this research, Berger's scheme of camera angles will be valuable.

3.2 Semiotics as a Reading Method

Semiotics has become a popular reading method in feminist media criticism because of its ability to interpret meanings beyond the mere presence or absence of women in cultural forms (van Zoonen 1994: 74). Semiotics attempts to detect *how* meanings are created instead of only listing the meaningful factors in an advertisement or in a text. Moreover, semiotics recognises the polysemic nature of a text. In other words, text or an image can be interpreted in more than one way. This is important in my research area, as lyrics and music videos contain numerous signs which can be understood in several ways depending on the person's age, gender, and cultural background.

3.2.1 Denotation and Connotation

Roland Barthes states that a sign has two levels of significations, denotation and connotation. The first level of signification is denotation, also known as a first-order sign. Denotation is a mere object; it does not have a meaning in itself, but it carries the meaning. Connotation, then, is a secondary meaning. Connotation can be said to be a relation, a determination, or an anaphora. It launches the process of interpretation, but as connotations are not dictionary meanings, rather associations that come to one's mind when examining a sign, signs can be interpreted in many ways. Connotation is the starting point of a code. (Barthes 1974: 9, see also Hall 1997, Fiske 1990) For example, a Finnish traffic sign shows two small figures walking. This does not reveal too much. However, these characters in the traffic sign carry a meaning; one should drive carefully because there may be children on the road. It is the context, previous experiences and culture that transmit the meaning (Hall 1997: 38). On the level of denotation, most people would agree on the meaning that there are two characters on the traffic sign. On the level of connotation, the black characters are linked with the previous experiences and knowledge people have, and that is how the traffic sign becomes meaningful.

It has been pointed out several times that one's cultural heritage affects the interpretation of signs. Some signs, however, have become so widely known that people from almost any culture may understand the wanted effect of each sign. Denoting and connoting meanings in the lyrics and music videos of Spears might become too mechanical. Also, more detailed analysis is required, which is why I have chosen Roland Barthes' system of five codes which enable the apprehension of the significant signs. Each of the codes focuses on certain, specific field offering more than one way of denoting and connoting the images of the woman in Spears' work.

3.2.3 The Five Semiotic Codes

The structure of popular music song texts and music videos is quite open when it comes to the narrative. This means that the verbal and visual texts allow more than one way of understanding meanings, giving the reader or the viewer an active role. As gender, cultural background, and experiences have an effect on interpretation too (Blom 1998: 202), a reading

method which enables more than one way of understanding the lyrics and the videos is needed. Furthermore, both the verbal and the visual are likely to contain numerous small but meaningful signifiers. In order to note all the important signifiers, a system that directs the reader's attention to all the meaningful features is necessary. In a music video, for instance, the colour of the female protagonist's hair or even fingernails can be meaningful; so can the change of lighting or a shot size. In the lyrics, a word like 'you' is important as it can expose the power relations between the female protagonist and the other person, hence revealing how traditional the gender roles are. For the constant process of denoting and connoting, Barthes' five codes offer an excellent reading method to expand on simple analyses.

In *S/Z* (1970) Barthes emphasised the plurality of the text, wanting to prove that even an ordinary short story can be read and interpreted in several ways. According to Barthes, a text may carry different meanings at the same time. (Barthes 1992: 8 – 9, original 1970.) As Barthes himself was in favour of constructing a reading method which would draw the reader's attention to all the meaningful signs, he developed a five-code reading method, giving the reader an active role. The codes are indicative and give guidance: they do not prevent the reader from drawing their own conclusions. A popular music song text, for instance, can be understood in several ways, which is perhaps due to its open structure: it does not have a clear narrative in the traditional sense: songs mainly describe feelings. As people react differently to sadness and happiness, there cannot be only one way of interpreting a song text expressing sorrow or love. Barthes calls texts that allow the reader to create meanings themselves 'writerly' texts. 'Writerly' texts give the reader an active role, making them not just readers but consumers of the text. Texts that do not allow the reader make interpretations of their own are called 'readerly' texts. (Barthes 1992: 4.) Spears' lyrics deal with emotions and feelings mostly, and so do the videos. Both the verbal and the visual texts of ...*Baby One More Time* and *Toxic* can be categorised as 'writerly' texts as they allow the reader to create their own meanings. Each Barthes' code has its specific field and therefore even if one code would have given an answer to the first question, the second code would be very likely to raise another.

The interpretation of meanings usually starts from the *code of semes*, also known as the semantic code. The code of semes consists of the smallest individual elements meaningful to the reader/viewer. (Barthes 1992: 17, 19.) One element can raise a wide range of thoughts in

the mind of the reader/viewer. Why an element becomes somehow meaningful, and how it can be interpreted in more than one way, is because of the concept of connotation. According to Barthes, an image has two levels of significance, denotation and connotation. Denotation carries the meaning which most people would agree with: it is the mere object, a sign. Denotation answers the question *what* is seen, whereas connotation answers the question *how* something is seen. (Barthes 1992: 8 – 9.)

In the code of semes, denotation and connotation are the main tools. A seme, then, can be a letter in a word indicating plural form, or a fur around a woman's neck in an advert. In such an advert, the fur is just an object, a denotation, and most people would agree on its meaning; it is clothing that keeps you warm. However, it signifies something else, too. Depending on the viewer's cultural background, the fur may associate wealth and success. This 'second meaning' that comes to the viewer's mind when looking at the fur is called connotation. Connotation is a feature which can relate itself to other sites of a text.

According to Barthes, connotation is a key to the plurality of possible meanings a text can have; therefore, a text may mean different things at the same time. (Barthes 1992: 8 – 9.) This is an important aspect in my research, as popular music lyrics and music videos can be understood in many ways. The code of semes is helpful when analysing the meaningful elements in Spears' lyrics and music videos, because it operates as a starting point: it launches the process of analysing. In my research, the possible semes will be Spears' clothes in the videos and the choice of words in the lyrics, to name but two. As the music videos are likely to include several shots of Spears and her outfits, the code of semes will be used to notify the meaningful scenes, that is, the scenes that are somehow different and which reveal something about Spears' role.

The *Hermeneutic code* maintains the form and function of a story. It creates an enigma or suspension; it suggests something that makes the reader/viewer interested. The hermeneutic code raises questions and may also give answers: it includes problems and problem solving. (Barthes 1992: 19.) In detective stories, for instance, it is the hermeneutic code that draws attention to the enigma and makes us ask questions. When the viewer sees a man point a gun at his enemy, they are held in suspense wanting to see what the resolution is: will he pull the trigger or not? Similarly, the reader/viewer is held in suspense in popular music songs. For

example, the person reading the lyrics of ...*Baby One More Time* is curious who the 'you' in the song is, or whether the girl in the narrative gets the boy at the end.

In my research the hermeneutic code will reveal whether Spears as a woman gets what she wants, and if she does, how she gets it. Such a reading then will reveal whether the female protagonist is adopting a traditional gender role or causing 'gender trouble' as Butler calls it (Butler 1990: 12). In *Toxic* the hermeneutic code plays an important role because the song does not seem to have a clear narrative. The lyrics do not reveal too much, and Spears in the music video changes her role constantly, making the viewer wonder who she is. The hermeneutic code does not always give an answer, though. Often part of the trick is to keep the audience in suspense and finish with a cliff-hanger, making the audience 'write' the ending to the story.

The code that functions on the same level as the hermeneutic code, often overlapping with it, is called *the proairetic code*. The proairetic code, also known as the code of action, applies to any kind of features that indicate further narrative action. In this sense, the proairetic code is similar to the hermeneutic one; they both keep the audience interested by making them wait for what will happen next. (Barthes 1992: 19.) Thus, in the proairetic code the suspense is created by action and not by a reader's or viewer's wish to have the mystery explained. The proairetic code makes one read a text or watch a film thinking of the cause-and-effect relation. Whereas the hermeneutic code gives a story its dynamic structure and excitement, the proairetic code makes it possible to understand the rapid sequences of a story line, because the order and purpose of the actions are understood through the proairetic code. (Blom 1999: 217.)

In this study, the proairetic code will be useful when analysing the purpose of the actions of the female protagonist. For example, if the female protagonist is seen caressing a man in the music video, she can be a woman looking for comfort while being dependent on the man, or she could be a dominant woman who can tell the man what to do next. The proairetic code will also tell if Spears' role has changed towards the end of the lyrics or the music video.

The next code, which operates together with the code of semes and the reader's cultural background, is *the symbolic code*. The symbolic code consists of all the recognisable symbolic patterns, such as the classical binary oppositions good/bad, dark/light. Such signs

form the large symbolic structure of a text. (Barthes 1992: 19 – 21.) Again, cultural background, experiences, gender, and age influence the interpretation of symbols. For example, the colour black raises different kinds of associations in different cultures. In Spears' music video *...Baby One More Time*, her dress has a symbolic value. She is wearing a school uniform, and to some viewers the costume may symbolise a good schoolgirl with certain expected behaviour. Spears' clothes also function as semes, as small, individual elements that carry meanings. In Spears' music video *...Baby One More Time*, the viewer can form oppositions by looking at the school uniform, and the way how she wears it: her shirt is rolled up, revealing her upper body. Possible binary oppositions could be good schoolgirl/naughty schoolgirl. A good school girl would wear her shirt buttoned up, a naughty, rebellious schoolgirl rolls it up to show her waist. Eventually, the viewer can decide what kind of a woman Spears represents as the story continues and other binary oppositions occur.

The last of Barthes' codes is called *the reference code*, also known as *the cultural code*. This system of codes refers to one's knowledge of the way the world works. In other words, it indicates the cultural beliefs and habits one has. (Barthes 1992: 19 – 20.) The cultural code brings together all the above-mentioned codes. It is the code which makes interpretations meaningful as it gives them a cultural context, the norms and regulations to compare the interpretations with. Therefore, the reference code can be compared to intertextuality. (Blom 1999: 222.) It is the cultural code which reveals what a reader or a viewer considers appropriate in Spears' lyrics and music videos when it comes to her actions. One already has an idea of what is morally right and how a woman should appear to others. This idea is culturally bound and it determines how one sees the woman Spears represents.

Some codes may appear more frequently than others. Codes may also overlap. The code of semes, the symbolic code, and the cultural code in particular seem to be connected and may overlap. The five semiotic codes were applied to analysing literature by Barthes himself in the 1970s and may therefore require updating. However, it has been proved that the code system can be used to analyse images in today's society as well. In her study *Onko mainoksella merkitystä? Mainosten tulkinta Roland Barthesin koodiston avulla* (1999), the Finnish researcher Virpi Blom analyses advertisements according to the five semiotic codes. My study combines both the verbal and visual levels.

4. IMAGES OF A WOMAN IN ...*BABY ONE MORE TIME*

The women in the song texts and videos are only representations: they are not ‘real’ subjects or objects. Representations are meanings which are produced through language, images, and texts (Nikunen 1996: 11). Meanings are often organised into opposed binaries, such as good/bad, feminine/masculine, but these binaries are questioned constantly. This is due to the interaction between representations: representations can displace or substitute one another. (Hall 1997: 10.) Furthermore, the narrator in the lyrics or music video is not a ‘real’ subject either. The lyrical I and the actual writer of the song text are not the same thing.

This chapter analyses the first of Spears’ two song texts and music videos. My analyses are based on the characteristics of a woman according to Barthes’ five codes in the images of Spears’ work. The purpose of my analysis is to discover what kinds of images of a woman can be found in a popular music lyrics and music videos, and whether the images are consistent.

4.1 Analysing the Representations of a Woman in the ...*Baby One More Time* Music Video

First, I will analyse the images of a woman in the music video of ...*Baby One More Time*, then analyse the lyrics for the same song in chapter 4.2. In chapter 4.3 I shall compare my findings and look at whether the images in the lyrics and the music video are similar to each other, or whether they even contradict each other. I will look at the ways a female protagonist, Spears, is presented in each scene. I will divide each music video into scenes in terms of location; a change of location indicates a new scene. I shall start with Spears’ first album and first single, ...*Baby One More Time* (1999).

In ...*Baby One More Time* the viewer can distinguish three different scenes on the basis of location. However, each location gives two contrasting images of a woman. The opening of the music video is very brief, showing Spears in a classroom, staring at a clock on the wall, waiting for the lesson to end. The actual music and action start in the next scene when the whole class storms out, Spears leading the group to a rhythmic dance in the corridor. The

corridor scene can be divided further into a sub-scene in which a sad-looking woman, played by Spears, is leaning on the lockers and singing to the camera. The viewer is taken outdoors next; again two different scenes are shown: Spears dancing with a group of teenagers and Spears daydreaming in a convertible, on her own. The daydreamer is very similar to the woman shown by the lockers: she is alone, looks sad and is confessing her feelings to the viewer. The last scene again shows two contrasting female characters: the first one is Spears dancing wildly with a group of friends in a sports hall, the other shows a sad Spears sitting by herself on the side of the sports hall, longingly looking at a boy in his basketball gear. Images provided can be categorised as follows:

SCENE	LOCATION & ACTION	IMAGE OF A WOMAN	ANALYSED IN CHAPTER:
One A	Corridor – dancing in the middle of the corridor with others	Woman as a Confident Challenger	4.1.1
One B	Corridor – standing by the lockers alone	A Woman’s Need for a Man	4.1.2
Two A	Outside – dancing with others	The Cheerful Woman.	4.1.3
Two B	Outside – sitting in a convertible alone	Woman as Daydreamer	4.1.4
Three A	Sports Hall – sitting alone on the steps	The Lonely Woman.	4.1.5
Three B	Sports Hall – dancing with the others	The Confident Woman	4.1.6

4.1.1 Woman as a Confident Challenger

The first apparent role Spears’ female protagonist has in the music video is as a confident challenger. Her confidence becomes evident as soon as the music starts. This woman steps to the front, leading the rest of the teenagers to a rhythmic dance. She is standing in the middle of the corridor, hence getting the viewer’s full attention. The first notable factor in her character is the dress, which functions as a seme. The female protagonist is wearing a traditional school uniform: black skirt, white shirt and a grey cardigan. It is Barthes’ reference code which launches the process of connoting and making meaningful interpretations of the uniform in this case. As such, the uniform could connote togetherness, being part of a certain

group (a school) and obeying the rules within the group by wearing a uniform. It could also be a sign of traditional values – girls should wear skirts, boys wear trousers. Such analysis would lead us back to where Butler started: within our culture we have fixed roles and expectations for male and female, established categories for masculinity and femininity (Butler 1990: 6 – 10), a skirt being a fairly feminine garment and the division between boys and girls being emphasised even further with their uniforms.

