Couples and Friends: Comic Strategies and Social Structures in German and American Comedy Series

German and American TV comedy series from the 1970s to the present are analysed with special attention to the social relations of their main male and female characters, ranging from the typical comic couple of the earlier German examples to the bunch of friends in current series, with changes in gender relations and other social areas as background. The historical view and the intercultural comparison are linked with observations regarding the transcultural influence of American TV comedy on German series.

Mass media in general and television in particular discovered comedy long ago, and realized that it was an indispensable element for television’s endeavours. As a comic TV genre, the sitcom (situation comedy) is a type of series that has been very popular of late. Like the soap opera, it is considered to be an originally ‘American’ genre deriving mainly from US-productions and spreading across the world. But in fact it has a long tradition that reaches far back into the realms of theatre, especially cabaret. In addition to political topics, gender issues always have provided a reliable source of audience amusement and a chance to reflect societal norms.

Comedy and especially the social structures it depicts are signs of the psychological state of society and culture. Since the American style of comedy found its way into German programmes after 1984, my analysis will include an intercultural perspective, one that touches on the differences in American and German comedy concerning the social structure presented in TV series, interprets different models of character constellations, and finally that considers the influence American comedy had on the German genre. The first part of this essay will focus on the German tradition of sitcoms and their forerunners; the second part will analyse the reception of American sitcoms in Germany, as well as their treatment of certain social structures. My argumentation will proceed from the comic couple to the couple of friends, then to the American series of the eighties and early nineties, and then to the changing of the patterns in the late 90s until the present day to a structure of a family or a group of very close friends.

From Comic to Crazy Couples

One of the dominant features of German TV comedy up to the mid 1980s is the comic couple. It marks an era of German TV culture that is characterized by jokes that follow a familiar pattern: long action – short reaction. Essentially, a long story is told, numerous steps lead to an announced end, and then, at least
in our contemporary perception, nothing happens. This comic pattern mirrors Kant’s 1790 definition that reads: “Das Lachen ist ein Affekt aus der plötzlichen Verwandlung einer gespannten Erwartung in nichts” (Kritik der Urteilskraft § 54) (“A joke is when concentrated expectations dissolve into nothing”).\(^1\) While his definition was not intended to be taken literally, until the beginning of the commercialized broadcasting system in Germany and the end of the state’s monopoly it was enough and, more than that, it was the right humour at the right time. German TV humour does not have a very positive image. As is set down in the German Constitution, German broadcasting has the duty to inform and educate – this is known as its ‘culture-duty’. So humour became both a serious state affair and serious. In addition, the German audience was very sceptical of complexity and latent ambiguity (the foundation of intelligent humour), largely as a result of mass media’s role as a means of propaganda during the reign of National Socialism, a time when many comedians were forced to emigrate or were killed. Thus, after 1945, they had to learn how to produce comedy from scratch.

The comic couple’s popularity and frequent recurrence are symptomatic of the nostalgic vision of the two German post-war states, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The couple represents continuity and allegiance, and when the harmony becomes a little boring, it becomes a vehicle for safe experiments and a touch of salaciousness.

Aside from the comic couple, we have the crazy couple. In the popular series *Ein verrücktes Paar (A Crazy Couple, ZDF 1977–1980)*, the development concerning the emancipation of women in German society reveals how influential those contemporary events were. For example, laws were being modified, there were influential publications such as *Der kleine Unterschied (The Little Difference)* in 1976, and the abortion debate was on the table. But this is just one aspect of the programme, which can be also seen as a conservative reaction to the state of flux at the end of the seventies. The title mentions two equal actors, well known comedian Harald Juhnke as the central star of the series, and Grit Böttcher as his female counterpart. In *A Crazy Couple* Grit Böttcher shows a great ability to assert herself and to push aside mollycoddled men. Most of the time, the last laugh is on her side, although Juhnke remains at the centre of attention. To avoid putting off the less emancipated members of the audience, Böttcher acts in a highly sexualized way. It is a typical mixture we find at the end of the seventies: women can show a little bit of dominance and superiority, but as a means of reconciliation they have to be very attractive and must clearly show their sexual willingness on that visual level.

