

"Old ladies—they got a way of coming back and  
biting you in the ass"

The female character construction in *Sons of  
Anarchy*

Master's thesis

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<p>Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena oli tutkia naispuolisten hahmojen rakentumista amerikkalaisessa <i>Sons of Anarchy</i> –televisiosarjassa. Sarjan tapahtumat sijoittuvat kuvitteelliseen kalifornialaiseen pikkukaupunkiin, jossa toimii lainsuojaton moottoripyöräkerho. Aineistona käytettiin sarjan neljää ensimmäistä tuotantokautta (2008-2011) keskittyen dialogeihin, joissa kaksi keskeisintä naishahmoa olivat joko osallisina tai puheenaiheina. Toinen keskeisimmistä naishahmoista oli sarjan päähenkilön äiti, Gemma, ja toinen päähenkilön naisystävä, Tara.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa huomioitiin kuusi eri näkökulmaa hahmon rakentumiseen Pearsonin (2007) esittelemän mallin mukaan, joita olivat: 1) psykologiset piirteet ja tavat, 2) fyysiset piirteet ja ulkonäkö, 3) kielenkäyttö, 4) suhteet muiden hahmojen kanssa, 5) ympäristö sekä 6) biografia. Observoinnin lisäksi käytin korpuslingvistiikan metodologiaa selvittäessäni tyypillisiä puhemalleja hahmoille sekä selvittäessäni tärkeimpiä muita hahmoja, joiden kanssa tutkimuskohdehahmot olivat eniten tekemisissä.</p> <p>Osoittautui, että keskeiset naishahmot rakentuivat monista eri osasista, kuten äitiys ja ammatillisuus. Lisäksi hahmot rakentuivat jatkuvasti uudelleen vuorovaikutuksessa muiden hahmojen kanssa. Erityisesti Taran hahmo muuttui ja kehittyi neljän tuotantokauden aikana niin ulkoisesti kuin käytöksen ja kielenkäytönkin osalta, siinä missä Gemman hahmo pysyi aika pitkälti samana, mutta syventyi. Sukupuoliroolit moottoripyöräkerhossa olivat nykyamerikkalaisia konservatiivisemmat, sillä naisten odotettiin tottelevan miehiä kaikissa tilanteissa. Lisäksi miehillä oli enemmän seksuaalista vapautta, sillä moottoripyöräkerhon moraalikoodin mukaan oli täysin hyväksyttävää miehille harrastaa parisuhteensa ulkopuolista seksiä, niin kauan kun parisuhteen toinen osapuoli ei tästä saanut tietää. Naisilla moista oikeutta ei ollut. Kuitenkin naishahmoilla oli valtaa miehin manipulaation ja vakuuttavan puheen kautta.</p>	
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Muita tietoja – Additional information	



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Television reflects the cultural reality and the themes discussed in different types of TV series are very often similar to current themes in public debate. Barker (1999:3) argues that television is the major source of global cultural capital. Bednarek (2010:8) suggests that television is very important for identity construction, as even those of us who do not watch television use it as an aspect of their identities. Kozloff (2000:27) argues that "films teach viewers how to talk, and thus how to think". This also applies to television. Moreover, Kozloff continues that, according to linguists, the dispersal of English as lingua franca has been partially caused by Hollywood films. Even though characters in fictional TV series are not real, they have usually been created in the way that they could very well be real. Viewers can identify themselves with some of the characters and empathize with their emotions and actions. Aarons (2013:173) describes the watching of *Sons of Anarchy* as "riding alongside the characters", as they try to achieve their life goals, happiness and love, for example. Rey (2001:138) points out that television, among other popular media, is a good venue for studying the language of men and women as media often mirrors the attitudes in culture and society. Television can influence the viewers' opinions and attitudes subtly, and therefore it is important to study TV series and what kind of messages they convey to the viewers. As American TV series are aired all over the world, they can influence viewers globally, which is why it is important to study American TV series in particular. Moreover, according to Bubel (2006:2) using a long-running series as data for research has the advantage that "ethnographic particulars such as the characters' personal histories are well-known and can be taken into account in the analysis", which is also one reason why a TV series is studied in the thesis also.

The female gender is traditionally considered weaker than the male gender, despite the fact that plenty of work has been done by feminist movements during the past few decades (Litosseliti 2006:1-2). In popular culture, this alleged weakness of the female gender is often emphasized, whereas the male gender is depicted as strong and aggressive. Such seems to be also the case of *Sons of Anarchy* (2008), the American motorcycle soap opera, created by Kurt Sutter. The series' scenery takes place in an imaginary small town in California called Charming where an outlaw motorcycle club



called SAMCRO (an acronym of Sons of Anarchy Motorcycle Club, Redwood Original) functions. The motorcycle club sells weapons but also keeps the town clean of drugs, which is why the sheriff lets them continue their criminal business. Most of the characters in *Sons of Anarchy* are male, typically very masculine and aggressive. Yet there are few women characters also who seem to have a special role in the motorcycle club. This is because, while they fulfill their responsibilities as partners in their relationships, they also appear as mothers for the entire motorcycle club and even the whole town of Charming.

This thesis deals with the representation of the female characters in the TV series *Sons of Anarchy*. More specifically, what I aim to study is how the female characters' identities are constructed and how the female characters are represented. Women in television have been studied mainly in female-oriented TV series only (Bednarek 2010:62). Hence, this study brings something new to the field. Moreover, the role of women in the TV series is an interesting subject to study because it seems quite multidimensional. On the surface, it seems that the female characters in *Sons of Anarchy* are simply wives and girlfriends who have no power in such a setting that the masculine motorcycle club provides, yet, in the end, they still seem to manage the whole club.

After this introduction, I will present the theoretical background of the study by introducing the central concepts and theories associated with it and also by giving a brief overview of previous studies that have discussed similar themes than the present study. After this, I will continue by introducing the aims and set-up of the study. Subsequently, I will familiarize the reader with the data of the present study – dialogue involving the two key female characters in the series. Both of the women have a central status in the motorcycle club and the TV series as a whole. After introducing the data, I will present the analytic approach I will use in this study, Pearson's (2007) taxonomy of "anatomizing" a character and corpus stylistics, and apply them to the investigation of the dialogue of the TV series. Finally, I will discuss my findings in relation to previous studies associated with the topic and in relation to my research questions.

As the use of 'he/him/his' as generic pronouns in this study can reinforce the male gender as a norm and make women invisible, in this study, particularly as it focuses on female characters, I will be using 'she', when a generic pronoun is needed.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this chapter, I will present the theoretical framework for the present study and define the relevant concepts for it. I will begin with an overview on the theories of characterization and then move on to a discussion of how television dialogue is studied. Subsequently, I will move on to discussing gender and the language of television. After this, I will briefly introduce the use of corpora in analysing dialogue. Finally, I will discuss other studies relevant to the present study, including research on *Sons of Anarchy*.

### **2.1 Characterization**

In this section, I will examine how characterization can be defined and studied. I will also briefly discuss how characters are constructed. *Characterization* is a central concept for the present study, which is why it is a natural place to begin presenting the theoretical framework.

#### **2.1.1 The study of characterization**

The study of character has been multi-disciplinary in nature. According to Bednarek (2010:98), *characterization* has been used as a concept in literary studies, stylistics, narratology and media studies, and it describes how characters are defined in discourse, or how readers construe certain characteristics of characters in discourse. Culpeper (2001:24) argues that characterization is "a part of the dynamic process, involving the speaker, the hearer, the context and the utterance". In this study, characterization is one of its key notions and both of these definitions above capture well the ways in which characterization is understood in it.

According to Culpeper (2001:7), it has been debated in the history of literary criticism 'where the character exists'. He presents two polarised approaches to conceptualizing the character: these are the humanising approach and the de-humanising approach. The supporters of the humanising approach claim that the characters are actually real people, and the supporters of the de-humanising approach claim that the characters have a purely textual existence. The latter has gained more prestige in the past decades (Culpeper 2001:6-7.). However, humanising characters is typical of people and part of the enjoyment of reading books or watching films comes from actually imagining characters as real people (Culpeper 2001:6). A mixed approach also exists, and it takes into account the textual existence of the character but it also pays attention to the fact that when watching a play or a film, we attempt to interpret the characters with similar structures and processes that we use to interpret our real-life experiences with people (Culpeper (2001:11)). This could be one of the reasons why it is useful to study the characters on television in order to understand also the underlying structures and attitudes in the society. The mixed approach to the debate on 'where the character exists' is also the approach of this study.