However, the female protagonist *chooses* to wear the uniform in a rather rebellious and revealing way, breaking the school rules and possibly challenging the conventional gender rules. Her skirt is short and she has tied her top up letting the viewer see her bare stomach and underwear. As such, this bold act and the uniform connote naughtiness; his woman has chosen to wear the uniform inappropriately for a school day. The code of semes can raise several connotations, even contradictory ones (Barthes 1992: 19), as one signifier can connote various things at the same time. Spears' way of wearing the uniform could be understood as her having been disorderly or in a hurry. However, it is with the help of the other codes, such as the symbolic code, that the viewer can understand this woman as a confident challenger rather than as an untidy school girl.

The symbolic code reveals a very confident, perhaps even less feminine woman. The symbolic code consists of opposites such as beautiful/ugly, rich/poor or dominant/submissive. (Barthes 1992: 19 – 20) The woman dancing in the corridor is very confident, dominant. She stands in the middle, attracting attention but she is not a mere object, something to be looked at. Her body language is aggressive rather than passive: her gestures are broad crowding space. Dominant individuals who crowd space may stand close to or tower over another person. They lean forward or move closer, invading one's personal space. Personal space is usually associated with situations of intimacy or aggression, hence an unfamiliar person crowding space may make one feel uncomfortable. (Henley 1977: 128.)

Crowding the space in this scene emphasises the female protagonist's authority over others. Her gestures keep the others – both male and female – behind her, not next to her or in front of her. In our society females often have control over less territory (Henley 1977: 37), but this woman has power over the whole corridor. She also controls the viewer with her gaze; she

stares at the camera challengingly, locking the viewer in her gaze. Such a stare (see appendix 1, picture number 3) is interpreted as a sign of aggression and aversion (Henley 1977: 153).

In contrast, a small detail in Spears' uniform launches a contradicting analysis. In her plaited hair the female protagonist wears pink, fluffy pompoms (see appendix 1, picture 2). Again these accessories function as semes, so does the colour pink. In Western, modern society pink colour is often linked with girls, sometimes even with babies. As the colour connotes 'girliness' rather than adulthood, it could be a sign of immaturity and inexperience. The school uniform and school as location support such a reading. The fluffy material connotes softness and caressing, which are often linked with girls rather than boys. Furthermore, even such words as "soft" and "caressing" are still more feminine characteristics than masculine, even though Butler challenges us to change such a stereotypical view in her work (Butler 1990: 6 – 10, 41 – 43, 140). It could be said, therefore, that despite the very challenging, almost arrogant behaviour of this woman, she still seems to have the more feminine, softer side.

Already the first scene and the first woman analysed implies that there is more than one side to this female protagonist. She has her feminine characteristics, the pink and fluffy accessories often connoting femininity, but her challenging gaze and confident body language contradict the image of a traditionally feminine woman. Also, the way the uniform is worn connotes rebellion and buoyancy. One could argue that she places herself under the male gaze, though, revealing her upper body in a seductive way. At the end, I believe it is the fast-moving, aggressive crowding of space, whilst holding the viewer in her gaze, that suggests this woman is a confident challenger. She does not necessarily succeed in violating those gender roles Butler invites us to challenge as her dress is still what we would consider typically feminine in our society.

This scene finishes with the female protagonist moving even closer to the cameras, crowding the space. As the camera withdraws, moving away from the female protagonist, it gives the feeling that the dancing Spears has power over the viewer. She crowds the viewer's space as she walks closer and closer to the camera, forcing the camera and the viewer to move back. All the time, she holds the viewer in her gaze. As Nikunen points out (1996: 9), with the way

of looking, one expresses one's relationship with others. This woman is clearly in control, not just the others dancing with her but also the viewer. The dancing Spears is an active doer; she knows what she wants. As she is also ready to take what she wants, she can be said to be a confident challenger.

4.1.2 A Woman's Need for a Man

Along with the very independent, challenging, almost arrogant woman Spears depicts, a binary opposition is constructed in the same location. Whereas the confident challenger takes the whole of the school corridor with her presence, crowding even the viewer's space, this woman steps aside, looking down shyly. She is wearing exactly the same school uniform as the previous woman, but only her face and shoulders are shown. This time, however, it is not necessarily the school uniform as a seme that launches the process of denoting and connoting meanings. It is a very powerful body language and gaze that cannot be ignored.

The female protagonist in this scene is first shown from a few meters distance. The viewer can see her lean on the lockers coyly. She looks back at the viewer, but her gaze is not challenging, rather it is sad and hopeless, singing "Oh baby, baby ... ". Whereas the confident challenger seemed to lock the viewer in her gaze and hold it, this woman turns away letting her head drop singing again "...Oh baby baby...". The protagonist letting her head drop, avoiding eye-contact, connotes submission and lack of power (Henley 1977: 153, 187). The lyrics add to this analysis: the word "baby" is repeated several times but it is not revealed who this "baby" is. It is the hermeneutic code that raises questions and sets expectations (Barthes 1992: 19 – 20; Blom 1998: 214 – 215). We are intrigued to know who this is and what has happened between her and the lyrical "baby". Here it is almost the lack of action that keeps us watching; no one rushes to comfort her and flashbacks are not shown to reveal what has happened before this school day. What can be confirmed, though, is clear affection between the female protagonist and the person referred to as "baby". The word "baby" is open to several interpretations, but the reference code, closely tied to cultural norms, helps us connote meanings. The word "baby" could simply mean an infant, but clearly in popular song lyrics our cultural knowledge leads to other interpretations, "baby" meaning a boy or a girlfriend. However, even if one was to link the word "baby" with an image of an infant, an infant is an

object of great devotion and affection. The female protagonist's yielding body language further suggests dependence on "baby", the sad look in her eyes connoting strong feelings of longing and loneliness. She needs her "baby" to be complete. Such dependence suggests that the woman will need a man to be complete; such emphasis on her weakness further emphasises her being the man's other. Such representation makes female gender the weaker and softer one again, instead of challenging the traditional view of femaleness and what it means to be a woman (Butler 1990: 136).

It is the symbolic code, though, that confirms the idea of a passive woman rather than a confident challenger. With the symbolic code the reader/viewer can form binary oppositions, such as hard/soft, masculine/feminine (Barthes 1992: 19 – 20; Blom 1998: 219 – 220). In this shot the female protagonist is automatically compared to the previous one, the confident challenger, and this comparison is reinforced further with the help of her clothing; as the uniform and looks are the same, one would expect her to act similarly to the woman shown in the previous scene. This woman, however, acts the opposite way. Her defensive body language and the lockers as location function as semes now. In a school corridor, lockers are always placed aside, not in the middle of the corridor. A person who does not want to attract extra attention, would place herself aside. A confident, powerful person would not place herself aside if more attention could be attracted elsewhere, such as in the middle of the corridor where everyone could see you. This was the case of the confident challenger. Being the complete opposite to the challenger, this woman is rather submissive and dependant on someone else.

Furthermore, the proairetic code, the code of action, emphasises the difference between this woman and the confident challenger in the previous scene. The dancing female protagonist in the school corridor is an active woman: she dances, and her gestures are rather pompous, attracting attention. While the proairetic code should now take the story onwards (Barthes 1992: 19), the story line seems to pause when the camera shows Spears leaning on the lockers. This woman is not an active doer; rather she is the passive object as she is standing still trying to avoid eye contact with the viewer.

However, also this woman has a contradictory side to her. When she leans on the lockers for the last time with a sad look in her eyes, the camera zooms in on her mouth, giving the

viewers a close-up of her red lips (see appendix 1, picture 7). Such a shot of one's mouth can raise sexual connotations (Morris 1977: 239). Such distance implies intimacy (Berger 1987: 38). According to Kress & van Leeuwen (1996: 122, 126), with a gaze one forms a relationship with the viewer. The object looking straight back at the viewer often desires, even demands, something from the viewer. Bearing in mind this woman's loneliness, she could simply long for caring and attention. However, the focus on her red lips has strong connotations of sexuality; bright red, especially glossy lips signify sexuality (Morris 1997: 239). Whether the woman needs sexual attention or merely comfort is hard to tell, but the red lips also highlight her femininity, providing an image of a woman that was traditional a few decades ago. She is soft, passive and her man's other, but she is clearly feminine with the pink hair accessories and red lips.

4.1.3 The Cheerful Woman

The next location introduces the third female protagonist, the cheerful woman. This woman stands outside the school entrance, dancing with her friends. She is wearing white trousers and a pink top which reveals her stomach. Her hair is let almost loose; it is only pulled up from the sides showing her face more. This woman is cheerful; she has a smile on her face and she maintains eye-contact with both the viewer and her friends. In turn the previous two female protagonists did not smile. At times, the female protagonist in this scene even laughs with the other teenagers who are dancing with her. According to Henley, smile and laughter are expressions of relaxation and pleasure; laughter may even imply higher status (ibid.: 172).

Again, the process of connoting meanings and analysing her character starts with the code of semes. Most notable factors are her dress and body language. The female protagonist's white trousers need the reference code alongside to make meaningful interpretations. The reference code, linked to cultural norms and intertextuality, associates the white colour with innocence and purity. In another culture, white could be linked with death or coldness. As the music video was made in America and the female protagonist is American, too, it is natural to read the white colour as it would be read within American culture: a symbol of innocence and purity, perhaps even freedom. The female protagonist is young and, unlike the woman in the previous scene, she seems to be almost free from this "baby", hence all the smiling and

laughing. This woman is not longingly whispering “oh baby, baby” either: instead she says “give me your sign...hit me baby one more time.” Words “give” and “hit” in this sense are imperatives signifying control and power. She is the one giving commands, not taking them. In this sense, the cheerful woman seems to be in control of the situation, as was the confident challenger. Her dynamic, rhythmic dance movements emphasise such a reading even further (see appendix 1, picture 13). Again, she stands in the middle and leads the rest of the group. She looks at the camera instead of turning her head away. All these factors contribute to suggesting a woman in control, not necessarily of the whole situation, as she is still telling the “baby” to “give ... a sign”, but at least in control of her own feelings and herself. She appears to be freer than the woman in need of a man, hence her cheerfulness. Also her hair loose and free in the wind could suggest such a reading.

This woman is not challenging the gender roles either. The pink colour of her top is again a very feminine choice of colour, but it is not necessarily a mature woman’s colour. Still, for decades girls have been dressed in pink and red, boys in blue and green in Western society. Despite changes in society and even in fashion, the reference code would help the viewer link colour pink with girly attributes rather than masculine traits. The pink top reveals Spears’ bare stomach but does not position her as a sex object for the male gaze (see appendix 1, pictures 14 & 15). This could be due to the body language, which takes over the interpretation, perhaps even distracting the viewer. Moreover, the camera does not zoom in showing close-ups of her body as was done in the previous scene, highlighting the sexual connotations a woman’s mouth could raise (Morris 1997: 239).

Just when the viewer has come to the conclusion that this woman is a free spirit, cheerful and in control, two boys step next to the female protagonist and push her gently towards the back of the row of dancing teenagers. Again, a very contradictory image of a woman is presented within the same character. As this woman does not attempt to protest at the gesture of being moved aside, it gives the impression that men have power over her or they are there to look after her. Whichever is true, her performance indicates a gender role very typical of femaleness, (Cixous 2004: 348; Butler 1990: 6 – 10, Gauntlett 2002: 11.)

4.1.4 Woman as Daydreamer

In the school yard, in addition to the cheerful dancer, Spears plays another role. This woman is a daydreamer, providing the contrast to the free and joyful woman shown in the previous scene. The daydreamer sits alone in a blue convertible, with only her shoulders and face showing from a few meter's distance. Therefore, the camera focuses on her facial expressions, especially the movements of her head and eyes (see appendix 1, pictures 16 – 18).

This woman maintains eye-contact with the viewer all the time. She sings "...it's not the way I planned it..." and "my loneliness is killing me...", turning her head, letting it drop and lean on her right arm. The look in her eyes is sad and lonely; there is no sign of smiling or laughing. With her eye-contact she establishes a relationship with the viewer. According to Niskanen (1996: 9), one expresses oneself and establish a sense of presence with eye-contact. Clearly, this woman is present in this moment, but she is not actively engaging herself with the viewer, perhaps due to her feelings. She indicates her loss of control and the need to sink into her dreams by letting her head drop and leaning her head on her arm. Such body language connotes passivity and submission (Henley 1977: 187). She is sinking into her loneliness when waiting for her love interest to give her the sign she longs for. Moreover, Henley remarks that in the past waiting was almost built into a woman's social role; men were to work elsewhere while women had to wait at home (Henley 1977: 52).

The woman's role in this scene is to emphasise the feeling of lost love. Her femininity is highlighted by the hardly notable semes; the pink top she is wearing and her submissive body language. Pink is more often seen in teenagers' clothing rather than in adults', which could connote a certain level of naivety and immaturity. Unlike the woman in need of a man in the previous scene, this female protagonist is represents a less sexual woman; she does not wear lipstick or draw attention to her body. Also, her image seems to be the most consistent so far.

Overall, the woman is reduced to the man's other; her longing and loneliness have made her weak and she needs the man to make her feel secure again. The references to feelings are repeated and her unhappy facial expressions emphasise the importance of the feelings in this scene. In the past women were thought to be weak and passive, whereas men were rational

and dominant (Cixous 2004: 348; Gauntlett 2004: 11). The woman in the convertible does not challenge these stereotypical characteristics of femininity.

4.1.5 The Lonely Woman

A new location takes us to the last scenes and the final two images of a woman. The first one shown is a lonely woman sitting in a sports hall holding tightly to a basketball. What makes her lonely rather than a daydreamer is the very sad, almost depressed, look in her eyes. What is more, this time the object of her desire and affection is shown; longingly, this woman looks at a boy in his sports gear. This also confirms that the “baby” and “you” in the lyrics is a male. The woman sings “...oh, pretty baby...” when a close up of her face is shown (see appendix 1, picture 19). The camera then moves back, showing Spears in a sporty outfit, in a bright yellow top and red trousers. Whereas the code of semes allows the viewer to focus on individual signifiers, such as the clothes and her facial expressions, the symbolic and reference codes help us analyse the image presented here.

The symbolic code forms binary oppositions. The woman here is sad rather than happy; she is lonely rather than contented. The colours of her outfit, bright yellow and red, seem to contrast with her feelings. In our culture, yellow is often associated with the sun, summer and cheerfulness. This woman, however, is anything but cheerful. Red has many connotations in Western culture, such as love, passion, fire, and danger. This woman does feel passionately about the male sitting below her, but her loneliness suggests the love is gone or that it is not mutual. Also her lyrics, “my loneliness is killing me...”, imply such a reading. The feeling of loneliness is personified here to further imply that this feeling has had a strong impact on her and she cannot cope. This promotes dependence and helplessness.