In addition to *A Crazy Couple*, we have Didi Hallervorden and Rotraud Schindler in *Nonstop Nonsens*, Loriot and Evelyn Hamann in *Loriot*, and

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1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
Dieter Krebs and Beatrice Richter (later on replaced by Iris Berben) in Sketchup, just to name the most popular crazy couples. If we look into the relevant studies dealing with German TV history, e.g. Knut Hickethier’s Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens (History of German Television), none of these comic series is mentioned, not even comedian Loriot, who is often seen as more cultured than the others.

Males playing dominant roles, although obviously within the structure of the couple, can be found in two of the aforementioned productions: Nonstop Nonsense (ARD 1975–1980, 20 episodes) and Loriot (ARD 1976, 14 episodes). In a sequence of twenty episodes, Hallervorden and Schindler in Nonstop Nonsense portrayed a couple in various everyday situations, sometimes in historical or science fiction settings. Hallervorden also had other partners and sometimes acted on his own, but the couple was an enduring feature of the show. The span of situations and couple constellations was wide and involved several forms of gender confrontations ranging from those of accidental acquaintances or meetings to all sorts of comic couples (engaged, married, divorced, old, young etc.). The narrative structure of the sketches in Nonstop Nonsense was steady. It centred on the man of the couple and ended with a corresponding curtain line. In general the woman was a motherly or seductive – but always sensible – person who took care of the foolish man. Yet in the end, the fool always had the last word and was at the centre of attention. The sensible woman’s role was minor and supporting. The patriarch role model of the fifties is still visible here, but the head of the family – the man – is often dismissed. Arguably, the popularity of Nonstop Nonsense was inspired by a mixture of commiseration with the disturbed man and relief about him behaving in a way that is almost certifiably insane. Nevertheless, he dominated both the action and the woman.

Another kind of domination with a similar model of undermined masculinity can be found in the series Loriot, which remains very popular to this day. Although the programme is called Loriot, most of the legendary sketches concern the typically comic couple performed by Loriot (Vicco von Bülow) and his partner Evelyn Hamann. Loriot and Hamann play petite bourgeois characters that often get into trouble with their social or material environment. What causes the trouble (and the curtain line) is either that they are holding firmly onto their principles in chaotic situations or that they have a desire for uncommon experiences, such as love affairs, etc.; but in such uncommon situations they tend to fall back into their habitual behaviour or act out stereotypes of behaviour they have only ever heard of. Thus they are a symbol for the old Federal Republic, citizens, who cannot get rid of the inner voice of the first chancellor Adenauer saying: No experiments!

One of the last comedies that deal with the comic couple in the old-fashioned way is Sketchup (BR 3, 1984–1985, 35 episodes), which was well received by
a young and progressive audience. However, a look at the sketches from recent narration habits or entertainment standards shows a hotchpotch of outmoded jokes and a quite discordant handling of gender issues. Maybe we have to accept the attempt to reflect gender roles by humour, but the sketches (either too long or too short) sometimes depict both ‘sexes’ in insulting ways. Sketchup’s kind of humour is old-fashioned, sometimes even gloating, and, moreover, it is in some aspects sexist and racist. Unmasking these structures can be likened to the arrival of a new perspective on the 1968 student revolt in Germany. Today we know about the hidden oppression of women through a more subtle argumentation of emancipation and freedom – (hopefully) for the benefit of all.

From the Comic Couple to a Group of Friends

The good old times of more or less boring, harmless, and not very complex sketches on ARD or ZDF came to an end when the high constitutional court decided to permit the commercialization of German television and radio in the year 1984. Commercialization heralded the end of the state’s broadcasting days and the beginning of an ongoing period of grave modifications within the whole system and its position and significance in society. Connecting those changes to the cultural-historical view, we later find similar structures and social upheavals at the reunion of the two German nation-states, an event which certainly marks the end of the sedate and comfortable ‘Republic of Bonn’ and the post-war period. The ongoing debate about the decline of German television culture can be compared with the never-ending debate over the loss of confidence and moral and financial security after the unification. The problems of the current German situation are reflected in the process of extended TV offerings from the mid-80s on. Suddenly there is competition, a clash of mentalities, role models and aesthetics, and an intensive altercation about the distribution of the obligatory charge for television programmes for every TV-owner in Germany.

Today, the act of commercialization is considered a turning point with regards to the character of the German TV programme. Consensus opinion in the different discussions is that new broadcasting companies like RTL, SAT 1, Pro 7 and others caused a loss of educational and high cultural entertainment, giving way to a mix of fictional series and news, combined in docu-soaps and ‘infotainment’ (cf. Hickethier 414–492).