As briefly touched in the previous paragraph, characters, despite the fact that they exist only on the textual level, are often treated by readers/viewers in a way similar to real people. For example, when a character, Ken Ojala, in a popular Finnish soap opera, *Salatut elämät*, was hit by a tram in an episode in 2005, the location in Helsinki that served as the setting for the accident scene was filled with candles and flowers by the fans of the TV series, even though the actor Aleksi Sariola was fine and the accident only happened on television. Culpeper (2001:86-87) argues that the knowledge of real life people is a primary source of knowledge that we use when understanding characters. In a similar vein, it is also suggested by Rimmon-Kenan (2005:35) that character constructs are partly modelled on the reader's conception of people, and this is what makes characters person-like. Furthermore, Culpeper (2001:86-87) argues that the social categories for real people, such as personal, social role and group membership, offer a useful means of analyzing characters, even though the knowledge of real-life people is not the only source of knowledge used in understanding characters. Moreover, Culpeper (2001:14; 144-15) notes that the fact that social psychologists use fictional

texts to illustrate their claims provides justification for applying their theories to literary texts. However, Culpeper also states that it is not possible to infer the characteristics of real people exactly in the same way as those of literary characters. This view is also shared by Kozloff (2000:19) who also points out that linguists using film dialogue as accurate case studies of everyday conversation are operating on false assumptions.

### **2.1.2 Constructing a character**

Constructing a character is a multi-dimensional process. Pearson (2007:42) argues that the very first few episodes of a television series are central to defining the major traits of the characters as they tag the central characters with the speech and behavior characteristic to them. Moreover, Pearson (2007:55-56) states that in television series its repetitive nature dictates a relative state of stability for its characters, and therefore it is useful to speak about character accumulation and depth instead of character development. Culpeper (2002: 252) introduces an exhaustive list of textual cues that form a character. Another framework for the analysis of characters is suggested by Pearson (2007:43). In her view, the televisual character can be anatomized by identifying the elements constituting a character "abstracted from the design of the text and existing in the story". She presents an analysis of Gilbert Grissom, a character in *CSI*, and dissects the character in six key elements that have a great deal in common with Culpeper's textual cues. Also Rimmon-Kenan (2005:61) argues that a character can be described by presenting a network of traits. He continues that this can be done in two different ways: by direct definition or indirect presentation. According to Rimmon-Kenan (2005:61-63), the direct definition names the traits of the character directly in a way such as "Gemma is fierce" or "Tara is law-obedient", whereas the indirect presentation displays the traits more subtly so that the reader must herself construe them.

According to Culpeper (2001:167), the viewer's impression of a character is formed in interaction between the text and the viewer's background knowledge, which means that the viewer uses both bottom-up and top-down processes to interpret the character. Moreover, Culpeper (2001:36) argues that the viewer's knowledge about real people in addition to the viewer's knowledge about fictional characters has an impact on how the

viewer interprets the textual cues. He (2001:167) continues that self-presentation of a character occurs when a character provides information about herself, whereas other-presentation occurs when a character provides information about someone else. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to not only what a character says but also what other characters say about her or to her. As implicit cues Culpeper (2001:173) names, for example, frequency of turns, length of turns, total volume of talk, turn allocation, interruptions and topic control.

Pearson's (2007:43) six key elements that construct a character are 1) psychological traits/habitual behaviour, 2) physical characteristics/appearance, 3) speech patterns, 4) interaction with other characters, 5) environment and 6) biography. Culpeper (2001:223) argues that some characters are dispositionally sad, happy or angry, for example, so that the emotional state of a character can be habitual for her. This matches with Pearson's key element 1) psychological traits/habitual behaviour. Also, according to Rimmon-Kenan (2005:63), the habitual actions of a character tend to reveal the character's unchanging or static aspect whereas one-time actions tend to induce the dynamic aspect of the character, especially in a turning point in the narrative. Pearson's key element 2) physical characteristics/appearance is also supported by Culpeper and Rimmon-Kenan. Culpeper (2001:221) mentions visual or appearance cues playing a key role in characterization. Moreover, he (2001:224) continues that stature can also convey characterizing information. He continues that a tall person may give the impression of both social and physical power. Furthermore, Culpeper (2001:225) notes that clothing and dress codes also play an important role in indicating factors such as social status, age, occupation and income. Rimmon-Kenan (2005:67) also mentions external appearance of a character as one indicator of indirect presentation. Pearson's key element number 3) being speech patterns is also mentioned in other writers' work. For example, Rimmon-Kenan (2005:65) explains that "a character's speech, whether in conversation or as a silent activity of the mind, can be indicative of a trait or traits both through its content and through its form." Furthermore, Culpeper (2001:188) states that the richness or diversity of lexis within a character's speech can suggest certain characteristics.

Interaction with other characters is mentioned as category 4) by Pearson (2007:43). Culpeper (2001:173) argues that the way in which people interact with each other can reveal, for example, the distribution of power between them. This also applies to characters and is an important notion considering the construction of character in the present study. Moreover, Culpeper (2001:23) also argues that constructing characters through interaction is an aspect of meaning construction. Culpeper (2001:193) also mentions that terms of address are one way of indicating characters' social relations. A similar view is suggested by Bubel (2006) who has studied friendship in the American television series *Sex and the City*. She (2006:59-60) argues that the viewer integrates her prior knowledge of relationships when seeing characters on screen interacting with each other.

Pearson (2007:43) introduces environment as the fifth category for anatomizing a character. According to Culpeper (2001:226), it is possible for the character to choose their surroundings in addition to choosing what they say or how they say it. Moreover, he continues that occasionally the environment a character has chosen can suggest her emotional state. Rimmon-Kenan (2005:68) goes on to explain that a character's physical surrounding, including room, house, street and town, as well as her human environment, including family and social class, are often used as trait-connoting metonymies. I will return to Pearson's taxonomy in the chapter of methodology: it will be the basis for the present my analysis.

### **2.1.3 Summary**

In this section, I have given an insight on characterization. Firstly, I discussed how characterization has been studied. Secondly, I explained how characters are constructed, also introducing Pearson's (2007) model for anatomising a character.

## **2.2 Television dialogue: its role and function in characterization**

In this section, I will discuss television dialogues role in characterization. I will begin by explaining the function of dialogue in films and television, and then continue to discuss if it can be compared to natural conversation. Finally, I will discuss how characters can be studied through dialogue.

### **2.2.1 The study of dialogue**

Even though films and television have been widely studied recently, television dialogue has been understudied. Kozloff (2000:13) argues that dialogue has been discredited and undervalued because it is associated with femininity. In other words, as femininity is undervalued, so is dialogue as it is associated with it. Moreover, Kozloff (2000:27) argues that "dialogue is often the first place we should go to understand how film reflects social prejudices". In other words, it is important to study dialogue, as it can reveal hidden attitudes that also apply in the society. Kozloff (2000:43) also notes that dialogue in addition to reflecting the social atmosphere in film, hints at the characters' inner life and makes them substantial. This view is also supported by Bubel (2006:4) who argues that "it is through talk that interpersonal relationships are managed, and it is through fictional talk that interpersonal relationships on the screen can be imagined and appreciated". This is why dialogue is also a starting point in this study of the female character construction.

In television, as in films and plays too, dialogue plays an important role. According to Bednarek (2010:101), dialogue is in a key position in construing relations between characters and also in their attitudes towards each other. Kozloff (2000:41) points out that dialogue often works as a pivotal link in the narrative, as a means of furthering the plot. For example, she mentions disclosure of a secret or of crucial information that functions as a turning point in the film. Moreover, according to Kozloff (2000:45), dialogue is also a means of self-revelation for characters. She (2000:47) continues that dialogue serves as character revelation also because it navigates the relationship between people. Bubel (2006:59) also notes that, as conversation is regarded as the most important tool in constructing relationships in real life, it is logical that scripted dialogue between characters is as important for co-construction of their interpersonal

relationships by the film production team and the audience that is overhearing the dialogue.