The position of the female protagonist on the steps and the camera function as semes too, emphasising the metaphorical distance between the two: Spears is positioned on steps higher above the male, the boy sits almost at ground level, focused on something that is going on in the sports hall, possibly a game. The viewer could first come to the conclusion that, as the female protagonist is positioned higher on the steps, she is the more powerful and therefore in control (see appendix 1, picture 22). However, her body language again reveals a lonely

woman who needs her man (see appendix 1, pictures 20 – 21, 23). Even though Spears looks at the camera at times, most of the time she is turned in the boy's direction as if to say these words to him. She holds a basketball protectively. As the boy would need to turn around to see Spears, whereas Spears can see him all the time, the positioning and distance seem to suggest that he is put of her reach; he may not even know the feelings this woman has for him. The hall seems to be almost empty: only 4-5 people are sitting on the same steps as the protagonists. This could further emphasise the loneliness the woman feels.

So far this woman is the one clearly defining herself in terms of her love interest and his attention. Her passive body language, wrapping her arms around herself and staring at the male longingly, suggest that this is how she would like to be held and touched by her love interest. How she lets her head drop implies that she gives in (Goffman 1979: 46). Overall, this woman is almost frighteningly stereotypical. Her body language is all about submission and inferiority; she almost seems helpless without her man, hence the interpretation she is the man's other. Her bright coloured outfit contrasts with her sadness, which has clearly taken her over, suggesting that women are driven by their emotions whereas men are more rational. If this is the case, this woman sinks back to Cixous' category of binary oppositions and a woman being defined in terms of a man (Rivkin & Ryan 2002: 348).

4.1.6 The Confident Woman

Parallel to the lonely woman, a confident dancer is shown again. Spears wears the same yellow top and red trousers but she is now positioned in the middle of the sports hall with a large group of teenagers dancing. Again, the female protagonist, Spears, dances in the middle as if to lead the crowd (see appendix 1, pictures 24 – 25).

Yet again, the most notable same in this scene is the female protagonist's outfit. Even though she is wearing the same outfit, the camera now shows that the top is actually rather revealing, showing her stomach again. In the previous scene such a shot was not shown, the basketball Spears was clinging to hid her body. Her expansive dance movements and gestures draw attention to her body, connoting that she is more sexual than the woman in the previous scene. With the symbolic code, one can compare this woman's body language to the body language

of the woman in the previous scene. Whereas the Lonely Woman was passive, this Confident Woman is active, almost aggressive. The Lonely Woman suggested that she longed to be touched by holding her arms around herself, the Confident Woman is someone who touches others or is almost too busy to be touched. The Confident Woman is more cheerful: one does not need the reference code to interpret her smile as a sign of happiness and contentment.

This woman is also rebellious which makes her comparable to the very first image of a woman seen at the beginning of the music video (see chapter 4.1.1). As the group dances with Spears in lead, an angry-looking female teacher approaches the group. Her facial expression suggests she does not accept the group dancing. Whereas others stop dancing and rush back to their lessons, Spears as the female protagonist continues to dance and leaves only when she is finished. Overall, this woman begins to break certain gender roles typical of femaleness. She is not only in control but also content with her life without her man. Moreover, this is one of the first scenes where her femininity has not been emphasised with certain colours, coloured lips or accessories. Even though her sporty top can be said to be revealing, the attention is drawn to her large movements rather than her body parts. All in all, her body language and rebelliousness with the teacher could even imply that she is more male, as in this scene.

4.2 Analysing the Representations of a Woman in the Lyrics of...*Baby One More Time*

The narrative of ...*Baby One More Time* is rather loose; it does not have a clear beginning, middle, and ending. As Modinos points out, popular music lyrics do not have the same kind of narrative as, for example, novels (Modinos 1994: 42 – 43). However, ...*Baby One More Time* can still be said to tell a story. The story is a first person narrative as quite many pop lyrics are. It describes the feelings and hopes of a girl who has lost someone. The narrative does not reveal whether the lyrical I really is a girl and if ‘you’ is her ex-boyfriend, but as Spears is the representative in these lyrics it is quite natural to think that the person telling the story is female. Also, as Modinos remarks, it is not relevant if the person referred to as ‘you’ is a male or female (Modinos 1994: 43 – 44): what matters is the power relation between these two persons.

In the chart below are the most typical representations of a woman in the lyrics of ...*Baby One More Time*. The lyrics are divided into four stanzas; the chorus is repeated twice. To identify the role of the female protagonist, I have first analysed each stanza separately, then compared the findings to record similar images. As some of the representations, such as Naïve Woman and Lonely Woman, seem to recur I have combined these analyses and will discuss them in one chapter.

STANZA	IMAGE OF A WOMAN	ANALYSED IN CHAPTER:
1	The Naïve Woman	4.2.1
1	The Passive Woman	4.2.2
1	The Demanding Woman	4.2.3
Chorus	The Lonely Woman	4.2.4
Chorus	The Provocative Woman	4.2.5
2	Woman Dependent on Man	4.2.6
2	The Demanding Woman	4.2.3
3	The Naïve Woman	4.2.1
3	The Lonely Woman	4.2.4
4	The Lonely Woman	4.2.4
4	The Provocative Woman	4.2.4

4.2.1 The Naïve Woman

The story starts with the female protagonist repeatedly whispering “Oh baby baby”. The first thing that attracts attention is the noun ‘baby’ and the pronoun ‘you’ later on in the stanza. The words ‘baby’ and ‘you’ operate as semes. However, they are not merely semes; they also create an enigma making the reader wonder who he/she is and what is the relationship between him/her and the person telling the story. It is not clear who the person referred to as “baby” is, but what is more important is the relationship between “baby” and the narrator, the female protagonist. As the second last scene in the music video of ...*Baby One More Time* suggested that the “baby” who is the love interest of the female protagonist is a young male,

it is reasonable to assume the same young male is the person referred to as “baby”, “you” or “boy” in the lyrics.

The person referred to as “baby” and “you” is obviously important to the lyrical I. To understand the full meaning of the word “baby”, one needs the cultural code, the reference code, to connect it with meaningful and logical interpretation. In modern Western society “baby” is a common pet name for a girl or a boyfriend, which indicates that the relationship between the lyrical I and “baby” has been romantic, or at least warm. In this respect it can be said that the word also carries a symbolic and a cultural meaning. Thus, depending on the cultural background, some people may consider the word “baby” negative and sexist. Even if one was to interpret the word literally as meaning an infant, it would still have connotations of excessive affection and dependency as infants need to be taken care of. Such a reading could take us back to the female protagonist’s feelings: perhaps they need nursing as she seems to be heartbroken. However, what is important here is power relationship between the lyrical “baby” and “I”. She clearly does not have the power over her own feelings, let alone herself. This further implies that the woman is also seen as rather typical female: she is the more emotional one, softer and in need of her man. As such, she accepts the gender role that the society reinforces. (Butler 1990: 6 – 10)

What is important here is the fact that the phrase “oh baby baby” is repeated several times. The repetition suggest here that she cannot stop thinking of her love interest; the sighing – “oh” – before “baby baby” also implies that she is still emotionally attached to this man, perhaps even dependent on him. Moreover, the use of alliteration in “baby baby” adds to the feeling of helplessness. Alliteration is a commonly used poetic device in which the same consonant is repeated in the words next to or near each other (Rivkin & Ryan 2004: 149). In advertising, for instance, alliteration is often used to add a playful, catchy tone to the message, but in this context the meaning is hardly playfulness. The repeated, soft sound is almost child-like talk, stuttering, which further implies that the narrator is helpless. Also, the same ‘b’-sound repeated in this manner almost sounds like a heartbeat, suggesting her heart is beating for this one man only, which could be a sign of extreme love, or contrastingly, could indicate her heart having been broken and her being too naïve to see it coming.

The woman seems to feel hopeless and confused, as the next line also implies. She is totally powerless here. The female protagonist continues to confess "...how was I supposed to know / that something wasn't right here". This sentence suggests naivety. The first lines, "...how was I supposed to know / that something wasn't right here", have the word order of a question but the sentence incorrectly ends without a question mark. It could still be interpreted as a question, as a rhetorical question, but as there is no one to answer it, this could be a sign of the woman either drawing attention to the situation or even denying her part in the possible conflict. Rhetorical questions are continuously used in the media to attract the reader's attention or deny something implicitly; they are not for the purpose of obtaining an answer (Rivkin & Ryan 2004: 159). Therefore, it can be assumed that this woman naively suggests she did not expect a conflict, the relationship to end. Her lines "...something wasn't right here" imply that there were signs of an argument, a problem, but she did not see it.

To add to her naivety and confused feelings, nearly all the stanzas are not end-stopped, that is closed with punctuation marks. Only the very last line of the last stanza ends with an exclamation mark. This could be interpreted as the narrator not being in control of her thoughts and emotions. It looks as if she is pouring out a confession; she is trying to clarify her feelings to herself too.

In stanza three, the naivety is shown again in the same sentence which has been repeated "...how was I supposed to know". The mere fact that she repeats the same question further emphasises her inexperience, perhaps even gullibility. Lines five and six also support such an interpretation: the female protagonist asks, "don't you know I still believe / that you will be here". Again, the word "still" clearly shows that the female protagonist is determined her love interest will come back and things will be as they used to be. However, her choice of words suggests that it is entirely the man's decision to come back or stay away. If the female protagonist's words are compared to the possible binary oppositions which the symbolic code raises, she could have said "...I will be there" instead of "...you will be here". This implies that she is left waiting "here", giving the man the active role. Modern Western society is full of love stories, and as the lyrics do not give a clear sign of the man's change of mind, one might come to the conclusion that the only one person who believes in a second change is the

female protagonist. This makes her a naïve woman, perhaps due to her young age or inexperience.

The hermeneutic code, which creates and maintains tension, makes the reader of the lyrics ask questions at this point and wonder what happened between the female protagonist and her love interest, and how likely it is that they would get together. Even the female protagonist does not seem to know the answers, hence her naivety. Such naivety, and perhaps even passivity, indicates the woman is not challenging her role as a woman. This declaration has some cultural references to the role of women in certain societies, and the roles can be interpreted with the help of the cultural code. Depending on the reader's cultural background, the statement she makes on line 2 may hint that a woman is only a man's other. Because of her passive role in the society, she is not expected to show agency. She has taken the role of an onlooker in her own relationship, which, if exaggerated, indicates a conventional gender role. (Butler 1990: 6 – 10, 140.)

4.2.2 The Passive Woman

Very similar to the Naïve Woman is the Passive Woman, whose lines overlap with the Naïve Woman, but who is clearly inactive onlooker of her own life. While the Naïve Woman denies her part in the conflict, the Passive Woman watches her love interest leave without preventing it, "...I shouldn't have let you go". The proairetic code ensures the continuity of a story and moves the story on, but this time it seems to take the reader back in time with a flashback. This flashback gives the reader of the lyrics an insight into what has happened and answers partly to the questions hermeneutic code raised. It apparently was the man's decision to leave, but it was the female protagonist's decision not to stop him. The modal verb "shouldn't" implies that she regrets this. However, she does not say she will do something to change the situation; therefore it is evident that her role is passive.

Moreover, the word "let" suggests that the narrator had a choice; she could have stopped her love interest from leaving. What is not revealed, however, is whether it was her naivety or passivity that stopped her. With the help of the reference code one can link this with the female protagonist's culture and the images provided in the music video. Perhaps the woman

was too young and immature, a school girl, to realise her man would not come back. In the same stanza the sixth line, "...and now you're out of sight", also emphasises her passivity. The use of assonance, the repetition of similar vowel sounds in the stressed syllables (Rivkin & Ryan 2004: 150), directs the attention to the most meaningful words: "...and now you're out of sight". The words "now" and "out" emphasise that the most important thing in her life is now gone. Assonance may create a comic, almost humorous, effect in poetry and prose (Rivkin & Ryan: 150), the cultural code, however, reminds the reader of the woman's situation and it being more serious. In modern Western society, several popular music songs are about the loss of love and how to cope with it. The female protagonist's decision is to do nothing. Her love interest is "out of sight" and she has "let [him] go". Patriarchal society sees woman inferior to man, linking passivity to femininity. For Butler, there is no typicality for femininity (Butler 1990: 6 – 10). However, the woman in the lyrics draws attention to her loss of love only, indicating that there is nothing more to her character. Such a reading suggests that being a woman means being emotional and being controlled by one's feelings.

The proairetic code further implies that the woman does not show agency. If the woman was an active subject herself, the proairetic code would show that the story proceeds. For instance, if the woman said '...I will show you how I wanted it to be...', the woman would make the story move on; she would also move on in her life. It seems now that the feelings, sadness and longing, prevent the woman from continuing her life on her own and, as she is sad because of the 'baby' being gone, she has no power over herself. This woman is controlled by someone else, that is the 'baby'. As this 'baby' can be reasoned to be male, it makes the woman his opposite, the passive and submissive other.

At this point, Butler's theory has proved that femininity in modern Western society still consists of the same traditional characteristics; softness, man's 'otherness' and emotionality, as the representations of a woman emphasise such attributes. The camera's emphasis on the female protagonist's sadness and longing reinforce such image as acceptable and common. Even though this woman has the confident side of a challenger in her, so far it has been taken over by the more passive woman.

4.2.3 The Demanding Woman

The image of a woman that has been constructed in the lyrics to this point suggests a passive female who is the man's other. However, a contradictory representation can be detected in the first stanza and the chorus: the Demanding Woman.

The Demanding Woman commands action and attention. She declares "show me how you want it to be", while the Naïve Woman can only sigh "oh baby" and ask desperately "...how was I supposed to know...". There is no sign of hesitation in the Demanding Woman's statements; she knows what she wants. The code of semes draws attention to the woman's choice of words: the imperative "show me" is demanding, suggesting a very determined woman. It almost seems as if she questions whether her love interest has what she wants. The same statement also indicates action at the level of the proairetic code and it is the woman who demands that action. This command for action is contradictory to the previous statements the woman has made (see the Passive Woman in 4.2.2); the earlier statements in the first stanza do not indicate any kind action. The command for action indicates the story will continue and there may be a change in the woman's life as she will no longer passively wait for the man to take control. The Demanding Woman is no longer suffocated and controlled by her emotions. For Butler, a woman's passive yielding would suggest she does not want to challenge the stereotypical traits of femininity. However, the Demanding Woman commanding a change in her life implies that she also demands a change in her role as a woman. (Butler 1990: 6 – 10; Gauntlett 2002: 11.)