Regarded more closely (and compared with the programmes of that genre before 1984) there has been considerable change and progress with regards to German humour, especially as represented in the more recent comedy shows of the new channels. When one considers the gender constellations of comedy programs since 1984, it is quite obvious that comic couples resembling the
Crazy Couple have nearly faded away. On the one hand there are mixed groups of comedians, often acting as people sharing their flat; on the other hand there is clear individualization and personalization with the primary stand-up comedian, be they male or female. There is also more going on than merely a change in character constellations (from a married couple to a couple of friends): It also is a way of making gender matter or not matter while the comedians act as a couple. Admittedly, showing sketches with men and women on TV does not naturally mean that gender is the main subject or that gender role models are reflected.

Looking at the comedy series today we can state that changed gender constellations in TV comedies are probably a result of changes in the society's gender role models as they are represented on TV (considering the theories concerning mass media and the origin of their contents; cf. Adelmann; Fiske; Gauntlett and Hill), or are the product of the creative and innovative teams in Cologne, who stand for advanced and 'avant-garde' thinking and for progressive gender roles (most of the time, but there are certainly examples showing new gender roles, but new problems, too). In both cases we could identify a change in society concerning role models and, considering the quality of the contents, maybe a certain increase in emancipation.

But we also have to take into consideration that commercial programs are forced to entertain the consumers more than state broadcasting was. From that point of view, and by taking TV-comedy as an indicator of emancipation, perhaps we can say that the younger viewers are often more liberal, the older ones more conservative. As Hickethier declares, entertainment at the end of the eighties was ironic and did not take itself very seriously, yet still claimed to form the basis for a new understanding of the world (cf. Hickethier 482f.). It is therefore not astonishing that the first months after the dissolution of the GDR were a friendly period of getting to know each other and of regarding each other with favour. This is how it is portrayed in the shows of the couple of friends and how the beginning of the reunion was like. Especially interesting and informative for the topic of the ‘comic couples’ is the show called Alles nichts oder?! (All Nothing, Is It?!)(RTL plus 1988–92) with Hugo Egon Balder (formerly known for his scandalous striptease-show Tutti Frutti) and the lesbian Hella von Sinnen. Both are comedians, but to say they represent a comic couple in the tradition of the ones named would be false and would neglect the satirical aspects of their actions. Actually, the content of their show was a curious game which always ended with the candidates throwing cakes in the faces of Balder and von Sinnen. But, to tell the truth, the content of the show was the exhibition of gender trouble as experienced in the eighties. The two presenters, the skinny, bad-tempered, melancholic-looking Balder and the strident, voluptuous, and outspoken lesbian von Sinnen staged an entertaining and furious battle of the sexes – and yet they in no way represented traditional gender
roles. Their jokes and their verbal battles were aimed at the well-known and established biases of society. And in order to differ from the traditional couple, they formally called each other “Herr Balder” and “Frau von Sinnen”. One disadvantage of that show was that both presenters were so busy showing their unconventional gender life that the lack of good jokes was often overshadowed by strident acting.

From today’s standpoint, the merit of Alles nichts oder? is that it prepared the comedy scene for a new era; a culture became established in Cologne, which, somewhat akin to San Francisco, is famous for its gay and lesbian culture. The connections of the comedy culture to the homosexual scene are various. Many of the popular comedians are bound to it and originated from it. So today we have on the one hand comedians mentioning and emphasizing their sexual attitudes and on the other hand, there are many sitcoms dealing with the everyday life of homo- and heterosexual couples and friends. The immense popularity of such sitcoms means that they cannot be solely entertaining for homosexuals. Instead, it could be suggested that the entertaining element is that gay or lesbian people have quite different problems or experiences than heterosexuals. But apart from these experiences, their lives are still similar to those of the ‘hetero-normal’ citizen. The writers of the screenplay can thus show the mainstream audience an image of life that they can identify with, yet one mixed with the exotic adventures of queer habits that differ from mainstream (heterosexual) lives.