### **2.2.2 Television dialogue vs natural conversation**

As much as it has been debated 'where the character exists', it has also been debated whether television/film/drama dialogue can be treated as natural conversation. Bednarek (2010:14-15) argues that scripted dialogue is very different from naturally occurring conversation with respect to its communicative context. Rey (2001:138) points out that "[w]hile the language used on television is obviously not the same as unscripted language, it does represent the language scriptwriters imagine that real women and men produce." A similar view is also suggested by Kozloff (2000:29), who considers dialogue a particular kind of imitation of people talking. Quaglio (2009:28) notes that scholars agree on the fact that dialogue on television "should *sound* natural", in order to convince the viewer to identify with the characters, which would positively affect the show's success. Naturalness is achieved, among other things, by the use of vague language frequently (Quaglio 2009:92). Also, Bubel (2006:42) is of the opinion that verbal interactions on the screen are designed to evoke an illusion of a real conversation so that the viewers imagine that they are actually overhearing private conversations. Similarly, Short (1996:168) argues that in drama conversation is similar to naturally occurring conversation, except that it is designed to be overheard by the audience. Culpeper (2001:38), too, reminds us that dramatic dialogue is composed by playwrights for audiences to overhear. This leads to the fact that there are two levels at which the dialogue operates: on one level a character is conveying a message to another character, on another level the playwright is conveying a message to the audience, and the viewer needs not only think what the speaker means but also what the playwright means to communicate by a certain character's utterance in a particular context (Culpeper 2001:38-39). The same notion of the dialogue being composed for audiences to overhear is shared by Kozloff (2000:14) who points out that viewers are also listeners, or eavesdroppers, who are listening private conversations that are designed to communicate something to the audience. However, there are certain differences between scripted dialogue and naturally occurring conversation. Bubel (2006:43-44) points out that any features of natural conversation that would make it difficult for the viewer to overhear have been eliminated or reduced in scripted dialogue, such as false



starts, repair sequences, abrupt topic shifts or repetition. The same view is also shared by Quaglio (2009:21-22) and Bednarek (2010:64). However, Quaglio (2009:89) also points out that hedges in television dialogue can operate as means of creating humor, for example. Moreover, there are certain conventions of stage dialogue that are usually followed even though it would be different from real conversation (Bubel 2006:43). For example, Bubel (2006:56) notes that on-screen dialogue must take into account certain disadvantages of screen-to-face discourse, to make up for a lack of common ground and an inability to negotiate ground. She continues that it might be difficult to find the common ground open to any audience, as every viewer interprets the dialogue resorting to their individual experience and knowledge patterns and might end up with a different interpretation from some other viewer. Quaglio (2009:92) also points out that the naturalness of the dialogue might be compromised when the dialogue is attempted to create in a way that the audience would easily understand it. Barker (1999:110) points out that as texts are polysemic, in other words, they carry multiple meanings, it is up to the audience how they will interpret the texts. This applies to television dialogue as well.

### **2.2.3 Television dialogue in relation to characterization**

Television dialogue consists of also other things besides the speech of the characters. The process of dialogue formation is explained by Bubel (2006:58) in detail:

Once these ideas are realised as scripted dialogue, verbal interactions between actors/characters are shot by the camera team, with the camera focusing in on the face of the speaking or listening actor/character and sometimes all of the conversationalists. The filmed material is then edited in a joint effort by cutters, directors, and producers. Through the choice of camera angles in the editing process, dialogue can be structured and emphasised; close-ups, for example, are chosen, if a conversation becomes more emotional or an argument reaches its climax.

Because of this, television dialogue is definitely somewhat different from real-world conversation, as different things can be emphasized by the use of camera angles, for example. Moreover, Bubel (2006:58) continues that the basis for designing and interpreting the characters' social relations relies on the overlap in common knowledge between the producer and the viewers. She calls this process "relationship impression formation". Culpeper (2001:174) notes that "[i]n dialogue, observing who tends to

initiate such sequences and who responds can, for example, suggest who may be dominant, a motivator, compliant, or obstructive." In other words, it is not simply the words of the speech acts that matter when analyzing conversation, be it between real people or between characters. In addition, what kind of words the characters use might give some information about them. According to Culpeper (2001:199), the high frequency of a character's words does not necessarily tell anything about the individual character, as the list often contains words such as 'the' that occurs in all the characters' speech. However, Culpeper continues that it is useful to compare the high frequency words of a character to an appropriate norm, as then it will be possible to examine what kind of words or clusters of words are typical of a certain character. Moreover, Culpeper (2001:237) points out that in addition to the words, in analyzing speech acts it is useful to pay attention to how characters "perform their speech acts". It is therefore important to also observe the multimodal factors when analyzing dialogue and not only the script.

#### **2.2.4 Summary**

In this section, I have discussed television dialogue, moving on from a more general view on how it works as pivotal links in the narrative to a narrower standpoint on how what kind of a role it has in characterization. I also compared television dialogue to naturally occurring conversation, concluding that despite they have many things in common, there are some major differences as well.

### **2.3 Women, language and television**

In this section, I will provide a brief overview on how women use language and how they are represented in media. I will begin with a look on how women have been studied to use language, and then move on to how women have been represented in media in general. Finally, I will discuss how powerful female characters have been represented.

#### **2.3.1 Women using language**

Early studies on gender and language have tended to focus on how women and men use language instead of how women and men are constructed through language. The problem with these approaches is that they focus on gender solely from the perspective of the speaker's biological sex. Moreover, the early study of gender and language, especially by Robin Lakoff in 1975, has been criticized for its treatment of men's language as the default and for considering women's weaker and deficient, as it is said to contain more elements of uncertainty, such as tag questions, hedges and minimal responses (Litosseliti 2006:27-30, Culpeper 2001:165.) More recently, it has been suggested by Rey (2001:141) that "female language is generally characterized as emphasizing the establishment of 'community' among speakers, while male language is typically represented as more concerned with the effective transmission of information to listeners". It has also been found that, more than men, women tend to use more standard linguistic forms, act as innovators in linguistic change more than men and use language in order to identify themselves with higher status groups (Culpeper (2001:16).

The use of profanities is not traditionally typical for women. According to Culpeper (2001:191), swearing is often an implication of emotions, such as anger. He also notes that swear words have power as they are linguistic taboos. Jay (1992:169) argues that men tend to use offensive language more than women. However, he also mentions that both men and women use more profanities when being around "members of the same sex". Jay (1992:82) also points out that women and men use profanities differently. McCabe (2006:63) notes that, for example, in *Deadwood* the female character Calamity Jane's use of foul language is shocking to the viewer, even though she is depicted as harsh and masculine-like. She points out that the ugly language is used by Calamity Jane as a way of protection in the TV series, in order to show others that she is not afraid to defend herself, and also as a way to hide from one's own feelings. In addition, McCabe (2006:71) argues that Calamity Jane's foul language use is a way to break the conventions of Victorian women.

### **2.3.2 The representation of women in media**

Litosseliti (2001:42) argues that biological explanations of gender differences can reinforce gender stereotypes and justify male privileges. In her view, these explanations

include the vision that women are naturally maternal and emotional. Barker (1999:87) also points out that men are often regarded to be "'naturally' more aggressive, domineering, hierarchically oriented and power hungry while women are seen as nurturing, child rearing and domestically oriented". Moreover, Barker continues that studies in the fields of sociology, culture and feminism have strived to challenge this kind of biological determinism by defining sex and gender as different concepts, sex referring to the biological representation and gender referring to the cultural and socially constructed representation of women and men. Fine (2012:153) argues that contemporary TV series have "caught up with the women's movement" by introducing female characters who "pack pistols without hesitation, wear the pants and command the screen". According to her, creating female characters with heroic power questions the traditional masculine heroism. In a similar vein LaGamba (2012:9) argues that women on screen can only be strong when they possess traits that are usually assigned to male characters only. Despite this, LaGamba (2012:24) also argues that female characters' identities are often constructed in their relation to male characters. This leads to female characters not being able to stand on their own.