The Demanding Woman, however, contradicts herself within the same sentence as the story proceeds. The proairetic code draws attention to the line that first suggested action, "...show me". The line implies that the woman would take control, but she finishes her sentence with "...how you want it to be", indicating that at the end the decision is still his, not hers. The use of internal rhyme in the same sentence, "...show me how you want it to be", is also open to similar interpretations. The words emphasised and linked are "me" and "be". This may first add a certain level of playfulness to the story as a rhyme scheme, such as the use of rhyming couplets, is often linked with playfulness. The lyrics of ...*Baby One More Time* follow a loose rhyme scheme:

1 Oh baby, baby	A
2 How was I supposed to know	B
3 That something wasn't right here	C
4 Oh baby, baby	A
5 I shouldn't have let you go	B
6 And now you're out of sight, yeah	D
7 Show me how want it to be	E
8 Tell me baby 'cause I need to know now, oh because	F

The words “me”, “be” and “baby” have the same rhyme which could suggest that these words form a pattern and, therefore, draw attention to the meaning of the words. Despite the dominant tone of the stanza, these rhyming words imply that the Demanding Woman has a weaker side to her: she links herself (“me”) to her love interest (“baby”) and being (“be”) with him. These words being linked with each other suggest that the man still has an important role in her life, making her dependent on the man’s decisions and, therefore, subordinate to him. The rhyme scheme and the woman’s choice of letting the man decide could therefore indicate that she genuinely believes her destiny is with the man. Butler sees such a division in power relations typical of society’s view of women and femaleness (Butler 1990: 6 – 10; Gauntlett 2002: 137): despite women entering the world of businesses, men are still seen as the decision makers and in the leading roles (Social Trends UK: 2001). The Demanding Woman also let the reader assume that even though she makes demands, it is the man who decides at the end.

The Demanding Woman continues to show her two contradictory sides. After admitting that her love interest has control over her, she finishes the first stanza by stating, “...tell me baby ‘cause [sic] I need to know now”. She clearly insists on answers, showing her dominant side with the commanding tone. However, the code of semes draws attention to the word “baby” that implies the woman is not consistently in control. Despite the strong imperative verb “tell”, which implies anger and rudeness, the female protagonist’s affection for the man is evident in her use of the pet name “baby”. The symbolic code, which functions on the level of binary opposites, help make a distinction between her feelings and possible roles: as I mentioned earlier, in modern Western society such a nickname has connotations of liking, loving and caring. If the female protagonist only wanted an answer, not her love interest to come back to her, she would have omitted such a positive word. Moreover, if she was more powerful and in control, she would say “I will tell you” rather than “tell me baby”. The

images of a woman already are contradictory; not just within one stanza, but within one sentence.

Overall, the Demanding Woman does show clear signs of power and control. Her use of imperative verbs not only show dominance, but also suggests she questions the man's ability to make a decision quickly and not lose her. Yet the woman contradicts herself at the end of each line, implying that men are still in charge in society and seen as decision makers. The first two images of a woman, the Naïve and the Passive, are more consistent throughout the stanzas. Perhaps the role of the Demanding Woman is to show that there is a more powerful and dominant side to each woman but emotions may still take over, making a woman weaker in comparison to a man. Such a reading would confirm that Butler's theory of the social norms of femininity and masculinity are constructed and maintained within society; while women are becoming more equal to men in terms of roles and expectations, men are often seen as the decision makers. Moreover, women are still believed to be more emotional and being led by their feelings. Such a generalisation is further implied in the next image of a woman which is constructed in the lyrics.

4.2.4 The Lonely Woman

One of the most obvious roles in the lyrics given is the Lonely Woman. Loneliness is clearly evident in the chorus of the lyrics in *...Baby One More Time*. In the first line, the female protagonist admits that "my loneliness is killing me". Obviously, the "killing" is only metaphorical but it is remarkable how she has chosen such a strong word to compare her loneliness to. The symbolic code draws attention to the strong feelings of loneliness and how they transform the woman.

The word "killing" emphasises the images of death and death interpreted as an ending. Despite the religious connotations of eternal life and being in a better place, the person who has died is obviously out of reach. Moreover, "killing" can also have connotations of a brutal way of ending one's life. As the female protagonist compares her loneliness to killing, it not only indicates that the relationship has come to its end but also emphasises that she cannot cope with her love turning into loneliness. "Killing" suggests that the feeling of loneliness is

almost eating her from inside, so painful is the loss. The loss is what makes the female protagonist so lonely and weak; she needs her man to be contented with her life. This further suggests that the female protagonist in these lyrics is dependent on her love interest. She is incomplete without the man, she is the man's other. Such reading places the woman in the more traditionally gender category; she is not challenging her role as woman or the way women are seen in comparison to men (Butler 1990: 6 – 10).

The code of semes draws attention to the woman's choice of words, implying that she is almost ashamed of her strong feelings, "I must confess I still believe (still believe)". The word "confess" gives almost the impression that she is pleading guilty of something, in this case guilty of thinking her love interest will come back. This suggests naivety but also makes her very weak as a woman; she is almost apologising for her thoughts and feelings, hence apologising for her existence. Such an apologetic approach to one's feelings and existence further suggests that Butlers' idea of women being categorised in terms of their biological sex as men's opposites makes them inferior to men. The insecurities and doubts of the Lonely Woman suggest that men are the cause of women's feelings of self-doubt. In that respect, Butler is right to argue that women must first be freed from their biology. (Butler 1990: 6 – 10.)

The woman's weakness is further emphasised in the line "still believe" and it being repeated in brackets like an echo. The repetition could imply that the female protagonist continuously dwelling her hopes and dreams, or the echo being her subconscious, something that she secretly wants. As the phrase is repeated, it emphasises that she strongly believes that her man will come back to her.

The image of the Lonely Woman is consistent; she continues to declare in the same chorus how her loneliness has had a deep impact on her, "When I'm not with you I lose my mind". Again, the female protagonist compares her loss and loneliness to another extreme; insanity. Obviously, "losing [her] mind" is only metaphorical and in modern Western culture such imagery is often used in popular music lyrics to emphasise the feelings of love and loss. Yet the imagery of insanity and madness shows her weakness and dependence on her love interest (Gauntlett 2002: 10; Butler 2004: 901 – 902). For centuries it has been a female character

who has been portrayed as a ‘madman’ in literature, not a male. For instance, in *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Bronte explores woman’s longing and the dark side of human psyche in the character of Bertha Mason, the lunatic wife of Rochester, who is locked in the attic – as an attempt to exclude her from society. She is a stark contrast to the ‘angelic’ protagonist, Jane Eyre, who suppresses her true feelings, love, longing and anger.

Also Charles Dickens’ Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* has lost her mind after losing her fiancé. Like Miss Havisham in her yellowing wedding dress, trying to hold on to what is left from the perfect love, our female protagonist is anxiously seeking answers. She is bold enough to declare her true feelings, unlike Miss Havisham or Bertha Mason, not to mention Jane Eyre, but the desperate need for the man highlights her being incomplete without her man.

Neither *...Baby One More Time* nor *Great Expectations* is an exploration of mental illness, but it can be argued though that the female protagonist in *...Baby One More Time* often quite obsessively refers to death. The references to death in the lyrics are only metaphorical, but they do suggest that the woman may have had to “kill” the real her and yield to the man’s decisions and actions. Moreover, the loss of love may have made her weak and powerless to continue her life alone.

The Lonely Woman does not challenge the stereotypes of femininity: she is weak, soft and powerless as society expects her to be in comparison to a man. As women are often seen inferior to men, Butler encourages women, and society, to challenge such thinking. (Butler 1990: 6 – 9.) The Lonely Woman is not able to free herself from the dependency on the man; therefore she is not able to face the challenge of questioning her role as a female.

4.2.5 The Provocative Woman

The next image of a woman constructed in the lyrics is very similar to the Demanding Woman. However, due to the very different tone, punctuation and perhaps the most controversial line in the lyrics, I have analysed the image as a separate entry.

The woman Spears portrays in the chorus is the Provocative Woman. She is the woman who repeats the title of the song “(hit me)...baby one more time”. The most controversial phrase of the whole song, “hit me”, has been omitted in the title of the song. The hermeneutic code draws attention to the enigma; the reader is left asking questions about what it is that the woman is asking for. With the help of the reference code particularly, the phrase “hit me” becomes more accessible.

The Provocative Woman demands “give me a sign”, just like the Demanding Woman, but what makes her controversial is the word “hit”. Not only is it an imperative again, suggesting power and control, but also the verb “hit” has several different, even confusing, connotations. With the help of both the symbolic and reference code, the reader can begin to analyse the command. In Western society, “hit [on] me” may be understood as a request to make sexual advances towards someone (The Penguin English Dictionary 2000: 660). Such a reading implies that this woman is demanding, as she makes such a bold command. The same line also implies that she is making herself available for the man she wants. If her intention is to draw attention to her availability, she reduces herself to a mere object; something to be looked at or to be taken. Moreover, as an object to be looked at, she draws attention to her body. On one hand, a posing woman who draws attention to her body may feel attractive and confident (de Beauvoir 2000: 288, 299). On the other hand, by posing the woman draws attention to her body and what makes her female. A woman emphasising her sexuality only emphasises the biological sex and how men and women are different. (Kotz & Butler 1995: 276.) This suggests further that a woman’s role is different from a man’s role, due to the biological sex; women are to be looked at. The woman’s decision to demand to be looked at and to be flirted with makes her provocative.

It can also be argued that the Provocative Woman asks for punishment. If the word “hit” is understood literally, it provokes abuse, violence. “Hit me” then implies the female protagonist wants to be punished. The hermeneutic code draws attention to a possible enigma: what has she done to be punished? The storyline does not provide answers to the question but it could be argued that she may have done something that was not expected from her. If this is the case, perhaps the Provocative Woman is beginning to challenge her stereotypical role as a feminine

‘good’ woman. Yet the direct demand for being “hit” is odd. Hitting can have connotations of eroticism and fetish, as does the school uniform in the music video for *...Baby One More Time*. This interpretation distinguishes the female protagonist clearly from the previous images of a woman, even the one of the Demanding Woman. If she asks for punishment, she could imply that she has done something ‘bad’ to deserve to be disciplined. Again, this could evoke connotations of eroticism and role play, rather than physical abuse and violence. The woman’s possible references to fetish and role play are open to another interpretation: in order for her to be something else but herself, she needs to adopt a different role, possibly the role of a ‘bad’ woman. It can therefore be argued that if a woman wants to free herself from society’s expectations, she needs to forget the gender role constructed and maintained by society. As Butler remarks, gender is only a performance: there are certain identity patterns in society that we become familiar with, but there is nothing fixed about them. (Butler 1990: 6 – 10, Gauntlett 2002: 139 – 141.)

The Provocative Woman is similar to the Naïve and Passive Women in terms of emotions: her line “hit me” may read as a plead for love and attention, it could even contradict the image of the Provocative Woman. As mentioned earlier, in the lyrics this is the only end-stopped line with the exclamation mark. Often in poetry an end-stopped line can indicate the narrator is in control of their feelings and thoughts. The use of enjambment, a thought being carried onto the next line or even the next stanza without punctuation, can indicate a stream of consciousness, lose of control. As this line is the only end-stopped line, it draws attention to itself and also implies control and power. Furthermore, the use of an exclamation mark indicates the narrator is commanding, demanding, even shouting for something. Such interpretation suggests power and control. However, if the phrase “give me a sign, hit me baby one more time!” reads as a demand for love and attention, it connotes loneliness and longing, not power.

Overall, the Provocative Woman attempts to challenge her role as a typical female, by taking control and suggesting that there is a reason for her to be punished, but she reduces herself to a mere body to be looked at or to be hit, which draws attention back to what makes her female; the biological sex. Similarly to the Naïve, Passive and Demanding Woman, the Provocative Woman also has a weaker side to her: she is lead by her emotions at times. It

could be argued that the most common trait of femininity in the lyrics is the woman being controlled by her feelings rather than her determination. While the Provocative Woman is the least emotional, the next image of a woman constructed in the lyrics shows a woman who is controlled by her emotions entirely.

4.2.6 Woman Dependent on a Man

Stanza two introduces a woman who clearly is the man's other. In the previous stanza a strong sense of passivity and naivety was established, but this woman weaker. She is not only sad, but also admits the reason for her existence: her love interest. She directs her words to the man saying, "Oh baby baby, the reason I breathe is you". The repetition of the word "baby" again reminds the reader of her affectionate relationship with the man. This time, however, the most notable sense is the word "reason"; the attention is drawn to her confession of her love interest being the only reason for existence.

Such a confession makes the woman submissive and dependent on the man. As Butler remarks, the biological sex – which determines the social sex – is the reason for women being treated as inferior to men. The biological sex creates the binary 'women versus men'. (Gauntlett 2002: 137.) If men are then given the attributes of intelligence, logos and activity (Cixous 2004: 348), women are left with the weaker characteristics, such as nurturing, caring and passivity. Society maintains these expectations which the Woman Dependent on a Man yields to entirely. She admits that her man is the only reason why she still breathes. This could only be a metaphorical love confession, but it still represents the female as the weaker sex.

The woman's strong feelings for the man are further emphasised with alliteration in "boy you've got me blinded". The alliteration draws attention to the two most meaningful words here; the boy and her being blind. The symbolic code draws attention to the binary opposites of control: the woman is blind, not able to see. Being blinded indicates that she lacks control, instead of having it. The woman is dependent, not independent because of her blindness. The binary opposites suggest that the woman again is man's other and would not cope without

him. Her metaphorical blindness implies that she will need someone to guide her, this being the man.

The Woman Dependent on a Man is the weakest and most submissive of the images of a woman constructed in the lyrics. She is powerless not only because someone walked out of her life, but because the sadness and longing have taken her over, making her insecure. Her confession of being blinded by her feelings indicates that she will need someone stronger to lead. Such a statement reduces the woman to the weaker attributes society often connects with femininity and being a woman. The dependence shown in the lyrics is not evident as clearly in the music video. In the next chapter I will discuss the similarities and differences between the images of a woman constructed in the video and lyrics.

4.3 Comparing the Representations of a Woman in The Music Video and Lyrics of ...*Baby One More Time*

When I started the research and analysis, my main interest was in finding out whether the images of a woman were similar in the music video and the lyrics of a song. My theory was that some of images in the music video would be different, perhaps even contradictory, from the images provided in the lyrics. The reason, I suspected, was to make a music video visually memorable, even provocative, to keep it in the audience's awareness. While some of the images in the music video of ...*Baby One More Time* were similar to the images in the lyrics of the same song, the images of a woman in the lyrics were constantly contrasting each other, even within one line.

The images of a woman in the music video are Woman as a Confident Challenger, Woman's Need for Man, The Cheerful Woman, Woman as Daydreamer, the Lonely Woman and the Confident Woman. The most obvious are the Confident Challenger and the feeling of loneliness expressed in the woman as Lonely. Confidence has been emphasised in two female characters, the first and last. These two are rather different from each other; the Woman as a Confident Challenger is rather confrontational, almost aggressive but at the same time seductive in her school uniform which revealed her stomach and showed her underwear. The

Confident Challenger in the final scene shows confidence on another level. She does not want to challenge the viewer but perhaps her role as typical woman who is either seen as passive or overly sexual, or who would respect the authority.

All in all, the images are rather clear in the music video even though it does not have a structured narrative. However, the lyrics are inconsistent, not just compared to the images in the music video, but compared to the images constructed in one line: whereas the first words in a stanza may imply dominance, the last words contradict such a reading, implying submission.