A few years after the early and experimental times of commercialization, the comedy boom earnestly started with RTL Samstag Nacht, a copy of the American Saturday Night Life, and it was the beginning of the constellation ‘group of friends’ which replaced the comic couple. The forerunner of that new kind of show was the scandalous family-satire Klimbim (1973–1978) with its scantily-clad mother and sexually active grandfather on the one hand, and the serious satirical political revues like Scheibenwischer (Screen Wiper) on the other hand. Both formats are based on a group of people bounded by family ties, friendship, or a shared place of work. RTL Samstag Nacht presented a mixed group (four men, two women) of comedians. Popular comedians appeared on the show as guests, but their contributions did not emphasize gender topics in a conspicuous way. The same can be said for their main competitors, the Wochenshow (SAT 1 1996–2002) and Switch (Pro 7 1997–2000).

Gender, it seems, no longer constituted an interesting and necessary content, although mixed groups seemed to be predestined for the treatment of such subjects. Now it was not the outer-medial reality of the audience that was topical; approaching the new millennium, it was the inner-medial reality, the loads of new programmes, and the plethora of new topics emerging alongside the radical changes in broadcasting in Germany that informed content. Traditional formats like the news or sports had changed their outfit. New formats like reality-TV
or afternoon talk shows had to be digested by an overtaxed audience. This situation – one nearly devoid of any real gender issues – went on for a few years.

If we look at the comedy scene on TV today, we can mark the return of a tendency to deal with sex and/or gender. The reason for this is a change in genres to one that could be described as a mixture between family series or soap operas and comedies. The topics of self-reference are still present, but now the comedians are presenting them in framed scenes. They are acting not just as a group, but more like friends, sometimes hinting at a life and a story away from the sketches. Examples for that type of series are Die dreisten Drei – die Comedy WG (The Bold Three – the Comedy Apartment), Bewegte Männer (Men in Motion), Sechserpack (Six Pack) or Schillerstraße (Schiller Street). The gender topic is back, however, the shorter the sketches are, the more superficial the treatment appears. For example, there are harmless gender-based jokes in sketches lasting 8 seconds (short ones) or up to 1.5 minutes (long ones). The plot has just seconds to develop; the punch line must be clear and sharp (cf. Holzer). Concurrent to the emerging motif of the couple of friends was the influx of American comedy series on German TV and their enormous impact on the ‘domestic’ TV culture.

The American Impact

With the beginning of commercialized TV in Germany, the channels bought a great deal of low budget action series and soaps from US-American producers to fill up their daily programming, especially in afternoon timeslots. The perception of ‘American reality’ in Germany – drawn primarily from TV – was a very strange one during this time. American society literally entered the living rooms and bedrooms of the German audience and, in this sense, was actually closer to the Germans than any European countries were. German viewers had come to know the Italians through La Piovra (The Octopus), the English through Upstairs – Downstairs and Monty Python’s Flying Circus, but they did not know the French, Dutch, Scandinavians or neighbours in the east. Initially, German viewers came to know the Americans, as action heroes and melodramatic soap opera figures.

After that first glut of series there came a second phase which undermined the stereotypes so common in Germany; new impressions of American society were produced, or rather forced, by mass media. I am referring to a kind of series with essentially conservative motifs, but with one dominating element of strangeness. This structure of ‘strangers are welcome’ corresponds to the end of the Cold War and a new open-mindedness towards the unknown, an attitude of being no longer hostile in the world. The embodiment of this new attitude was the titular character in the series Alf (1986–1990), the friendly alien from Melmac, who became a member of the Turner family. Other examples are the
series *Who’s the Boss?* (1984–1992), *Golden Girls* (1985–1992), *Married . . . with Children* (1987–1997) and *Roseanne* (1988–1997), all of which have two things in common: First, each one was and still is very popular in Germany, more successful than other, more ‘normal’ American series that were shown on German TV (cf. Evermann et al.; Compart). Second – and most responsible for the marked success –, each of the named series is conservative with regards to its main topics and values, family life, material goods, being part of the society and so on, but each has one astonishing exception. *Who’s the Boss?* is an often told story of the lonely, abandoned or widowed man and his child looking for someone to care for their house, and after a while for their life, so that the structure of family is completed. However, in *Who’s the Boss?*, the gender roles are turned upside down: She is a top business woman, president of an advertising agency who hires as her domestics a good looking widowed Italian and his little daughter. After a long while of gender trouble, they unite as a patchwork family: he does the housework, and she is successful outside the home.