Litosseliti (2006:93) argues that women's portrayal in media emphasizes their physical features, such as beauty and sexuality and excludes other characteristics. In addition to sex objects, women are represented as mothers and wives, which means that women are presented only in relation to others, men in particular, instead of being independent. Moreover, they are often placed in supporting roles or victims, whereas men are described to be strong, independent, active and sexually confident (Litosseliti 2006:93). Motherhood is one aspect of femininity and a role that is often assigned to female characters. According to Hunter (2012:320), "mainstream American TV has not been kind to mothers". By this, she refers to the rise in TV series that had a single father taking care of the family. This rise occurred between years 1990 and 2006, and in these TV series, the mother of the family was either dead, in jail or negligent. LaGamba (2012:16) also notes that in crime films mothers and white women in general were banished, and only treated as objects. Similarly, according to Hunter (2012:321), in most TV shows in the late 1990s and early 2000s motherhood was treated as an end point for characters, instead of presenting them as subjects who would have deserved attention and progress. However, she (2012:321) also notes that it was encouraging to find that in some TV series of the turn of the millennium (such as *Gilmore Girls* and

*Judging Amy*) many of the mothers were working, which led them to exist in both public and private sphere instead of only one of them. Nevertheless, Hunter (2012:321) points out that many TV series emphasize the masculine head of the family. She (2012:322) concludes that even though American television has shown some progress in representing mothers, in general it is still quite common that mother characters gain less attention in the narrative and are reduced to the nurturing mother role instead of developing into multi-dimensional characters. She also points out that very often female protagonists are pictured as returning to their family homes or towns as adults, which, according to her, leads to the woman protagonist to be shown to be interesting only when she is brought back to the domestic sphere in which she plays the role of the mother and the child at the same time. Also Litosseliti (2006:92) argues that women, in addition to being under-represented in media, are often represented in stereotypical and limiting ways.

Language shapes gender as much as it reflects the gender division (Culpeper 2001:17). Barker (1999:86) points out that representations of gender on television also constitute gender as a cultural identity. Litosseliti (2006:58) argues that "[g]endered discourses *position* women and men in certain ways, and at the same time, people *take up* particular gendered subject positions that constitute gender more widely." Barker (1999:92) points out that as gender is a social and historical construct, the representation of women and also "the subject positions and identifications available to women are open to change". Rey (2001:140) finds it important to study linguistic gender differences on television over a longer time period to identify the changes that have happened in American television culture in relation to the characterization of roles for both men and women. She also notes that "differences in language use along gender lines are not so much a problem inherent in language as they are indicators of social and cultural attitudes." A similar point is also made by Barker (1999:87) who argues that the political, cultural and social discourses on gender are at the core of women being unequal to men. In sum, it is through language that gender stereotypes are constituted and maintained. However, language is also in key role in terms of changing attitudes and stereotypes related to gender. In addition to gender, there are also other aspects of identity that affect the representation of women. Litosseliti (2006:65) points out that gender is intertwined with, for example, race, ethnicity, age, religion, social class,

sexual orientation and so on. It is therefore important to pay attention to these other aspects when studying female characterization as well.

### **2.3.3 The representation of powerful women characters**

Fine (2012:154) names toughness and aggression as heroic characteristics, as according to her, "traits are conceptualized as being either male or female." This means that being of either gender assigns some traits to that person. Fine (2012:155) argues that breaking the boundaries of gender interrupt the performance of gender. What she means is that as people behave in the limits set by the cultural gender roles, they perform the gender role assigned to them and reinforce the gender stereotypes. Breaking these boundaries is confusing and it reconstructs these cultural gender roles. She continues that aggression and toughness combined with the role of the protector also identifies female characters as heroic figures, which leads to challenging their feminine gender performance. However, LaGamba (2012:3) argues that female characters who possess physical power have been often emotionally or physically abused by male characters. Thus they have gained their anger and physical power from their associations with the male gender. LaGamba (2012:3-4, 22) continues that the female angry women characters' definitions are dependent on male characters, which undermines their power as independent women. In addition, according to LaGamba (2012:2-3), it is the women with power that often suffer negative consequences of "their authoritative personalities". Moreover, LaGamba (2012:76) argues that the "contemporary angry woman" still needs to be erotically attractive: she needs to have a highly sexualized appearance, a perfect body and wears black leather and often has short dark hair. LaGamba (2012:77) also argues that the angry woman often does not love men, as she has been abused by them. In her view, their identities are nevertheless modified by their relationships with men.

### **2.3.4 Summary**

In this section, firstly, I discussed the study of women's language use. Secondly, I dealt with women being represented in media, concentrating on television. Thirdly, I explained how powerful women characters have been represented on television and film.

## **2.4 Previous research on *Sons of Anarchy***

In this section, I will discuss the previous studies that have been conducted on *Sons of Anarchy*. I will begin with Fine's (2012) study on female TV heroines and then move on to the collection of essays edited by Eberl and Dunn (2013) on the philosophical theories in relation to *Sons of Anarchy*.

### **2.4.1 Fine on Gemma Teller Morrow and Marshal Mary Shannon**

In her study on female TV heroines, Fine (2012) has concentrated on discussing Gemma Teller Morrow, one of the female characters I will also deal with in my analysis, alongside with Marshal Mary Shannon of *In Plain Sight*. She argues that Gemma is not simply a tough woman, but a heroic woman, because she uses her toughness to act as a protector (Fine 2012: 154). She uses aggression that generally has been associated with the male gender to protect her son, grandson, the motorcycle club and also the whole town of Charming (Fine 2012:156). She also uses instrumental violence to get justice when she has been raped and cold-bloodedly shoots the woman who was involved in her rape. As a result, she becomes an outlaw hero (Fine 2012:157-158). It is also noted that part of Gemma's toughness is testified by her ability to undergo the rape and keep it a secret and thus avoid the uproar that it would cause if the club found out about it (Fine 2012:167). Moreover, Fine (2012:164) argues that even though gender roles in *Sons of Anarchy* are otherwise traditional, Gemma's character does not fit into the women's place in this hierarchy and this thus challenges the unequal balance of the genders in the TV series.

Even though Gemma possesses a great deal of heroic characteristics that are usually associated with male characters, she also has some traits that could weaken her heroic powers (Fine 2012:153). Fine (2012:162) argues that even though Gemma broadens the way in which the feminine gender is constructed, she also has limitations as far as her sexuality is concerned that for example her husband does not have. The "old lady" of a club member is expected to be monogamous to her male partner while the male partner

is free from similar expectations, as long as the old lady never finds out about his sexual adventures. This imbalance could thus undermine Gemma's heroic power. (Fine 2012: 162-163.) Fine also notes that in the opening scene of *Sons of Anarchy*, Gemma is introduced in a different way than the male characters. Her introduction is highly sexualized, inviting the male gaze upon her breasts. This gaze is then interrupted by a focus on the scar from her heart surgery, whereas the male characters' introductions are more concentrated on the characters' toughness and have no sexual connotations (2012: 166.) In Fine's view that the scar is "a visual reminder of her toughness".

Fine (2012: 169) argues that Gemma's (grand)motherhood does not feminize her protective aggression, because she crosses the line by threatening an innocent baby girl with a gun to get what she wants. In other words, she engages in actions that are pure evil to protect her family and to find her grandson. Fine (2012: 170) claims that she could have picked anybody to threaten with the gun, hence picking the female child is a message that she does not have the instinct to protect and nurture in general. However, as a female hero, Gemma using aggression in the way subscribed to the male gender bends the inflexible gender roles (Fine 2012:71).

#### **2.4.2 Contributors to the collection by Dunn and Eberl on the women in *Sons of Anarchy***

Besides Fine, also Dunn and Eberl (2013) have examined *Sons of Anarchy*. In their study, the collection of essays *Sons of Anarchy: Brains before bullets*, the focus was on discussing the philosophical dimensions of the series. For the purposes of the present study, the most relevant chapters include the chapters by Aarons and Kolb that consider specifically the women of *Sons of Anarchy* and the chapter by Ahumada and Jung dealing with character identity. The essays of Eberl, Corn, Leveringhaus Littmann and Zanin also contain relevant thoughts for this study. Here, I will introduce some central observations in the chapters that are related to Gemma and Tara, the two female characters that the present study also concentrates on.