The lyrics are a lot more problematic to analyse as almost every stanza seems to give a contradicting image of the female protagonist. There also are fewer roles in the lyrics than in the music video. This could simply be because of the repeated lines in the lyrics. The most obvious roles, The Naive Woman and Woman's Need for a Man, are often in an obvious opposite to the images the music video provided. This suggests that perhaps the music video's purpose is not to re-tell the story told in the lyrics but to provide entertainment, perhaps even provoke.

In the music videos, it is easier to rely on the visual clues and notify how femininity is emphasised. It is usually a colour linked with women and femininity, such as pink or white. Also, pink colour was used on the female protagonist's lips to connote womanhood, but also to draw attention to her sexuality. Often (in 3 scenes of out 6) the female protagonist is shown in a revealing outfit. The most provocative is the Confident Challenger who poses for the viewer drawing attention to her nearly bare chest.

In the next chapter I will analyse and discuss the video and lyrics for *Toxic* in the similar manner. I assume that the music video in particular provides images of a woman which challenge the more stereotypical gender roles. Moreover, the lyrics seem to have a narrative looser to ...*Baby One More Time*, which could indicate that the images of a woman are more consistent and similar to the images constructed in the video.

5. IMAGES OF A WOMAN IN *TOXIC*

The next song I shall analyse is *Toxic*. Again, I will analyse the images of a woman in the music video, then explore the lyrics for the same song in chapter 5.2. I will divide this music video into scenes in terms of location, as this often indicates change in the woman's role too. My hypothesis is that this music video offers more provocative images of woman than ...*Baby One More Time* or any other video she has made so far, challenging the more traditional gender roles. This could be due to Spears' experience in the music video making and knowing that the more media attention the video gets, the more attention she would get. Moreover, Spears is also older now than when making her first music video. This could imply that it is more acceptable for her to be more provocative now than a few years earlier when she was only starting her career.

5.1 Analysing the Representations of a Woman in the *Toxic* Music Video

The music video for *Toxic* offers a role play with twists and turns to analyse. The video has a narrative that is perhaps more consistent and notable than in the music video for ...*Baby One More Time*. *Toxic* consists of several very different scenes, each presenting a different image of a woman. Altogether, there are three different women that can be distinguished by their outfits. However, a change of location seems to imply that there is a change in the woman's role, too.

The story starts with a futuristic airplane high in the air, being followed by five black birds. The upbeat, rhythmic music starts and the viewer is shown what is inside the plane. The first actual scene where the female protagonist is shown is the one inside the plane. Spears acts as an air hostess dressed in an ultramodern blue uniform (see appendix 3, pictures 1 – 3). Parallel to the airplane scene, another very different image of a woman is shown. In this scene Spears is a woman in a white, well-lit room. She is lying and writhing on a floor dressed in nothing but sparkly sequins. The camera zooms in, showing close-ups of her face, lips, and different parts of her body (see appendix 3, pictures 4 – 6). It can be argued that at this point the image

of a woman is constructed of the body parts only, drawing attention to the biological sex and what makes one female. Such a way of representing a woman further emphasises the differences between men and women, leaving perhaps little room for challenging the stereotypical gender roles. This woman, however, is not reduced to a passive object: she is shown alone posing to the cameras, clearly enjoying it. Before the viewer can fully understand her role, they are taken back onto the futuristic plane.

On the plane, Spears and another flight attendant are serving drinks. Again, after a few seconds the camera goes back to show Spears as the flight attendant tipping a drink on a male passenger's lap. The flight attendant flirtingly cleans the mess she made. Whilst pushing the serving trolley down the aisle, the female protagonist notices a rather unattractive man whom she aggressively pushes in to the lavatory. She passionately kisses the very confused man (see appendix 2, picture 17), touches his face seductively and, to the viewer's surprise, pulls off a mask, transforming the surprised man into a handsome model (see appendix 3, picture 25).

Next, Spears is shown in a new role riding a red motorbike with another handsome, very muscular man. The female protagonist wears a tight, black leather outfit and her hair is bright red. The motorbike seems to fly in the air, travelling with speed. Spears throws her head back laughing (see appendix 2, picture 32). The story moves on and the next shot shows the same red-haired woman break into a vault. Cleverly, she avoids all the lasers managing to steal a bottle of green poison.

In the last scenes, Spears is shown climbing a high wall in a new outfit, indicating a new role: in black lace, leather and black long hair, she breaks into a man's penthouse. Aggressively, she throws this man onto his bed, kisses him passionately and surprises the audience by pouring the green poison down his throat. The man is left lying on his bed whilst Spears spreads her arms and jumps out of the window.

The final scene takes the viewer back to the futuristic plane, showing Spears as the flight attendant wink at the viewer. The viewer witnesses the airplane fly away being followed by the five black birds.

Images provided can be categorised as follows:

SCENE	LOCATION	IMAGE OF A WOMAN	ANALYSED IN CHAPTER
One A	Airplane	Woman as a Flirt	5.1.1
One B	Lavatory	Woman as a Seductress	5.1.2
Two	A white room	Woman as a Poser	5.1.3
Three A	On a motorbike	Woman as Danger	5.1.4
Three B	In a vault	Woman as Danger	5.1.4
Four A	Climbing a wall	Woman as Evil	5.1.5
Four B	Ex-lover's bedroom	Woman as Evil	5.1.5

Toxic music video is constructed of five different images of a woman. The most notable difference is that the images seem to change when the location changes, whereas in *...Baby One More Time* each location presents two contradictory images of a woman. I will analyse the images in turn, similarly to the analysis of *...Baby One More Time*.

5.1.1 Woman as a Flirt

The story starts with Spears as a futuristic flight attendant. The first notable signifier is her blue, modern outfit. The costume first connotes professionalism and skills due to its formality and perhaps futuristic design. The idea of professionalism could imply she is a woman with power, knowledge: she is in charge. After all she is the one picking up the phone to say "Baby can't you see, I'm calling", suggesting she is the one taking action. However, the thought of being 'professional' or 'formal' is hasty. As soon as the female protagonist turns to face the viewer, the camera shows a revealing uniform. Her suggestive looks and posing further imply that this woman enjoys the attention she attracts. Furthermore, with her hand gestures she draws more attention to her half bare chest. Such body language is categorised as sexual and within a culture is controlled by situational rules (Argyle 1994: 100). Such suggestive gestures would be more appropriate at social events, like parties, but the flight attendant poses seductively at work. She is rather a flirtatious than professional trying to

attract the viewer's attention, hence catching the attention of the passengers too. According to Goffman (1987: 31), a woman suggestively touching herself is a sign of her attitude towards her body; it is the object of admiration and desire, it is valuable. Interestingly, such behaviour could reduce her to the mere object of the male gaze (see Mulvey 1988), but her actively challenging the viewers' gaze and clearly posing seems to empower her. Her male audience is almost hypnotised by her. Even though she gains this power and control through drawing attention to what is womanly and feminine about her, she both ignores the viewers and fulfils their desires. De Beauvoir remarks that this is very clever of a woman; the woman is aware that she almost puts herself on offer by posing, but she still knows she is in control, she is the subject rather than a passive object (de Beauvoir [1949] 2000: 371).

The woman highlights her feminine side even more when she starts to walk down the aisle to serve the passengers. The flight attendant dances and tiptoes her way down the aisle. Her body language is very feminine, perhaps over-feminine. Dancing and tiptoeing are traditionally seen as very feminine characteristics (Henley 1977: 145), even though in modern Western society there are male dancers too. Femaleness is emphasised here particularly as the woman's dancing is not aggressive space crowding (Henley 1977: 187) but almost exaggerated gazelle-like stretching. Her flirtatiousness, and perhaps naughtiness, is further implied when she dances her way down the aisle, turning the back to the camera, and the viewer gets a glimpse of her pink underwear.

At this point the cultural code connotes a woman who is traditionally feminine: her profession as an flight attendant is still very common for women; as an flight attendant she is serving and looking after others. 'Others' in this case are men as the passengers all seem to be male. Such a reading already implies inconsistency: the first shot draws attention to the woman's uniform, emphasising her professionalism and power, whereas her role as a nurturing servant reduces her to a role typical of women. Caring and looking after others are characteristics traditionally linked with women rather than men (Koivunen 1995: 44). Again, also the almost 'girly' colour of her underwear, pink, implies femininity rather than masculinity in Western society. Her feminine gestures, such as tiptoeing, touching her mouth and cheeks in astonishment, accentuate her role what is seen as a typical feminine, but sexual, role for a woman in Western society. This woman clearly emphasises what is feminine about her, such

as the lips and the shape of her body, the hoops in her ears echoing round and soft shapes usually linked to the female body (Messairs 1997: 82).

Her way of touching her face is seductive, drawing the attention to her mouth. According to Goffman (1987: 31), a woman touching herself knowing she is being watched implies that she longs to be touched and with her gestures suggest how she wants to be touched. Moreover, her revealing outfit and posing make her an object rather than an active doer. In that sense, this woman is not challenging her role as a woman to a great extent. It looks as if her mission is to get the male attention with the feminine behaviour and drawing attention to her body. Such emphasis on a woman's body reinforces the biological differences between the sexes that Judith Butler challenges. According to Butler, anatomical differences should not form differences for gender roles. The on-going battle between the sexes is not the result of our anatomy but how the two genders, male and female, are seen within a culture and which characteristics are valued. (Butler 1990; Kotz & Butler 1995: 276.)

Before the actual story proceeds, the camera shows brief glimpses of important elements which suggest that this female protagonist is more than just flirty. With an extreme close-up, the camera directs the viewer's attention to the female protagonist's bright red nails. The shot has a dramatic impact making the woman seem less innocent. The camera does not focus on such elements by mistake; every angle and shot size has been carefully constructed. Therefore, the painted nails function as a meaningful signifier connoting different meanings. When the air hostess says "...it's dangerous...", the camera focuses on her nails (see appendix 2 for lyrics; appendix 4, picture 11). The colour red in modern Western society has sexual connotations. This implies that the flight attendant has a more powerful, perhaps even more dangerous side to her. However, the viewer would need more clues to fully understand her role. Any element in a story which is not explained exists as an enigma (Barthes 1992: 19 – 20, Blom 1998: 214). It is the hermeneutic code which draws the attention to the possible clues in the narrative of the video to solve the mystery of the air hostess. Like most stories, also this narrative holds back details in order to increase the effect of the final revelation of all the secrets. We tend not to be satisfied by a narrative before all the enigmas have been solved (Blom 1998: 214), and are therefore challenged to watch more to find the answers. On this

occasion, the proairetic code draws the viewer's attention to the now dancing flight attendant; the viewer expects more action to take place in order to the story to move on.

The female protagonist is now serving drinks and, in what appears to be a clumsy mistake, pours a drink on a male passenger's lap. Here the action the flight attendant takes launches several important interpretations of her role. Showing a seductive, yet very confident and dominant, side to her, the flight attendant leans over to wipe what she spilled. To do so, she not only crowds the male passenger's personal space, which suggests dominance (Henley 1977: 187), but she also touches what can be said to be the intimate area on one's body. While doing so, the female protagonist sings "...you're dangerous, I'm loving it..." (see appendix 4). Within Western modern society, one has certain social norms and expectations of professional behaviour. The cultural code helps distinguish the flight attendant's action as inappropriate. She is not concerned about the situation and moves on. The symbolic code and binary oppositions help compare this flight attendant to what one would expect in such a situation: she is not embarrassed but confident, she is not surprised but in control of the situation. Also, she swiftly moves on as if she is looking for something or someone.

The flight attendant next passes by a child, and caringly taps him on his head. She, however, does not stay to look after the child. The woman's reaction to the child passenger is unexpected in terms of her role as an flight attendant: she does not seem to be genuinely interested in his well-being; it looks as if she does this as it is part of her job. The camera shows the woman gaze to another direction, suggesting that her attention is drawn elsewhere. Whereas characteristics such as caressing and nurturing have been traditionally linked with women and femaleness, this woman does not have such characteristics. She seems to challenge the view that her gender should be the more motherly one, due to the biological differences. (Cixous 2004: 348; Butler 1990: 6 – 10; Gauntlett 2002: 10)

Overall, this female protagonist is very different from the images constructed in ...*Baby One More Time*. Her role seems to be nothing but a role for her too. She first performs as a flirtatious flight attendant whose seductive posing gets both the viewer's and the male passengers' attention. However, she is not just a passive sex object who reduces herself to the male gaze (see Mulvey 1975). Gauntlett remarks that as gender roles have developed and

changed in today's society (2002: 58), scheming women may use feminine tricks to get what they want from the trusting men, (ibid. 2002: 11). Perhaps this woman is over-feminine and sexual to attract attention to her body, hiding what she really is after. Such a role is still perhaps quite a usual role for a woman, especially reinforced in beauty product advertisements, but the Woman as Flirt does break a certain stereotypical gender expectation: woman's role as a caring mother figure. She does not show genuine interest in the child passenger, even her gestures do not indicate caring.

5.1.2 Woman as a Seductress

Even though the woman analysed next is still in the role of an flight attendant, her behaviour has changed dramatically with the change of location. The change of location shows a change in the role of the female protagonist, too. She is now seen pushing the serving trolley towards an unattractive male passenger. Confused, the man looks at the female protagonist as she blocks the man's way with the trolley. With a sudden change in the woman's behaviour and body language, the viewer witnesses her push the male passenger to the lavatory. The flight attendant has become less flirtatious and more aggressive; she kisses the man passionately ignoring his confusion. She crowds the man's personal space and leans her body on him.

To understand the change in her role fully, the proairetic code offers tools to analyse her action. The proairetic code, the code of action, refers to any action that indicates a further narrative action. For example, if a man draws his gun on an opponent in an action film, one wonders what the resolution of this action will be. The viewer waits to see if he will kill his opponent or is wounded himself. Here, the suspense is created by action too, rather than by the viewer's wish to have the enigma explained. The viewer is intrigued and left asking questions; why is a highly attractive woman kissing what one would call an unattractive man? Why is the flight attendant taking the risk of getting caught in her own workplace for doing something forbidden? As such, her act is clearly rebellious and not expected. While the woman serving drinks was femininely flirtatious, this woman is almost frighteningly dominant. Her power and control are emphasised further by the camera showing how much bigger and taller the man is. Yet the female protagonist has him under her control. Again, Gauntlett might be right about women using their femininity and sexuality to get what they

want (2002: 11), but she also uses aggression in her bodily contact to show her superiority. Such dominant body language has traditionally been linked with boys and men rather than woman (Argyle 1994: 215, 219 – 220). Moreover, her gestures are not playful or flirtatious, as were the gestures of the Woman as a Flirt. What is more, even though the flight attendant kisses the man, she does not use her sexuality or draw attention to her body. For Butler, such behaviour would indicate anatomical differences between the sexes, hence highlighting differences (Kotz & Butler 1995: 276).