*Alf* tells the story of an ideal ‘all American family’ that receives a visit by an alien life form and cohabitates with him, even though he threatens their cat and neighbours. They eventually ‘tame’ him by teaching him human manners and emotions. *Golden Girls* shows a few ‘girls’ sharing a flat like youngsters, a version of which will be seen in *Friends*, and sharing their sorrows, especially concerning love and their relationships with men. The exceptional element in the story-plot is that the girls are mostly about sixty years old, and the oldest one over ninety; these are their ‘golden years’.

My last examples from this category are *Roseanne* and *Married . . . with Children*. The comedy *Roseanne* is named after its heroine and shows an underdog family with a very dominating, assertive, and contumelious mother – but without socio-critical intention. The actually deterrent role of the mother has the same function as *Donna Reed* in her self-titled show (but confusingly in the show the name of her role is ‘Donna Stone’), and all the mothers in the conservative series of the fifties and sixties. In former times we would see the patient housewife loving her family, caring for them day and night, and ignoring her own needs and desires. *Roseanne* does the same as Donna, but she serves up fast food to shorten cooking times and the real reason behind her having a family – a husband and four children – is to have victims to laugh at. Representing the average American family but with another principle of producing comic effects is *Married . . . with Children*. Here we have a male head of family working to provide his son, daughter, and the lady of the house with a dog, a car, and a house respectively. But in this comedy, each character is exaggerated: we have a dull, baseball-loving man, who habitually denies his wife sex and who loves nothing more than sitting on the toilet and reading pornographic magazines; a gaudily-dressed housewife who watches so much TV that she has a pseudo-social relationship with the apparatus; a son who
desperately craves his first sexual experience and whose best friend is an inflatable doll that is treated like a family member; and a daughter who is blonde, ditzy, and always lucky.

A mix of all these series is the impression the German TV-viewers had of American society during the nineties: within the well-known patterns of life something strange intruded and gave the familiar and sometimes boring settings of family series a new facet. The structures are still solid, but now they are shown in their funny aspects – and the best method to show the well-known in a new dimension is to change one element in the system. This special element is generally one that transposes the genre from comedy to tragicomedy. With regards to gender, the series show even more: in all of these series it is obvious (but not necessary for the story) that men have lost their status as head of the family. Even so they are not presented as losers, but rather seem to be confident and liberated from a former male need for recognition. Beyond doubt it would be interesting to explore the relationship between societal developments in general and gender role models, as reflected in TV-series.

After the great success of series like the ones mentioned above (as well as some others), there followed a new generation of comedies in Germany. The American principle was applied, but not in all respects. The genre of the comic family series was established. A story is told in several episodes as in the classic series, but it is combined with the elements of sitcoms. Examples of that type of comedy, which could be called ‘narrative comedy’, are Me and My Life (Mein Leben und ich), Rita’s World (Ritas Welt) and Nikola (cf. Holzer). Commercial channels broadcast all of these series, and each series has a main female character. Important elements were changed to present the well known patterns in a new light by way of a crabby daughter being lenient with her hippie parents and commenting on them with an odd sense of humour (Me and My Life); or a female head of the family and supermarket manager similar in disposition to Roseanne, forward, hard-boiled and emotional simultaneously, who is comforting to her boss but can still dominate him when needed (Rita’s World). A very similar plot can be found in the series Nikola; here, the main difference is in the location – this time a hospital and not a supermarket. Men are shown as emotional, often homosexual, and sometimes just one step away from being oppressed; it is not clear if the series fulfil their claim to represent everyday life or if it is just wishful thinking.

On German TV today we have the ‘narrative’ comedy, which involves one strange element, the traditional sitcom, and also numerous series mixing up structures and motifs. Series such as Schillerstraße present a new concept of friendship: the figures are more and more often single or engaged in short-term relationships. They reside with friends who have the same or even a higher status in their lives than their family. Living with others in a shared flat can compensate for the lack of a partnership. Characters of this kind of comedy series can have
a stable social environment, people to live with and to rely on. To sustain this situation, they can neglect gender differences and can behave in an emancipated fashion. Behaviour may be quite different when they meet as possible sexual partners.

The greatly successful forerunner of such constellations is the American series *Friends*. It marks a new upcoming type based on the ‘narrative sitcom’ and following the era of the ‘strange element’-series. *Friends* is the prototypical of the group-of-friends type, in which familial relations are replaced by structures such that the social support is rendered by friends living together, not solely by ways of cohabiting but also through sharing their lives and experiences (cf. Mack). Platonic friendships and sexual or partner relationships blur into one another, and running parallel to the short-term comic elements in each episode are long-term developments like love affairs or childbirth.