Aarons (2013:165) explains that in *Sons of Anarchy*, the men have the power, as it is their votes that count in the clubhouse and the women need to "strategize from the



outside looking in". She continues that the men of SAMCRO know that violence is the way to get things done and that they ruthlessly manipulate and take advantage of whomever they need to. However, she also reminds us that the male members of the club are only one part of the story, since the female characters "play equally pivotal roles in the action". Also, Kolb (2013:175) notes that "the women of *Sons of Anarchy* have pivotal, powerful roles in the drama, despite not being official members of the MC." Nevertheless, Aarons (2013:165) also points out that the women of SAMCRO know how to manipulate too. She argues that even though women like Gemma and Tara are strong and resourceful, their energy, focus and identity are devoted to the men of SAMCRO. In other words, they only exist for the men in the TV series. According to Aarons, Tara's dedication to medicine gradually decreases as the story progresses, as she becomes more committed to the club and Jax, the male protagonist of *Sons of Anarchy* (Aarons 2013:165.) Moreover, Aarons (2013:166) points out that for Gemma, the motorcycle club is a central part of her life, as she has dedicated her whole life to the club even though she can never be an actual member of it. She continues that Gemma finds her manipulative ways to influence the club from the outside anyway. Kolb (2013:176) also argues that it is the women that keep the world of SAMCRO running even though they have no formal power in the club. Aarons characterizes Gemma as a "strong-willed, assertive person with deep convictions of her own" and mentions that she is passionate about serving and protecting the club and her family, which makes her a valuable asset to the motorcycle club (Aarons 2013:166.) However, Aarons (2013:167) notes that, although Gemma cherishes her role as an old lady of the SAMCRO's president, it becomes evident that she believes her marriage is more equal and respectful than Clay does and in the end it appears that for the club she is simply "just an old lady".

Aarons (2013:168) describes Gemma as "ferociously protective of her son and seemingly jealous of another woman entering Jax's life – especially one who has hurt him before". Hence, Gemma is not happy that Tara returns to Charming in the pilot episode. Moreover, Aarons (2013:169) points out that Gemma's sense of family is indefinite as she sometimes considers, for example, Tara to be part of the family and other times not. This makes her suspicious. About Tara, Aarons (2013:171) writes that she has "achieved her own identity", as she has had more choices in life than Gemma. In the beginning of the TV series she was found usually in the hospital practicing her

medical profession as a neonatal surgeon (Aarons 2013:171). However, as her relationship with Jax progresses and becomes more serious, she is seen less at the hospital and more often by the clubhouse patching bullet wounds. This leads to her compromising her own safety, freedom and career (Aarons 2013:171). Aarons (2013:172) also notes that it is traditional in Western cultures that man is the main provider in the family, and this also applies to *Sons of Anarchy*, as Jax refuses to go with Tara to Oregon where Tara would have a position as a surgeon, as then it would be her "old lady" who would support the family financially.

Kolb (2013:175) introduces the masculine and feminine spheres of *Sons of Anarchy*. The masculine sphere she describes as powerful and aggressive, but compared to the feminine sphere, something that deals with things that are less relevant. Kolb (2013:176) continues that the feminine sphere actually deals in matters of giving and sustaining life and in maintaining caring relationships. Kolb (2013:176) also argues that there is persistent tension between the feminine and masculine spheres. Kolb mentions Gemma caring for Clay by giving injections for his hands, as he has arthritis, which means that he will be able to ride his motorcycle and continue his violent behaviour. Kolb (2013:177) also notes that the women in *Sons of Anarchy* stay at home or in the clubhouse raising children, healing, protecting and feeding, whereas men live in a world of assault rifles, motorcycles, drugs, political alliances and power plays. This is to say that the gender roles in *Sons of Anarchy* are very traditional, as it is an ancient Victorian idea that men and women live in different spheres based on their biological sex (Kolb 2013:177). As a summary, Kolb (2013:178) points out that even though the "Mothers of Anarchy" have no control on the surface, "in reality they use their power in the private sphere to influence the public sphere and effect great change, albeit with little public recognition for their efforts."

Kolb (2013:179) also points out that, because Gemma keeps her assault in secret in order to protect the club, she acts bravely. Moreover, Kolb writes, she only decides to tell the club about the rape when she does not want Jax to leave Charming and go 'nomad'. According to Kolb (2013:179), by doing this she brings the whole club closer together and by turning her pain into an advantage "she really is the undisputed "queen" of SAMCRO". Kolb also states that Gemma is not just the biological mother of Jax but

a mother to all the Sons. She was the one bringing the club to Charming in the first place and has orchestrated the club since the beginning (Kolb 2013:179). Kolb (2013:179-180) argues that motherhood is tightly rooted in the feminine sphere of the club, as both of the most important women are mothers. She (2013:182) continues that ethical care actually grows in importance as the TV series progresses and that the mother-child bond acts often as a catalyst for action. She (2013:182) gives an example of this:

Gemma, in her need to care for her grandson, encourages her son to rage and kill without thought. She even goes so far as to put a gun to another baby's head and threaten a group of nuns for information on his whereabouts ("Bainne"). Her own use of a baby as "goddamn poker chip" is rewarded in this instance, which drives home how complicated and problematic it is to try to combine the care ethic with the violent criminal world that Gemma inhabits.

Kolb (2013:183) continues to describe Gemma as caring about her family in a more traditional manner as well; she cooks big family meals and cleans up Jax's room at the clubhouse and his house. According to Kolb (2013:183), also Tara grows into her matriarchal role within the club, beginning with serving as the club always on-call, and in the end she accepts her role as an "old lady" in the hierarchical rank of the women of SAMCRO. She "represents a new generation of female power" (Kolb 2013:183), as her professional training as a surgeon empowers her to be able to provide for her family in case they would need to move out of Charming for beginning a new life. Fosl (2013:191) suggests that Jax and Tara at the ending of season 4 (Tara standing behind Jax who is sitting by the end of the table as the new president and holding her hand on his heart just like in an old photograph of J.T. and Gemma) give new hope for the club showing that the history of the club can take a different turn and does not need to deteriorate, even though before this change the future of the club has not been bright. However, in the end of Season 5, Tara is arrested, because she put her role in the club above her responsibilities as a care-giving healer and mother (Kolb 2013:184). Gemma, on the other hand, has been under the influence of the male-dominated society her whole life, which has led her care about her family in a very masculine form of retributive justice (Kolb 2013:184).

Ahumada and Jung write about the identity construction in *Sons of Anarchy*. They describe (2013:128) Tara as follows:

When we first meet Tara Knowles, she is wearing her scrubs and saying things like "congenital birth defect" and "gastroschisis." Dr. Knowles explains to Jax Teller and Gemma Morrow the frail condition of Jax's newborn son, Abel: born ten weeks premature to a junkie mother, Abel will need all the medical help he can get. It's a good thing that the accomplished Dr. Knowles has volunteered to be on Abel's watch, since she seems to care deeply about Abel and Jax. But when Gemma lifts Tara's shirt to reveal a tattoo on the small of her back (the type sometimes called a "tramp stamp"), we get a fuller glimpse of who Tara Knowles is – or should we say was? Tara asserts that she's not the same person she was ten years ago when she left Charming for college and then medical school, saying about her tattoo, "I leave it there so I remember all that shit's behind me" ("Pilot").

As Ahumada and Jung point out, among other things, what Tara says is extremely important in relation to her identity construction. Also Eberl (2013:9) points out that Tara had to leave Charming in order to construct her identity as a healer, as she explains in the episode "Seeds" (Season 1, episode 2). In it, she says that she did not hate Charming when she left it, just herself in it at the time. Ahumada and Jung (2013:129) argue that, as *Sons of Anarchy's* plot furthers, Tara is slowly beginning to look more like Gemma than a doctor. Moreover, as Tara has come back to Charming, her identity undergoes dramatic changes as she starts helping the club and disregarding the hospital policies (Ahumada and Jung 2013:135). In other words, Tara begins to distance herself from the skillful surgeon identity and move more towards the "old lady" of an outlaw motorcycle club member identity. However, both Gemma and Tara's supervisor, Margaret Murphy, remind her that her vocation is to be a healer (Littmann 2013b:231). Ahumada and Jung (2013:136) argue that Tara's life project is to have a happy life including working as a doctor, raising her children and being with Jax. However, they continue, her attempt to fulfill this goal shows viewers what it costs to become involved with SAMCRO. In addition, they point out that Tara is an exceptional character in *Sons of Anarchy*, as she becomes associated with SAMCRO during the show, whereas other characters are already fully involved with the club and have life goals inseparable of the motorcycle club world. They continue that once Tara becomes Jax's "old lady", her whole character, including her dreams and her ethics, changes, as she begins to help the club in order to reach her life project of a happy life with Jax. They also argue that this leads to Tara often finding herself torn between her past self and her current self.

Corn (2013:120-121) compares the motorcycle club to both ancient and modern religious all-male communities in which inequality between genders is common in, such as Roman Catholics and Jews. Corn explains that male bonding is near religious duties in these all-male societies and this also applies to SAMCRO. Even though Gemma is one type of a queen within the SAMCRO community and she has some control over club business, in the end she is no different from other "old ladies" (Corn 2013:122). When it comes to religion, Gemma is not interested in religious activities per se, but she does state that she believes in family, and family for her includes the SAMCRO community as well (Leveringhaus 2013:97).