To understand the woman's motives, one needs to see more. In this scene the hermeneutic and poiretic code have drawn the attention to the action and narrative. The story moves on with an unexpected twist in the plot; the flight attendant touches the man's cheek seductively, but instead of it being an affectionate gesture, she peels off the man's mask transforming the unattractive male into a handsome model (played by Matt Felker). The flight attendant smiles knowingly and leaves the lavatory. The first apparent, new seme is the woman's smile. So far, she has not used such a facial expression. One does not even need the cultural code to understand that the smile is a sign of happiness. However, the cultural code suggests a bit more than just a happy feeling. Bearing in mind where the female protagonist is and what she has done in the previous scenes, her behaviour has already raised several questions. She seems to be a woman on a mission. This is confirmed by a careful analysis of the last seconds of the lavatory scene. The female protagonist does not smile when her unattractive partner has been transformed into a handsome prince. What makes her smile is what she can find in the man's pocket. It is not revealed to the audience what she finds, hence the enigma, but she is ready to move on and waves goodbye to the man.

The woman is no longer just a confident seductress; her role is suddenly full of enigmas and secrets. Even though it was with her suggestive gestures and dominant body language that she obtained the men she needed, she is clearly not just a mere object. Her clever use of femininity and her sex appeal perhaps gave her what she wanted; the mysterious object. On the level of narrative, it is the enigma of the secret object and the unmasked man that keeps the audience intrigued. However, the representation of the woman is even more intriguing. In the past, there have not been many courageous, intelligent female protagonists. It is only since early 2000s when female characters such as Lara Croft, Buffy The Vampire Slayer and

Sydney Bristow from *Alias* have provided new gender role models for women. Other than that, women were either victims to be rescued or something beautiful to be looked at (Gauntlett 2002: 46 – 47.) In Spears' representation of a woman in this video one can see traits of modern female protagonists: also her protagonist is an active doer, clever but, perhaps contradictory to Butler, she still uses her femininity and sexual assets to get what she needs. All in all, the Seductive Woman is also breaking the more traditional gender roles, as was the Woman as Flirt.

To take it even further, her futuristic uniform could even imply a woman too modern; she might be a woman that men in this society are not prepared for. She is confident, in control and willing to do whatever it takes to get what she needs. The reference code also draws attention to the representation of male gender in this scene: the audience see an old, unattractive man being transformed to a young, athletic and handsome man. In each society there are preferred norms for beauty and attractiveness. In modern Western society beauty is often associated with being slim and young, even though what one considers as attractive is subjective and bound to the culture. The symbolic code, however, draws attention to these two men being each other's binary opposites: old versus young, over-weight versus athletic. As the woman chooses to kiss the more athletic young man, it can be argued that he is the more attractive one. Such a reading suggests again that gender roles and expectations are bound to cultural norms. There are ideal bodies for men and women, these bodies determine how we should act. Masculinity is often seen as a state of 'being a man', femininity as timidity. (Butler 1990: 6 – 10; Gauntlett 2002: 9 – 10, 12.) However, the seductive woman is the one who intimidates the men in this scene, suggesting a change in the gender roles.

The Woman as Seductress is showing clearer signs of challenging the stereotypical gender roles than any other woman at this point. Moreover, her role is consistent which suggests that she is strong and confident. This woman makes the male gender look weaker as both the men are fooled by the woman implying that she can be a danger if one is not careful. Her narrowed eyes with the smile support such a reading; care-free facial expressions with narrowed eyes indicate slyness (Argyle 1994: 137)

5.1.3 Woman as a Poser

Parallel to the flight attendant, Spears is also shown as a woman in a white room lying on the floor. She is dressed in nothing but shiny sequins, which could be diamonds. She is alone in the room and of all the other roles Spears has in the video, she looks most like Spears herself. Her role is not very clear as there is very little action; all she does is dance, writhe on the floor and hold the gaze of the viewer. Her role as a sexual Poser is further emphasised with the line "...should wear a warning...." (see appendix 4).

The most obvious seme here is her body language. She sits on the floor, looking at the camera. The camera moves closer and closer, zooming in on her face. The woman touches her lips (see appendix 3, picture 6). According to Berger (1982: 38), camera in a close up indicates intimacy. The Poser is confident with such intimacy letting the camera zoom in on her lips. The woman seductively touches her lips, which glitter with lip gloss, implying sexuality (Argyle 1994: 13, Morris 1977: 239). What makes this woman a Poser rather than a Flirt or a Seductress is how she performs for the camera. She looks at the camera and locks the viewer in her gaze. Her stare is not threatening but very intense (see appendix 3, pictures 6, 13, 26). She does not turn her face away from the camera, even once, and even when she seductively lies on the floor on her back, she is still looking at the viewer. Similarly, she stands up and begins a suggestive dance for the camera (see appendix 3, pictures 40 – 41). While she stands up, she allows the audience to fully view her body. Van Zoonen remarks that in Western society it is women's fate to be looked at (van Zoonen 1994: 87). In this scene, she can be seen as an object only, as her role does not consist of active doing.

As mentioned earlier, such emphasis on a woman's body draws attention to the biological differences, which further implies that also the gender roles are very different (Kotz & Butler 1995: 276). Also, the sexual woman is often reduced to a sex object only, she becomes "a woman only" (de Beauvoir [1949] 2000: 26, Koivunen 1996: 36). Such an interpretation of Spears' performance is possible, as the camera focuses on her body. However, her dominant gaze contradicts such a reading. She even seems to control the camera, never mind the viewer of the possible male audience. As Butler has mentioned, man/woman are categories which give one a certain role in our culture (ibid. 1993: 7; Nikunen 1996b: 40). Each culture has its own norms which determine what is expected from a man or a woman, and how each

sex should perform. What is still more common in modern Western society and media is women shown as posers showing their almost naked bodies. A few advertisements do rely on similar techniques with male models (for example, the chocolate advertisement *Aeros* uses a man with a bare chest to advertise chocolate), but mainly in the music industry one is more used to seeing bare female bodies. As van Zoonen points out, the display of women as spectacles to be looked at is a core element of western patriarchal society. Women become objects of the male gaze, while it is still quite rare to see the male body being displayed like the female body is. (van Zoonen 1994: 87, 97.)

Despite the woman's contradictory position as a poser, she could have a role within the narrative with more symbolic value. As this woman is seen on her own and as she does not seem to be disguised to the extent as the other women, this could suggest the woman in this scene being the true narrator. She is shown when the story moves on. Also, her almost naked body could imply her being the one who tells you the 'naked', undisguised truth. Furthermore, she is in a white room, the sparkling sequins reflect a light that is almost white too. With the help of symbolic and reference codes one can connote meanings that distance her from the sexual Poser. In modern Western society white connotes purity, innocence, freedom. Additionally, the sparkling outfit connotes diamonds and quality. This could imply that her body and femaleness is precious, she also draws attention to her body with her gestures, which could further suggest that her body is the object of desire that she is proud of.

It could be argued that even in this role the female protagonist contradicts herself. Her first apparent role as a mere object to be watched is suddenly challenged by her dominant gaze. She seems to control the camera, her posing and touching of the body covered in diamonds suggest that her body is to be desired and valued.

5.1.4 Woman as Danger

The next role is indicated with a change of location and a costume. Spears is now seen sitting on a red motorbike with a muscular man. The couple is in night time Paris, the red Eiffel tower can be seen amongst the other neon lights. Spears is dressed in a tight, black leather suit and high heel boots (see appendix 3, pictures 31 – 32). The wind blows in her bright red hair; she has disguised her eyes with sparkling sunglasses. The bike travels at speed and the

woman Spears plays is enjoying every minute of it. Even though she is not steering the bike, she is clearly in control. She throws her head back and laughs, she leans towards the man and with a minor touch on his cheek, she makes him turn around to face her.

This scene is full of meaningful semes, the first notable seme is the outfit of the female protagonist. I shall start the analysis from the red hair. As mentioned earlier, the colour red has several connotations in modern Western society, such as danger, fire, blood or love. This woman clearly is danger, she is metaphorically also in fire. Her body language (relaxed but suggestive dance movements, her hand up in the air and her ability to make the man turn to face her) indicate she is in control. The motorbike travels at speed, it seems to be flying in the air. As she laughs and throws her head back, she indicates that she is confident. The long red hair in the wind implies freedom. Also, according to a Freudian interpretation, long hair symbolises sexuality (Argyle 1994: 48). In her revealing leather outfit she is a sexual character and the red colour of her hair could suggest she is dangerously sexual, or in control. The colour black also connotes danger; black is often linked with night time, dark, evil, perhaps even death. All the above-mentioned nouns imply that the woman is in clear contrast to the Flirt and Seductive characters the audience have met earlier. All in all, her outfit is very dramatic. It is dominant and unconventional.

Her dominance is further emphasised in the last scenes when the female protagonist touches the man's chin, making him turn around to face her. Even the muscular male seems to be under her control. According to Henley, staring is used to dominate others (1977: 166). As the female protagonist does not even need an eye-contact to dominate, she has hidden her eyes behind big sparkling sunglasses, she clearly is the one in control. She stands on the bike and lifts her hand in the air, indicating victory.

The setting can also operate as a seme suggesting the woman is dangerous. The couple is riding the bike in a night time Paris. The reference and symbolic codes link Paris as a city of romance and love. This woman, however, is there when it is dark, which could further imply her slyness and dangerousness, as especially in horror stories the events take place at night. Moreover, it is in the night time street corner where the female protagonist sings "...I took a sip from my devil's cup...", suggesting she has an evil side to her. Again, the hermeneutic

code draws attention to the narrative and the mysteries surrounding the female protagonist. If this is a woman in disguise, what is her mission?

The next scene gives an answer to the mystery of her action. The camera shows the same red-haired woman break into a secret vault. “TOXIC” is spelt in bold, red letters on the wall. The red colour in the writing links the word “toxic” back to the red-haired woman, suggesting that she is toxic. The female protagonist gets a black object, the one she stole from the handsome man on the plane, and breaks into the vault. One can see an explosion and flames at the background (see appendix 3, picture 42). The female protagonist shows no emotion as she continues walking. The viewer witnesses her to take a bottle of green liquid, which now can be said to be poison, toxic, and she then fights her way back against lethal lasers. In her red hair, leather outfit and dangerous mission, the female protagonist is reminiscent of the agent Sydney Bristow in the television drama *Alias*. Sydney Bristow was one of the first cross-gender female protagonists on television series. Sydney Bristow was known for her fearless attitude, intelligence and ever-changing disguises. As the reference code links Spears’ protagonist to Sydney Bristow with the connotations of her appearance, perhaps also this woman in the video is a fearless woman in disguise.

Whether this is an action heroine similar to the secret agent Sydney Bristow or not, she is clearly an active doer, challenging almost every aspect of her gender role. Her body language is aggressive and dominant, which according to Argyle is often linked with male rather than female behaviour (Argyle 1994: 100 – 102). Even though her outfit is partly revealing, the camera does not focus on her body as such drawing attention to the anatomical differences. Her fearless attitude and ambition to complete her dangerous mission have not traditionally been characteristics of a feminine woman (Gauntlett 2002: 10; Cixous 2004: 348), but characters like Sydney Bristow have begun to challenge such views. She is clearly causing gender trouble, by performing a man like gender role with her action. As Butler has remarked, gender is not tied to one’s body: gender is performative. Cultural norms define the behaviour and gestures preferred for both genders. By repeating and almost mimicking such behaviour patterns, gender roles are maintained. (Butler 1990: 136.) The Woman as Danger has adopted behaviour typical of men and male action heroes, hence challenging the assumption what is and is not feminine.

The mysteries are beginning to unfold; this is a woman on a mission, the mission being to obtain the poison. Proairetic code links action in this scene back to the beginning of the video; the red-haired woman must be the same woman who was on the airplane as she has the key to the vault. This woman, then, is again a woman in disguise, which could imply danger, as she is not trustworthy. To gain the poisonous liquid, the female protagonist has completed unsafe missions and cleared any obstacle on her way, even other people. Therefore, it can be argued that she is dangerous and confident. Whereas the explosions and fire on the background clearly symbolise danger, the woman's calm presence signifies her being in control of the situation again.

The woman's evil, dark red and black eye make-up only adds to the idea of her being dangerous. Her angry stare shows power and dominance, her look is almost furious. Just when the viewer is left to wonder what the poison is for or where the anger comes from, the explosion on the background functions as a flashback giving the viewer a hint. Careful analysis shows a man kissing a young, slim woman. At this point, the female protagonist in the vault forms a scream with her facial expressions, yet nothing can be heard. The explosion as symbolic value: it could be metaphorical shock, a trauma the female protagonist suffers from. The emotional pain makes her scream but the scream is silent as she cannot reveal how she truly feels. A flashback showing a man kissing another woman could then be the cause for her pain. The hermeneutic code makes the viewer wish to see if the man shown in the snapshot is the female protagonist's unfaithful love interest. If the female protagonist's anger derives from the painful experience of being betrayed, two contrasting interpretations of her character can be made: she can either be seen as a woman still in need of her man and affection, or as a determined woman who will not stop until she has had her revenge. The lyrics heard in the background would support the first interpretation, as she sings "...I'm addicted to you, don't you know you're toxic". However, her body language, and the action so far implies she is to get her final word. Moreover, her whole appearance suggests that she is toxic, especially now when she is in possession of the poison.

Again, as the music video narrative relies on cliff-hangers, the scene does not reveal what the poison is for and whether the female protagonist gets her revenge. The viewer is hooked to

watch what the resolution will be. My interest lies in the constantly changing role of the female protagonist and how many there are. Moreover, the roles at this point seem to be disguises for the female protagonist, suggesting that the narrative may not reveal the representation of the 'real' woman at the end.

5.1.5 Woman as Evil

The next scene shows a change of location and yet again, a change in the woman's role. Spears now acts as a witch-like superhero climbing a wall. Despite the strong wind blowing her black hair, she keeps going. Her costume is once more rather revealing, but what attracts the attention is a cloak like cloth in the wind (see appendix 3, picture 49). The cloak makes her look supernatural, almost like a female version of a superman. Her dark hair, black clothes and black make-up make her the embodiment of evil. Eventually, she makes it to the top of the building and boldly stands in a modern luxury apartment.

Again, the symbolic code, together with the reference, code help analyse the most apparent signifiers in the female protagonist and her presence. Provided that this woman is yet again in a different disguise, she has transformed herself dramatically since the beginning of the story: the scenes on the futuristic plane and her as a blonde, feminine flight attendant. The colour of her hair has gone from blonde to red, now to black. In modern Western society, black is often a denotation for night, evil, bad luck, a darker side, even death. If such interpretation is now combined with the female protagonist's body language, especially facial expressions, she is clearly on a mission to show her dark side. The camera shows a close-up of her face, the viewer can witness her angry gaze and determination in her grin (see appendix 3, picture 48). Her cloak in the wind could be a signifier for freedom but, depending on the viewer's cultural background, can also raise connotations of witchcraft. Witchcraft itself has connotations of evil, which the woman's resemblance supports.