Because of its mood, the series marks the end of an era and the beginning of a new one: it shows the end of ‘one element is weird in a right constellation’-type. The basic constellation is not one of harmony and a status of completeness, in which something happens that opens a new perspective on the well-known features of everyday life and makes them a little more interesting and funny. In the new type of comedy the basic situation is characterized by the sense that something is fundamentally missing. The characters are seeking a state of completeness, one which they can never attain. More often than not it is a bitter and desperate laughter. Sometimes we laugh about the failure of the characters, which means we laugh at them, but most of the time we laugh with the characters in spite of the tragedies that occur.

In *Friends* every character feels incomplete; each attempts to be successful at work and at love, or to manage life in general, and each is punished with a tragicomic development of the story line. The only reliable component is friendship. The pattern of the dramaturgy is as follows: a long phase of attempts and quests; a short phase of realizing how to operate; the announcement of a future happiness; a long phase of failure and depression, absorbed and alleviated by one’s friends. The ideal couple cannot come together because she hated him in high school; nevertheless they fell in love later on. After a short time of ideal love, she breaks it off. However, upon his marriage (to someone else) she realizes she loves him, but by now it is too late. A few months later, his wife acknowledges that she loves another woman and breaks off the marriage. He and his former girlfriend reunite and separate again, only now she is pregnant, and so on and so forth. The motifs resemble those of a soap opera, and so indicate the changed character of the comedies. Central topics are unemployment and lost love, which lend the series a melancholic undertone.

*Friends* takes place in a relatively low-budget one-room setting and is filmed using a range of reductive techniques and cuts, simple lighting, and the
like. The sequences are short and develop in linear fashion towards the punch line. The simplistic settings of these sitcoms will be given up for the benefit of a more expensive and complex décor and environment that we find consistent with prime time series like two decades ago in *Dallas*, a series that wasn’t yet a sitcom or had sitcom elements at all. The sitcom elements from the ‘cheap’ programmes changed into expensively equipped programmes, but they took with them the bitter humour – missing in expensive prime time series before – and the melancholic touch. Examples of this are *Ally McBeal*, *Sex and the City*, *Desperate Housewives*, and *Gilmore Girls*.

In the centre of action we find groups of chummy people, or a quartet of friends in New York, or the housewives living in Wysteria-Lane, or a mother and daughter in their idyllic town. Each group represents the ideal constellation, true friendship, success, and especially a longing for a conservative world. Maybe that sounds strange if we look at the fancy, independent, and self-sufficient thirty-something women in *Sex and the City*, or at the not very respectable women in *Desperate Housewives*, or the unconventional pair of girls, both named Lorelai, in *Gilmore Girls*. But on second glance, and after analysing the episodes, it becomes clear that each character, missing something important in her or his life, is motivated to compensate for it. That lack is the impetus for their actions and the topic of the narration. Unable to enjoy their actual lives, each wants to marry and to have children and to no longer be a hipster. The environment of *Sex and the City* is hostile: New York City prevents them from being complete, but as the opposite way of life in *Desperate Housewives* or *Gilmore Girls* can show, the status of housewife is no more desirable. As housewives, the women try to change in an obviously impossible way, i.e. without disrupting their actual lives.

Plagued by violent daydreams, the successful lawyer *Ally McBeal* becomes thinner and thinner with every episode. She has a faithful girlfriend but cannot find the right man. And as for the *Gilmore Girls*, their own family, the Gilmores, is the enemy, the hostile environment that tries to infiltrate their strenuously fortified life with their caring substitute family in Stars Hollow, an apt name, demonstrating cosiness and protection from the world outside.

In this recent type of prime time sitcoms, it is interesting to note that men are not the main characters. Central instead is the busy, working woman, looking for a man but who is always incomplete. The series symbolize a new and hidden type of conservatism – women cannot return to the kitchen, nor can they attain much happiness outside the home. The series show us that an independent woman does not find a partner because her very independence makes her unattractive.

US-Americans no longer give a warm welcome to strange elements in their sitcoms, elements that could give their familiar lives new dimensions. Today the strange appears to be dangerous again – at least it seems so, if we look at
the stories sold as comedies, which are actually tragedies. In Germany these series are very popular; perhaps it is that the Germans can identify with this sense of disillusionment.

Works Consulted