Zanin (2013:157) describes Gemma as "street-wise, fierce, passionate, intrusive, manipulative, and violently protective" and points out that she is also conniving and scheming. According to Zanin (2013:158), Charming and Gemma's family suffers from Gemma's lust for power and desire of affirmation. She continues to describe Gemma's love towards her son as pathological and "rooted in a desire to possess". Zanin (2013:158) argues that Tara and Gemma are competing for Jax's life, which makes Jax's life an emotional war zone and which culminates in Jax having to choose between his mother and his wife. Zanin also argues that Tara and Gemma appear very similar, despite their explosive relationship, even though in the beginning Tara seems to be the exact opposite of Gemma, as she is "gentle, kind, righteous (even self-righteous), morally sound – all the characteristics required of a doctor who values lives of her patients". However, Zanin also finds that, as Tara's relationship with Jax progresses and she becomes more involved with the club, her strong ethical code constituting the core of her identity is challenged. Zanin (2013:158) also notes that Tara's character development can also be seen in her changing appearance, as her appearance evolves from the doctor in her scrubs into a biker chick reminding the viewer of Gemma's biker style, including the attitude and manipulation skills.

Littmann (2013:221a) also writes about Gemma's maternal instincts telling that Gemma gives emotional support for Clay, Jax and Tara, tries to help her sick father and adores her grandsons. He continues to give an example of Gemma's desire to possess that Zanin (above) also mentioned:

In "Bainne", Jax decides to leave his son with a loving couple in Ireland to spare him a life of crime. To Gemma, this is unthinkable. As she explains to a group of horrified nuns at gunpoint, she'd rather a child of her blood was chopped in two than raised by strangers.

Littmann (2013b:230) points out that there is a moral disconnect in Gemma's character, as she is sometimes shown to be nurturing and even helping strangers, yet she is still supporting the club that sells weapons and kills innocents. He also describes her as a "moral monster who helps to prop up a harmful criminal organization".

### **2.4.3 Summary**

In this section, I have discussed earlier studies on *Sons of Anarchy*. Fine (2012) discussed Gemma's heroic characteristics, concluding that despite the toughness and heroic qualities she obtains, the restrictions on her sexuality could undermine her heroic power. The contributors to the collection by Dunn and Eberl (2013) on *Sons of Anarchy* concentrated on the philosophical point of view of the TV series. Aarons wrote about the women characters' altering throughout the TV series, and Kolb also introduced the male and female spheres in the TV series. Corn explained that although Gemma seemed to have some power in the club environment, in the end she was "just an old lady". Ahumada and Jung, in turn, discussed Tara's identity construction and change as she became more involved with the club. The incoherence of Gemma's maternal instincts was also seen in many of the essays, as at one point she could be very nurturing and in another point she could be a cold-blooded murderer.

## **3 SET-UP OF THE STUDY**

In this chapter, I will first introduce the aims and research questions of the present study. Then, I will move on to explain the methods of analysis and describe the data and the methods of collecting it.

### **3.1 Aims and research questions of the present study**

The aim of this research is to investigate in what way the female characters are constructed and represented in the TV series *Sons of Anarchy*. I will investigate the different roles the female characters have and how their identities are negotiated during the four first seasons of the TV series.

Thus, my main research question is:

- How are the female characters constructed in the TV series *Sons of Anarchy*?

In addition to my main research question, I have two additional research questions that will assist me in finding an answer to my main research question. It is as follows:

- How does the language the characters use contribute to their character construction?
- What kind of a role do interactions with other characters have in constructing the female characters?

*Sons of Anarchy* is an important topic for a study like the present one, because the TV series is very popular all over the Western world. As was discussed above, television reflects the cultural reality and subtly affects the attitudes of people, and this makes a popular TV series worth studying. Moreover, even though *Sons of Anarchy* is an American TV series, it has been aired worldwide, which makes it meaningful in not only the United States, but in the whole Western world. The events of *Sons of Anarchy* take place in an outlaw motorcycle club, which is basically on the dark side of the society, since the club is involved in criminal business, yet the viewer can still identify with the characters. As was discussed above, it is interesting to study the women's role in this kind of a setting, as the motorcycle club is a men's world; there are no proper members in the club that are female. The lead female characters seem to be modern and strong but still there are some very traditional values that the club possesses. Thus, as popular TV series are reflections of the cultural reality, I aim at tracking the values and attitudes of the implied viewers of the show by studying the women characters in it. In a

broader sense, it could provide useful information of the position of the female gender in the Western world, too.

### **3.2 Methods of analysis**

In this chapter, I will discuss my methods of analysis. My analysis is mainly based on Pearson's (2007) taxonomy of character construction that consists of six different aspects of forming a character. However, I will also be combining quantitative methods to my otherwise qualitative analysis, as I will be using corpus methodology in two of the above-mentioned aspects. Fischer-Starcke (2010:11) explains that using corpus linguistics can reveal issues in the text that by using other methods would not be detected, which is why I have decided to deal with speech patterns of the characters with it. However, Pearson's taxonomy forms the basic structure for my analysis, and corpus linguistics methodology is only used on the side as a helpful tool instead of the whole analysis being established on it.

I will now introduce more closely my methods of analysis. Firstly, I will explain Pearson's taxonomy that my analysis is strongly based on. Then, I will shortly introduce the use of corpora in analyzing television dialogue.

#### **3.2.1 Pearson's taxonomy on anatomising a televisual character**

Pearson (2007:43) adapts Bordwell's suggestion about a character constituting of traits, physical behaviour and speech by introducing a taxonomy of six key elements that the identity of a televisual character consists of. These six key elements are 1) psychological traits/habitual behaviour, 2) physical characteristics/appearance, 3) speech patterns, 4) interaction with other characters, 5) environment and 6) biography. I will use these key elements as a basis of my analysis, when investigating the representation of female characters in *Sons of Anarchy*.



For 1) psychological traits/habitual behaviour I will firstly use the first episode of *Sons of Anarchy*. Short (1999:200) points out that the beginnings of texts are strongly decontextualised, as the writer has not yet been able to give us any information about the world of the text, which according to Pearson (2007:42), leads to the fact that the first episode is particularly important when analyzing characters, as it tags the characters with their definitive characteristics. However, to show the development of the characters, I will also look into the later episodes after examining the psychological traits and habitual behaviour of the two characters in the first episode.

For 3) speech patterns I will draw on corpus linguistics methodology to find out the most used expressions by Gemma and Tara. I use the AntConc 3.2.4w (Windows) 2011 software as a tool to discover what kind of speech patterns are characteristic to them by searching word clusters associated with their names. Due to the limitations of time and space I am not able to compare their most used expressions with any larger corpus, as for example Culpeper (2001:199) and Bednarek (2010:69) would recommend to do, but I will disregard the typical expressions that could appear on any character's keywords list, such as *I'm* and *It's*, and pick the exceptional ones for further analysis.

I have formed the corpus by removing all the preliminary analyses and additional descriptions from the original file that I created when collecting the data. The dialogues and the speakers' names were then left and formed what I call SOA-corpus. I have decided to leave the names of the speakers in the corpus because then it is easier to see who is talking when doing concordances. According to Bednarek (2010:103-104), by retaining the names in the corpus, the analysis gets information of not only about the characters who talk the most, but also whom are talked about. This is another reason for my decision not to delete the speaker turns of the SOA-corpus, so that when searching with the characters' names, the result would show both the occasions when the character in question is talking and also when the character in question is talked about. The limitation of this is the fact that I cannot discover who is talked about the most or who is talking the most. However, it does show the most significant characters in *Sons of Anarchy*, from the female characters' point of view, which I consider to be enough for the present study. Babel (2006) finds in her study of doing friendship in *Sex and the City* that the two characters out of four that interact most frequently appear to be more

close to each other than the other two characters. It does therefore matter who shows up the most in the corpus. This feature I will take advantage of when choosing the characters for 4) interactions with other characters, to find out which characters Gemma and Tara are in contact most frequently.

### **3.2.2 The corpus methods**

I will now introduce the use of corpora in analyzing television dialogue. In two parts of my analysis, I will be taking advantage of corpus stylistics, which is why it is important to introduce it here. These two parts are speech patterns, in which I will run concordance searches for often occurring utterances for characters, and interactions with other characters, in which I will use the corpus to select the most important other characters for the two main characters of my analysis for further analysis.