Here Spears adopts the role of a superhero: she is on the mission of poisoning someone and will not stop until it is done. Her determination is further emphasised by showing her climbing a high wall. As such, this act is merely impossible but it has more symbolic than realistic value. As mentioned earlier, for decades there were no heroic female characters in television series, films or even cartoons. Women were to be victims, to be rescued by male

heroes. Only protagonists such as Xena the Warrior and Lara Croft began to challenge the stereotypical viewpoint. (Gauntlett 2002: 66) Surely, Spears' representation of a woman challenges a few stereotypical gender roles of women as passive, caring characters. Similar to the red-haired woman, this woman is fearless and determined like a warrior. Her performance is breaking the typical expectations of womanly behaviour (Butler 1990: 6 – 10). However, her femininity is still maintained and emphasised in her long hair, glittering ear rings and high heeled boots (see appendix 3, pictures 48 – 49).

What truly makes this woman evil is the next scene. The hermeneutic code has drawn attention to the enigma surrounding the female protagonist and her mission to poison. In the next shots the viewers questions are answered. The woman is now seen approaching a handsome man. The proairetic code links the man's face back to the action in the previous scenes in which a flashback of this man with another woman was shown. The mystery is still to be solved but the viewer is able to associate the man as the female protagonist's ex-lover who was possibly unfaithful. The woman seductively moves closer to the man and, to everyone's surprise, with a manly aggressive gesture throws the man onto his bed. The female protagonist leans over to kiss the man but instead pours the green poison down his throat. Showing no remorse, the woman leaps to the window and jumps.

The first striking fact in the female protagonist's performance is the sign of no remorse or regret. The camera shows her flirtatiously approach the man, which emphasises her feminine side, but instead of a softer, caring gesture, the audience see her throw the man in a stereotypically manly motion. She is challenging her role as a typically feminine woman with her body language. The gender role she seems to perform is male rather than female. This challenges one to question why, in the first place, woman/female was linked with such attributes as soft, caring and nurturing. (Butler 1990: 6 – 10; Cixous 2004: 348; Gauntlett 2002: 10.)

The female protagonist is also not blinded by her feelings, which challenges the stereotypical viewpoint that women are driven by their emotions, whereas men are controlled by rationality (Cixous 2004: 348). If throughout the narrative the audience have seen only one woman but in several disguises, her performance suggests she has planned the revenge carefully. The only

moment where one sees her feelings is in the vault when the explosion and breaking glass suggest a breaking of a heart and an emotional outburst as an image of an ex-lover is shown.

The last scene of the music video *Toxic* indicates a flashback which brings a narrative closure, answering all the viewer's questions. The last scene takes the viewer back on the futuristic plane, showing Spears wink at the viewer. The woman on the plane Spears represents is a woman with a secret. She has taken revenge on her ex-lover by poisoning him and is now on her way elsewhere, in disguise. Such use of a flashback suggests that there is more to come, that this woman is dangerous. She, not the man, is toxic, even though her lines "don't you know that you're toxic..." imply the opposite. We can expect more seduction and revenge from her. As such, the flashback functions as a cliff-hanger, leaving the viewer on the edge of their seat wanting to know what happens next. Her winking at us makes us almost her allies; we know her secret but we are not to tell anyone.

The last image of a woman constructed suggest that all the images are nothing but roles the woman as adopted to suit her purposes. As she winks at the audience knowingly, she leaves the audience to think if there is a real side to her and if there is a moment when she is not disguised. Her role play supports Butler's theory of gender being performative: "gender is what you do at particular times, rather than a universal who you are" (Butler in Gauntlett 2002: 139). The last woman dressed as an flight attendant implies with her facial expressions that her professional, yet feminine, outfit is only a mask and she is not what she seems to be, that is a stereotypically feminine woman. It can be argued that the last image of a woman is a metaphorical attempt to challenge the gender roles.

All in all, the music video for *Toxic* has provided a complex field for study with each disturbing role play. Unlike the *...Baby One More Time* music video, *Toxic* has a more consistent narrative structure which action takes forward and backwards. Despite a seductive outfits and overly flirtatious gestures, the female protagonist in each role attempts to break the most conventional gender roles. This woman challenges her male audience with her sexuality and seductive body language, yet she is in control. She is not a typical motherly character who believes, as the cultural norms suggest, that a woman should be caressing whilst looking after a child passenger. Moreover, as a Danger and Evil, only her long hair and accessories make

her feminine; the body language is that of a man, more specifically the body language of an action hero.

5.2 Analysing the Representations of a Woman on in the Lyrics of *Toxic*

In this section I will analyse and discuss the lyrics of *Toxic*. As in the analysis of *...Baby One More Time* lyrics, I shall first examine the image of a woman provided in each stanza. I will then look for similarities in other stanzas and chorus to get a more sustained image of a woman. The images of a woman in the lyrics of *Toxic* can be divided into categories, as illustrated in the chart below:

STANZA	IMAGE OF A WOMAN	ANALYSED IN CHAPTER:
Stanzas 1	A Woman's Need for a Man	5.2.1
Stanzas 2 & 4	The Demanding Woman	5.2.2
Chorus	Woman Addicted to a Man	5.2.3
Stanza 3	The Rebellious Woman	5.2.4

5.2.1 A Woman's Need for a Man

The first very apparent role of a woman is that of a need for attention. She addresses her lines to someone who again is referred to as “baby”, which on the third line is confirmed to be a male (“A guy like you...” see appendix 4). Significant here is her relationship with the “baby”, “guy”. The lyrics start with her rhetorical question “Baby can't you see / I'm calling”. Even though this woman is taking the active role to get her love interest's attention, the negative in her question implies that the man does not see her or does not want to see her “calling”. This further implies that the female protagonist is in need of her man, not the other way round, as the man is not trying to reach for her.

Again, the woman's use of the affectionate pet name “baby” implies that she is emotionally involved with the man. Once more, such an interpretation could indicate that this woman is the man's other, only fully content with her life when she has her man. However, the female

protagonist is clearly aware of her situation, more than the female protagonist in ...*Baby One More Time* (see chapter 4.2.1), who naively believed her love interest would eventually come back to her. The cultural code and knowledge of previous similar songs drive the reader towards the conclusions that also this relationship will end in a heartbreak and the woman will be left on her own.

However, in her next lines the female protagonist states boldly “A guy like you / should wear a warning”, which suggests she is not easily fooled. She is acknowledging that the man has characteristics which may make him a charmer, but she is aware of his dangerous charisma. Even though the man’s looks or personality are not described, the female protagonist could be suggesting that this man is a danger to women because of his appeal. In this case, the female protagonist’s statement “...should wear a warning” could also imply that she does not approve of his actions. Traditionally in modern Western society it has been more acceptable for men to have numerous relationships; it has not been as acceptable for women.

Even though the female protagonist is not naïve, as she seems to be fully aware of her man’s actions, she shows a weak side in her statement at the end of the first stanza. She whispers “It’s dangerous / I’m falling”. The use of the word “falling” implies she is losing control. She is either falling for him, suggesting a passionate love, or falling into a trap, in other words the man’s charm. “Falling” suggests addictive qualities, and the reader can see a pattern forming; the female protagonist has moved from the simple feelings of affection to loving, from loving to addiction. Traditionally, women have been seen as the more emotional sex (see Cixous 2004: 348, Gauntlett 2002:10), and this female protagonist’s confessions support such a statement. She is not only “falling” for her man but also is in the danger of falling into the stereotypical category of women: they are weak, passive and controlled by feelings rather than rationality (Cixous 2004: 348).

Furthermore, in the first stanza only the lines with “calling / warning / falling” rhyme, suggest a pattern. Whereas the woman has been calling for the man’s attention, and she has seen the “warning”, perhaps the man’s behaviour amongst other women or his reputation, but despite the warnings and signs, she has taken the risk and is now “falling”. Clearly, this woman is more mature and aware of her own actions than the female protagonist in Spears’ previous

work, ...*Baby One More Time*. However, the striking difference is between the visual images and the verbal images. Whereas the music video suggests a woman fully in charge and superior to any man, this woman is intoxicated by a man. Such a juxtaposition could suggest that in a relationship, one can be in control at one time, then lose it due to strong feelings and different emotional states. The visual often takes over verbal; one remembers what has been shown rather than what has been said or read. Like watching a play and listening to the lines, the music video images take over the verbal images and, as we know the female protagonist to be a clever woman in disguise, also these submissive lyrics could be a disguise, perhaps even the female protagonist humouring herself. The hermeneutic code again draws attention to the mystery of dualities in this female protagonist, and in order to interpret her character, one needs to carry on reading / listening the lyrics.

The first image of a woman constructed does not show any signs of control and dominance as all the images in the video do. The woman's emotions, which have taken over her, suggest a very weak woman in the first stanza. Her emotional state makes her inferior to the man, suggesting that her sex is the weaker (Butler 1990: 6 – 10, Gauntlett 2002: 10). Moreover, the constant emphasis of the woman's feelings further support Cixous' binary oppositions and men being more rational, while women are led by their emotions (Cixous 2004: 348). While modern Western society attempts to challenge such a view (Gauntlett 2002: 75 – 76), the woman in need for a man in the lyrics does not: she accepts her role as the stereotypically weak female.

5.2.2 The Demanding Woman

The role the female protagonist adopts next is perhaps the most sustained throughout one stanza. In stanza two the woman becomes demanding, "I can't wait / I need a hit / Baby, give me it". The first notable sense here is the repeated use of the pronoun "I". This does not only show that the woman is in an active role, rather than a passive onlooker, but the continuous use of the first person indicates a certain level of selfishness, too, which implies the woman wants the focus to be on her and her needs. Equally, the use of an imperative "give" and "can't wait" suggest she is demanding, rather than asking. She will not wait.

This role is perhaps feminine still as the woman affectionately calls her love interest “baby” and states how badly she needs him. In this respect, she is not challenging her role as a dependant woman. However, the demanding side of her, clearly emphasised by the use of first person pronoun “I” and the imperatives in her commands, show that she will not passively wait for the man to take action. The woman also sounds very confident with her demands, as if she believes her request has an outcome she wants.

Such demanding is continued in stanza four when the female protagonist demands “intoxicate me now / With your lovin’ now [sic]”. Her dominant role is fully shown in the last stanza, as it mainly consists of her commands to be “intoxicated”. Also the adverb “now” implies that she will not yield to waiting. Her demand is ambiguous, though. While she speaks as if she is in control, her request to be intoxicated implies she would lose control. To be intoxicated, the woman needs the man’s “lovin’”. The Reference code links the concept of love and such a passionate feeling with loss of control, perhaps even being “high” on the feeling. However, the woman’s request is odd: if she is in control now, why want to lose it and be under the influence of something or someone else? If her command reads as a wish to pass the power to someone else, she indicates that she is still what Cixous would call a traditionally feminine woman; the woman who is only man’s other (ibid. 2004: 348).

Overall, it can be argued that the woman’s demanding tone first suggests an attempt to challenge the gender roles: the Demanding Woman’s use of the first person pronoun “I” draws attention to her and what she needs, rather than being seen as the man’s other and determined as the man’s opposite. Perhaps the request to be intoxicated also reads as a wish to be seen as an individual, rather than being linked to and compared to the man. Such an interpretation would further imply that the Demanding Woman is the first one in the lyrics to challenge her gender role.

5.2.3 A Woman Addicted to a Man

As mentioned earlier, the female protagonist’s control of her feelings has been shown in a steady progress of affection, loving and addiction, the latter indicating a loss of control. The chorus, which is repeated twice, indicates an apparent loss of power and lack of control. It

begins with Spears singing in a high-pitched voice “Too high / Can’t come down”. Previously, the woman has confessed that she is “falling”, indicating that she is beginning of lose control. She is not “falling” but is going “too high”, which is a juxtaposition in terms of where she is. “High” in colloquial language can be a reference to being under the influence of drugs, the previous confession “I need a hit” also supports such a reading. If the female protagonist is comparing her feelings to the feeling of being drugged, her metaphor strongly suggests that she has no control over herself. The drug in this case would be her love interest; she is now under his control. Such use of figurative language to describe her position in this relationship represents her, again, as the man’s other.

Moreover, her high-pitched voice continues to describe her feelings with “Spinning ‘round and ‘round”. This again could be a metaphorical merry-go-round, suggesting that she cannot stop or have enough. If using the symbolic code and binary oppositions, such spinning could also be understood as her life following the same pattern, implying that nothing has changed. It is evident, however, that she cannot stop this spinning, which further implies her lack of control and addiction.

The woman, apparently, wants to be addicted. She uses the semantic field of poison when referring to her lover and their relationship, but she contrasts such evil and dark images with more pleasant ones. She compares the man’s kiss and her addiction, confessing “With a taste of poison paradise / I’m addicted to you / Don’t you know you’re toxic”. The alliteration in “poison paradise” draws attention to the phrase, the hard p-sounds make it stand out, perhaps further indicating the power of the kiss. Poison and paradise being compared raises several connotations. Poison connotes death, evil, a darker side and loss of control, whereas paradise is peaceful, calm, refreshing and in every way poison’s opposite. However, the reference code can take these two contrasting images as far back as to the Bible where they are combined. Perhaps Spears’ protagonist is implying that she is about to take the poisonous apple in the paradise risking everything like Eve. As stated earlier, the female protagonist is aware of her actions and the possible consequences, yet she proceeds. Such woman is no longer only addicted but rebellious.

The Woman Addicted to a Man is the weakest female character at this point. Her emotional state described as “falling” and being “too high” can be understood as an emotional rollercoaster, which further indicates that she has no control over herself and her feelings. Moreover, the feeling of love does not seem to be mutual and as the man seems to have the power to decide what to do about the relationship, the woman is forced to wait passively. As Butler maintains, the biological sex wrongly determines the social sex, setting expectations of gender roles, that is what is and is not typical of masculinity and femininity. (Butler 1990: 136). As all the female characters are controlled by their emotions, it can be argued that such a representation of a woman, even though stereotypical, suggest that femininity consists of emotionalism rather than rationalism and power. Therefore, in stead of challenging the stereotypical gender roles, the woman surrenders to society’s expectations of women and femininity.

5.2.4 The Rebellious Woman

The image of a rebellious woman is first shown in the chorus and further emphasised in stanza three. The female protagonist has made it obvious that she chooses to take the risk and become addicted. Furthermore, she implies that “It’s getting late / To give you up”. Again, she is aware of her situation within the relationship and her not being able to go back. While the pronoun “you” could be ambiguous, the proairetic code links it to the action in the previous stanzas, and one can assume this to be the love interest of the female protagonist. However, one can bear in mind that “you” here does not necessarily have to be a person. As the viewer has witnessed a scheming flight attendant make her way to the vault and poison her ex-lover, the pronoun “you” that she cannot “give up” could even be her plot to take revenge. In that sense, the lyrics would get a more humorous tone, yet still portraying the female protagonist driven by her emotions.

Nevertheless, the rebelliousness can be detected from the woman’s casual tone when she states that it is too late to give up. Moreover, she hints that she has a darker side: “I took a sip / From my devil cup”. The reference code connects “devil” with evil and the dark. This woman is clearly dangerous herself, especially if she has taken the sip knowing what she was doing. Seeing her as a “devil” or in possession of “devil cup” implies that her song might fully be about her plot against her ex-lover. In that case, she might at times be talking to

herself, especially in the chorus when she says “you’re toxic”. Such an interpretation would further support the analysis of her being a rebellious woman, as such scheming and cold heartedness is not expected from her.

The Rebellious Woman is the first woman to challenge the traditional gender roles consistently, likening herself with male characters such as God the Father or even James Bond with ambition and determination. Even though for Butler there is no such thing as male-like behaviour, ambition, determination and dominion are characteristics often linked with masculinity than femininity (Butler 1990: 6 – 10, Gauntlett 2002: 11). The woman’s conscious choice of doing something bad and evil further implies that she is breaking free from the stereotypical thinking of women being passive and submissive.

5.3 Comparing the Representations of a Woman in the Music Video and Lyrics of *Toxic*

Toxic provided a complex material for study. The music video in particular with its fast pace and ever changing roles was full of multiple meanings. The analysis was an enjoyable challenge. In *Toxic* music video, the images of a woman were Woman as a Flirt, Woman as a Seductress, Woman as a Poser, Woman as Danger and Woman as Evil. Even though the first two, Woman as a Flirt and Seductress, had similar traits, their body language made them very different from each other. The Woman as a Flirt relied heavily on her feminine side which was further emphasised with the use of lip gloss, accessories in round shapes (see appendix 3, picture 1), red finger nails and the dress as a uniform. It could even be argued that her femininity was a performance (Butler 1990: 6 – 10), so evident was the over-doing of it, especially the tiptoeing and gestures drawing attention to her body. What traditionally has been considered as a feminine characteristics is passivity (Cixous 2004: 348, Gauntlett 2002: 11), which none of the female characters showed in the video. Despite the various and ever-changing roles, they represented the woman in a position of power, ambition and determination consistently.

Overall, the images provided in the music video were very consistent; the woman was in control, feminine and powerful. Femininity was perhaps emphasised with more traditional ways, such as portraying the female protagonist in revealing dresses or highlighting her

sexuality, but such a portrayal did not reduce her to a mere passive object. Even as a Poser, the woman controlled the camera, and the viewer, with her gaze. In this respect, Butler's idea of challenging gender roles has partly been done (ibid. 1990: 6 – 10, Gauntlett 2002: 136 – 137). The female protagonist's behaviour was almost male at times, suggesting that in order to be strong and superior; one does not need to be anatomically different.

The lyrics of *Toxic*, however, sent a very different message. The images of a woman in the lyrics consisted of a Woman's Need for a Man, in which loneliness was emphasised, Demanding Woman, Woman Addicted to a Man, which showed how loneliness had turned into a total loss of control, and contrastingly a Rebellious Woman. The narrative in *Toxic* lyrics was very loose; it only focused on different stages of emotions. This made the analysis more challenging and the images of a woman less radical and different from each other. However, the Rebellious Woman emerging in the third stanza suggests that the woman has a dark secret. Other than that, the lyrics seemed to tell a completely different story.

The most striking difference between the lyrics and the music video is the complete omission of aggressive, dominant and powerful women in the lyrics, whereas they dominate the screen in the music video for *Toxic*. The conflicts between different images, then, may occur due to the loose narrative of *Toxic* in the lyrics. The narrative in *Toxic* is even looser than in *...Baby One More Time*, because it only describes and lists feelings the lyrical "I" has. Also, as Kaplan (1987: 14) has remarked, an artist's image depends on that what is marketable at that time. Perhaps at the time when *Toxic* was made, it was more appropriate for an artist like Spears to have more provocative images in the video than in the past when, for instance, *...Baby One More Time* was made.

Even though Spears' roles and disguises in her music video *Toxic* could just be understood as her promoting her album or simply having fun, all the characters can be described with words such as ambitious, powerful, in control and fearless. Such characteristics were traditionally linked with the male gender rather than women and femaleness (Cixous 2004: 348; Gauntlett 2002: 11; Butler 1990: 6 – 10). Therefore, it can be said that *Toxic* music video has succeeded in challenging the most traditional stereotypes and does give the audience something to think about

6. CONCLUSIONS

My aim was to study the similarities and consistency in the images of a woman in two popular music song lyrics and music videos by Britney Spears. The songs chosen were ...*Baby One More Time* from Spears' first album (1999) and *Toxic* (2003) from her recent album. In order to analyse and compare both the visual and verbal elements, I chose studies from the field of nonverbal communication and semantics to help denote and connote meaningful signs. For this purpose, Barthes' five semiotic codes were used and Henley's research on body language. The five codes break an image into small signifiers, such as the colour of a dress, and help analyse it, linking it with the culture and society in which it was produced. Significant elements in music videos in particular are gestures and body language. To understand power relations and how gender characteristics had been portrayed, Henley's research material was fruitful. As my research focused on studying images of a woman, a feminist approach was necessary. Judith Butler's idea of gendered identities and gender roles being reinforced and reproduced proved to be the most applicable.

In popular culture, women have often been represented in terms of the binary oppositions given and maintained by society. These binary opposites categorise a woman as a man's other: a woman is weaker and submissive, whereas a man is expected to be rational, active and dominant (Cixous 2004: 348). Such expectations determine what it is to be feminine or masculine. For Butler, biological sex and anatomic differences do not determine social sex. Butler argues that a certain kind of body does not mean that one has a certain kind of identity and that there is not such a thing as masculine or feminine behaviour. (Butler 1990: 6 – 10, Gauntlett 2002: 137.) According to Butler, we should challenge such stereotypical views and cause "gender trouble", that is break free from the behaviour patterns and expectations of what it is to be feminine or masculine (Gauntlett 2002: 141).

The music video for *Toxic* provides the viewer with fast-paced, challenging role play. The women represented are a Flirt, Seductress, a Poser, a Danger and Evil. The order suggests a progress and transformation in the woman's character. This is evident in the music video itself but requires a careful viewing in order to realise Spears' as the female protagonist plays the role of a one woman only who disguises herself in other roles. These roles are very

different and clearly challenge the more typical gender roles of women as passive and submissive (Cixous 2004: 348; Gauntlett 2002:11). These women are all powerful, in control, dominant and clever. The Woman as Danger shows no fear, the Woman as Evil shows no remorse, characteristics which have previously been linked with male action heroes rather than a feminine woman.

The video challenges the more stereotypical representations of a woman, portraying the female protagonist in challenging and daring roles. Despite the feminine looks, long hair and red lips, the woman in the video is represented as an opposite to what has stereotypically been considered as a feminine behaviour. The Woman as Danger and Evil in particular show attributes of masculinity. However, for Butler there is no male or female behaviour as gender is performative (Butler 1990: 6 – 10). Spears' construction of a woman in *Toxic* video suggests that femininity is role play only: every role the woman adopts is a mask, even at the end the woman winks at the audience indicating deception. The video implies that gender is a performance and not tied to the biological sex. The message seems to be that women can be equally deceitful, powerful and dominant to men who have been represented as the more powerful sex in the media.

However, Butler points out that gender as performance does not mean that one chooses a different mask for different occasions (ibid. 1990: 9 – 10), like the female protagonist does in *Toxic*. Her argument is that no identity is more real than another, but we are accustomed to certain behaviour patterns men and women have, and mimic and repeat them (Gauntlett 2002: 139). While the *Toxic* music video suggests confidence and control to be a feminine attribute, the behaviour that is consistent in the lyrics is passive yielding to the feelings.

In the lyrics of *Toxic* one can detect less role play and the roles are softer, even more passive than the ones in the video. The lyrics represent woman highlighting her Need for a Man, showing her as a Demanding Woman, as a Woman Addicted to a Man and as a Rebellious Woman. Despite the promising “demanding” and “rebelliousness”, this woman is not as powerful and dominant as the ones in the music video. The overlapping and inconsistencies between the video and lyrics could be due to the loose narrative of the lyrics. The video functions as a mini film with a clear plot line and flashbacks, but the lyrics seem to focus on

describing a change in one's feelings. Contradiction between the verbal and the visual is not a common feature in popular music only, also the theatrical includes conflicting images. What one does seems to have a greater impact than what one says; language does not have priority in the theatrical.

Despite the conflicts between images, it has been positive to note that especially the more recent music video challenges the norms and traditional gender roles more. Even though Spears is seen in revealing outfits and drawing attention to her body, these representations of a woman still portray women as active doers rather than passive sex objects. Gauntlett is right when pointing out that in the past ten years things have changed and men and women are becoming more equal in media too (ibid. 2002: 57). The female protagonist's each role represent the binary opposite often given to a man: the woman is dominant, cunning and confident. Even though for Butler neither sex is more cunning or powerful (1990: 9 – 10), the roles in *Toxic* may imply that a woman in today's society is able to break free from the stereotypical gender roles and be all the things that previously have been considered male.

Similarly, ...*Baby One More Time* video attempts to portray the woman as a Confident, Cheerful and Dominant Woman. However, each woman has a more passive side to her and therefore contradicts the image of a powerful woman. It can be argued, though, that as there is not a behaviour pattern typical of men and women (Butler 1990: 6 – 10), such contradictory images of a woman only show that femininity is neither constructed of power nor weakness. Therefore, Butler's theory of the biological sex not preceding the social sex may be accurate, which Spears' work supports at times.

Contrastingly, the woman in the lyrics of ...*Baby One More Time* is represented as a prisoner of her feelings. The images of a woman do not consist of confident challengers or cheerful girls; rather they are Naïve, Passive, Demanding, Lonely and Provocative Woman. The sad tone in the lyrics with women like Naïve, Passive and Lonely is dominating and clear. Unlike in the video, Demanding Woman and Provocative Woman do not take over the storyline. Naivety and longing in particular are very obvious in the lyrics, emphasised in lines such as "my loneliness / is killing me" and "I must confess / I still believe". These images only overlap with the Daydreamer or the Lonely Woman in the video. Cheerfulness, which was

evident in the video, is omitted in the lyrics. Even though the popular music songs often describe emotions and feelings, the feelings in this song portray the woman in a negative way as she is controlled by her emotions. Such an emphasis on negative feelings and the woman left waiting for the man's decision reduce the woman to the more passive binary oppositions. Moreover, repeated references to longing in both the lyrics suggest that it is typical of women to behave like this.

Overall, it can be concluded that the images of a woman in Spears' two music videos were inconsistent compared to the lyrics, but *Toxic* challenges the more stereotypical gender roles. This could be due to it being more recent and Spears having more experience on music video making. The video still supports Butler's view of gender being performative rather than tied to the biological sex. The constant changes in the role play and each female character being represented in a less traditional way suggests that there is no behaviour typical of male or female. Both the sexes can be dominant and powerful, or weak and passive. The music video of *...Baby One More Time* suggests such a reading too: each female character has two sides to her – the more confident and the weaker – , implying that a woman can be both, not just the stereotypically weak and passive sex. Therefore, it can be argued that even though the women in Spears' videos are representations only, gender roles are being challenged more in today's society.

Studying popular music and the representations has provided to be rather challenging due to loose narratives and inconsistencies. Furthermore, analysing verbal and visual images can be challenging as people see the world differently even if they had the same cultural background (Hall 1997: 17 – 18). Even if people from the same cultural group would see the world of popular music in the same way, an image – verbal or visual – hardly ever carries only one meaning. Therefore, conflicts between the verbal and visual levels are likely to arise. Also, what an artist says and does can be rather contradictory.

It would be interesting to proceed in the same field of study; in particular the visual images in music videos have provided some interesting material for research. Particularly appealing would be a research on both genders and which gender characteristics are valued more than others. However, for such research I believe a more modern method than Barthes' five

semiotic codes would be needed. Personally I felt that denoting and connoting meanings with the help of the codes became rather mechanical. The positive side is that, as Barthes himself pointed out, the system of the codes is rather open, allowing several different interpretations. In that sense, the process of analysing is almost never-ending as new meanings arise. Nevertheless, the codes served my purposes well opening new meanings to both the lyrics and music videos for Spears' work. Despite her own controversial reputation (Gauntlett 2002: 228 – 229), she has clearly showed how the traditional view of women and femininity can be challenged.

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Appendix 1

...Baby One More Time Music Video

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Appendix 2

...*Baby One More Time* Lyrics

Oh baby, baby
 How was I supposed to know
 That something wasn't right here
 Oh baby, baby
 I shouldn't have let you go
 And now you're out of sight, yeah
 Show me how want it to be
 Tell me baby 'cause I need to know now, oh because

Chorus:
 My loneliness is killing me
 I must confess I still believe
 When I'm not with you I lose my mind
 Give me a sign
 Hit me baby one more time

Oh baby, baby
 How was I supposed to know
 Oh pretty baby
 I shouldn't have let you go
 I must confess that my loneliness
 Is killing me now
 Don't you know I still believe
 That you will be here
 And give me a sign
 Hit me baby one more time

Chorus

I must confess (my loneliness)
 That my loneliness
 (Is killing me) Is killing me now
 (I must confess) Don't you know (I still believe)
 That you will be here (I lose my mind)
 And give me a sign...
 Hit me baby one more time!

Appendix 3

Toxic Music Video

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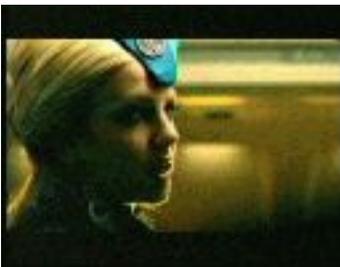
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Appendix 4

Toxic Lyrics

Baby, can't you see I'm calling
A guy like you should wear a warning
It's dangerous, I'm fallin'

There's no escape, I can't wait
I need a hit, baby, give me it
You're dangerous, I'm lovin' it

Too high, can't come down
Losing my head, spinning 'round and 'round
Do you feel me now

(Chorus)
With a taste of your lips
I'm on a ride
You're toxic I'm slipping under
With a taste of a poison paradise
I'm addicted to you
Don't you know that you're toxic
And I love what you do
Don't you know that you're toxic

It's getting late to give you up
I took a sip from my devil's cup
Slowly, it's taking over me
Too high, can't come down
It's in the air and it's all around
Can you feel me now

Do you feel me now