Fischer-Starcke (2010:1) explains comprehensively that corpus stylistics is the combination of stylistics, which is "the linguistic analysis of literary texts", and corpus linguistics, which is "the electronic analysis of language data". According to her, its goals are to study the literary meanings of texts and also to study how the meanings are encoded in language and to develop techniques to interpret these meanings. She continues that the two disciplines, corpus linguistics and stylistics complement each other. Bednarek (2010:69) lists several linguistic features that can be found out by researchers when using corpora and software. These include:

(1) the frequency with which every word in the corpus occurs, (2) words that are unusually (in)frequent when compared with a reference corpus, (3) all occurrences of a particular word, (4) recurring larger structures (p-frames, n-grams, clusters, phrases), (5) grammatical frames, (6) collocations, (7) occurrences of parts of speech and their combinations, etc.

Bednarek finds the use of corpus stylistics as a method for studying television dialogue very useful. Fisher-Starcke (2010:3) also points out that corpus linguistics expects a correlation between the frequency of a pattern and its meaning in the data. She continues (2010:13) that corpus linguistic analyses exposes "tendencies and probabilities in language by way of electronically generated quantitative data". In other

words, corpus linguistics is an empirical and quantitative method that relies on numbers and generalizations.

Corpus linguistics is tightly connected to computers and technology (Anthony 2009:88). Anthony (2009:88) mentions that the rise of modern technology and corpora software has helped primarily the development of corpus linguistics. He also notes that the software becomes more and more important as the corpora grow larger, so it is very important that the software works properly. Anthony (2009:91) compares a corpus to a library and explains that the corpus software helps the linguist to make use of it. He introduces the corpus software *AntConc*, which is also used as a tool in this study. He (2009:89) describes it as "a freeware, standalone, multiplatform corpus toolkit developed by the author in collaboration with some of the leading corpus linguistics in the world". He continues that it is exceptional corpus software, as it is constantly developed and updated according to the feedback and suggestions received on it.

Bednarek (2010:193) argues that corpus linguistic methodology could be considered an alternative methodology in studying media and television. Bednarek (2010:72) uses reference corpora to compare the language of the characters in *Gilmore Girls* to naturally occurring conversation and recommends this method when analyzing television dialogue with the help of corpus stylistics. In the present study, no reference corpus is used, due to the limitations of access to these corpora of spoken language. Nevertheless, the use of the corpus provides useful information in the present study, as it is used alongside with other methods and the whole analysis does not depend on it.

### **3.3 Data**

In this chapter, I will first introduce my methods for collecting data. Then, I will describe the TV series *Sons of Anarchy* by explaining the main points of it, and then I will introduce the two characters that I will focus on this study. Subsequently, I will familiarize the reader with the main events of the four seasons that the data consists of.

### 3.3.1 Methods for collecting data

According to Pearson (2007:44), dialogue is used to "distinguish one character from another and to point up key psychological traits". Therefore, it feels logical to use dialogues in particular as my data. I will use the dialogues of the first four seasons of *Sons of Anarchy*. Each season consists of 13 episodes, except for season 4 that consists of 14 episodes, so altogether my data consists of 53 episodes. My data consists of the dialogues that have either one or both of the most central female characters of *Sons of Anarchy* participating in them. I first watched the 53 episodes of the four first seasons of *Sons of Anarchy*. While watching the episodes, I transcribed every dialogue that had Gemma and/or Tara participating in. Also, I transcribed the dialogues of other characters that had either Gemma or Tara as subjects. After transcribing a dialogue, I wrote a short preliminary analysis about it; made notes and observations about the conversations. Moreover, I marked the dialogues with key words, such as "sexuality", "motherhood" or "interaction with X", so that it would be easier for me to find relevant material, when doing my analysis. The .docx file that contains the dialogues and my preliminary notes on them consists of 398 pages. Also, I used the DVD's English subtitles as a tool when writing down the conversations, although I noticed somewhat many mistakes in them. I corrected those mistakes when making my own transcriptions. For section 3) of my analysis, I formed the SOA-corpus out of the transcribed dialogues by erasing all the notes, so that only the conversations and the speaker turns were left. When choosing the examples for the analysis, I watched the scenes containing the relevant dialogues again more carefully, paying attention to also other things than the text, such as facial expressions and tones of voice. I also double-checked while re-watching the scenes that my transcriptions had no mistakes in them.

### 3.3.2 The TV series *Sons of Anarchy*

Although the creator of *Sons of Anarchy*, Kurt Sutter, calls the TV series 'a motorcycle soap opera', it does not properly fit into the genre of soap opera. In fact, Bourdaa (2011) locates *Sons of Anarchy* as a TV series into the category of quality television. Quality TV is a new type of genre for television series. At first, it was the cable channel HBO that took risks and began showing TV series with a new type of complex narratives. The phenomenon spread and other cable channels began to produce TV series belonging to

the same genre of quality TV, one of them being the cable channel FX, which originally aired *Sons of Anarchy* (Bourdaa 2011:33-34.)

According to Bourdaa (2011), quality television has some central properties even though the type of TV series varies greatly. First of all, quality TV series contain complex narratives, many storylines and sub-plots. Secondly, there is a notion of seriality, which maintains the viewers' attention and makes them want to see more. In other words, even though episodes are independent entities in some sense, they always have a cliff-hanger so that the viewer feels that he or she needs to see the next episode also. Moreover, the quality TV series usually have a "previously happened" sequence in the beginning of each episode. Thirdly, Bourdaa (2011:37-38) mentions fandom and new technology as crucial factors of quality TV. All these factors of quality TV also apply to *Sons of Anarchy*.

The scenery of *Sons of Anarchy* is located in California in a small town called Charming and it deals with an outlaw motorcycle club called Sons of Anarchy, often referred to as SAMCRO (Sons of Anarchy Motorcycle Club, Redwood Original), as the club has spread across the country. The motorcycle club was founded in 1968 by Piney Winston and John Teller, the father of Jackson "Jax" Teller who is the main protagonist of the TV series. John Teller has died in 1991 and the president of the club is now Clay Morrow, the step-father of Jax. It is implied that Jax will be the heir of the presidency when Clay resigns. The motorcycle club owns a clubhouse that is disguised as a garage where most of the events take place when they are not on the road.

The members of the motorcycle club are all male, but most of them have wives or girlfriends who have a central role in the club despite the fact that they are not members in it. One of them is Jax's mother and Clay's wife, Gemma Morrow Teller. Another central female character is Doctor Tara Knowles, the high school sweetheart of Jax, who has left Charming as a young adult but has returned in the beginning of the first season of *Sons of Anarchy*.

The first episode of *Sons of Anarchy* was aired on September 3, 2008 on cable network FX in the United States. It has been the most popular TV series on FX so far. Seven seasons have been produced and aired. In Finland, SubTV began airing *Sons of Anarchy* in 2010 and has finished airing the final season in 2016.

*Sons of Anarchy* as a TV series has been described as drawing on conventions of the Western as a genre (Johnson 2012: 125). Hence, the male characters are depicted as very masculine and violent. Moreover, the whole motorcycle club world seems to be a men's world in which women do not have much power, if any. Nevertheless, the female characters seem to be quite multidimensional, especially those that have the 'old lady' status. An 'old lady' is what the wives and girlfriends of the motorcycle club members are referred to. They are presented as strong women who are protective mothers to the whole club, yet in some cases they are expected to be submissive wives to their husbands and to do exactly as they are told.

### **3.2.2 The most important women of *Sons of Anarchy***

I have chosen to focus in my analysis on the two most central female characters in my analysis. As has already been mentioned, they are Gemma Teller Morrow (played by Katey Sagal) and Tara Knowles (played by Maggie Siff). The reason why I chose these two strong women characters is the fact that they are the most interesting and multi-faceted female characters in the TV series. Moreover, as they are central characters, they appear in all episodes and therefore they provide plenty of material to analyze.

Gemma Teller Morrow, 52, is the wife of Clay Morrow, the president of the motorcycle club. She is also the mother of Jackson "Jax" Teller, the lead character of the TV series. This makes her the mother figure of the whole motorcycle club. She is strong, cunning, manipulative and very protective, especially towards her son and her grandson Abel, who is born to Jax and his heroine-addict ex-wife Wendy in the first episode of *Sons of Anarchy*. Gemma has a genetic heart disorder, which is why she has a relatively big scar on her chest and which causes her to have a heart attack when she is really stressed.

However, she does not let her heart condition soften or slow her down. According to Kurt Sutter, she is the true matriarch.

Tara Knowles, 30, is Jax's ex-girlfriend from their high school years in the beginning of the TV series. She has left Charming after high school because she wanted more than Charming could offer but in the first episode she has returned. Later, it turns out that she has fled from a stalker who comes after her to Charming, and Jax ends up killing him. Tara and Jax end up getting together again, breaking up a few times during the seasons, and later in the show they also have a child together. Tara is a doctor, and in the beginning she takes care of Jax's son, Abel, who is in intensive care after being prematurely born. Tara's character develops a great deal during the episodes, as does the relationship between her and Gemma.

The relationship between Gemma and Tara is complex. Gemma is so protective towards her son that no woman seems to be good enough for him. Moreover, she is bitter because Tara left and abandoned Charming years earlier. Tara is a "good girl", and Gemma considers her too sensitive to become an old lady, as the motorcycle club earns most of its income by crime. However, Tara loves Jax deeply and later proves herself to be tough enough for the old lady status. The relationship between Gemma and Tara remains quite tense even though they begin to get along. Also, when Gemma gets raped, she confides in no one but Tara in addition to Unser, the sheriff who finds her after the rape.

Gemma and Tara are very different, when considering their education, age, position in the club and morals. Gemma does not seem to have higher education. She is a housewife and occasionally does paperwork for the motorcycle club. She has her own office but she is never seen doing any work there. Tara, in turn, studied medicine in Chicago and is working as a doctor. She is also often referred to have been a very good student. There is also a gap of generations between them, as Tara is 30 years old and in a relationship with Gemma's son, whereas Gemma is already in her fifties and a grandmother. Their position in the club also differs greatly, as Gemma has been with the club since the beginning of it, as she was married to the founding member John

Teller. Tara, then, is a newcomer to the motorcycle club and to the world of crime in general. She has the moral concepts of a normal person in today's world, at least in the beginning. She knows that killing and stealing are wrong and that criminals should be punished. In contrast, Gemma does not avoid any means when her family is in question. She has plenty of dirty secrets and she seems to have no bad conscience for any of her or the club's actions, as she believes that the end justifies the means. This is why it is important to include both of them in my analysis, to get a broader picture of the role of the female characters in *Sons of Anarchy*. I will also lightly introduce some other female characters as well, as the contrast between them and these two central female characters perhaps implies the differences there are in their positions.

#### **3.2.4 Summary of the four seasons of the series**

The first season of *Sons of Anarchy* begins with the explosion of the gun warehouse of the motorcycle club. Also, Jax's drug addict ex-wife, Wendy, gives birth to a son by an emergency C-section ten weeks prematurely. ATF agent Kohn, Tara's ex-boyfriend with a restraining order, is stalking Tara and pretends to be after the motorcycle club in Charming. Tara tells Jax about it, and Kohn is arrested and his career as a federal agent comes to an end. However, he comes to see Tara and tries to rape her but Tara manages to take his gun and shoots at him. Jax arrives and kills him and hides his body. In this way Tara also becomes involved with crime.

SAMCRO visits in Nevada, and Clay sleeps with Cherry, a "sweet-butt" of the Nevada charter, there. Later, Cherry comes to Charming to find Half-Sack, the new prospect of SAMCRO, and Gemma realizes she has had sex with her husband and hits her with a skateboard. The agent for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, or ATF, June Stahl, comes after SAMCRO and interrogates the women associated with the club. Stahl sets Opie, Jax's best friend, up to look like a "rat" to the club members and this leads to the shooting of his wife, Donna, as Clay and Tig, Clay's right hand, believe that he is informing the ATF about their gun-trafficking. Clay in turn frames the street gang One-Niners being responsible of Donna's shooting to protect the club members.



The second season starts with LOAN, League of American Nationalists, arriving in Charming intending to banish Sons of Anarchy from Charming. They gang rape Gemma to cause disorder in the motorcycle club, but Gemma realizes this and keeps quiet about the rape. Otto, an imprisoned club member, asks SAMCRO to help his wife, Luann, as her pornography business is threatened and for a short time SAMCRO makes a deal with her getting a new legal way of earning money. LOAN nearly kills one of the club members and Clay wants to revenge, which leads several club members' arrest, including Jax and Clay. They get out of the prison on bail money, meanwhile agent Stahl has come back to find out about SAMCRO's IRA connections.

Jax wants to go "Nomad", meaning that he would not be a proper member of the club anymore but an independent biker. Gemma tells him and Clay about her rape and convinces him to stay. Stahl arrests Edmond Hayes, the son of Cameron Hayes, who is a member of Real IRA dealing guns to SAMCRO. Stahl wants to use Edmond to apprehend his father. He tries to escape and Stahl ends up shooting him. Edmond's girlfriend, Polly, who is also the daughter of one of the LOAN members and responsible for luring Gemma to her rape, arrives at the house where Stahl is holding Edmond. Gemma follows her and shoots her. Stahl sees this and frames her also for shooting Edmond. Gemma flees Charming. Cameron kidnaps baby Abel.

An essential part of the events of the third season take place in Ireland, where Cameron flees with baby Abel. SAMCRO hires a bounty hunter to track him down. The members arrested in season two are supposed to have a bail hearing, so they are not supposed to leave the country. A nun contacts Gemma, telling her that Abel is safe in Belfast. Gemma finds out about his kidnapping and gets a heart attack and ends up in police custody because of the shootings that happened in the previous season. Tara finds out that she is pregnant and tells Gemma. Tara decides to get an abortion without telling Jax. Jax makes a deal with Stahl that she will let her mother free and cancel the charges against the club members if he gets her Jimmy O., the brother of Cameron. Gemma escapes custody with the help of Tara and leaves for Belfast with SAMCRO to get Abel back.

Father Ashby, Cameron's cousin, tells Jax that he should kill Jimmy O. and then he would get Abel back. However, Jax has promised to Stahl to get Jimmy O. alive for her. Meanwhile, Tara is kidnapped on her way to the abortion clinic. Ashby tells Jax Abel's location but suggests he would let him get adopted to get a better life. Jax decides to do so, so that Abel would avoid the life in a violent motorcycle club. However, Jimmy O. kills the couple adopting Abel and kidnaps him. Ashby trades himself to Abel and the baby is returned to Jax. SAMCRO returns to the United States and Jax goes to rescue Tara. Stahl keeps her promise about freeing Gemma and arranging the club members to do only a short time in prison, as she thinks she will get Jimmy O. However, a member of SAMCRO, Chibs, kills Jimmy and Opie kills Stahl as an act of retaliation since she was the one responsible for Donna's death.

In the beginning of season 4, Jax, Clay and other club members have been released out of prison for parole. Tara has had the baby and they have named him Thomas. She has been taking care of Abel and Thomas with the help of Gemma. Jax tells Tara that he wants to get out of the club, as it would be better for the boys to grow up in a more peaceful environment. Clay makes a deal with a drug cartel about muling cocaine in addition to selling guns to them. Clay promises Jax that he will get out of SAMCRO if he accepts the deal with the cartel. While Jax has been in prison, Tara has found and read a stack of old letters from John Teller to Maureen, who has put them in Jax's bag when he was leaving Belfast. The letters reveal that John Teller did not die accidentally but was killed by Clay and Gemma. Gemma finds out about the letters and tells Clay about them. Clay decides that Tara must be killed but does not tell this to Gemma.

Clay kills Piney, as Tara has told him about the letters. Unser, the Sheriff of Charming and a friend of the club, steals the copies of the letters from Tara's office. Clay reads them and burns them. Then, he convinces Gemma that they were the original letters and that there is no worry about them anymore. He hires the drug cartel to kill Tara. The cartel fails to kidnap Tara but her hand is hurt badly in the incident. Tara gives Gemma the letters, and Gemma lets Jax read them. She has hidden the ones that reveal her part in John Teller's death. Jax decides, by the manipulation of Gemma, that he has to kill Clay. Opie shoots Clay, as he finds out Clay was the one who killed Piney, his father. Clay goes through surgeries and survives the shooting. Tara gives Jax an injection with

which he can kill Clay so that it cannot be traced to him. However, Jax finds out that the deal with the cartel and the Irish will not happen if the Irish will not deal with Clay, and the cartel turns out to be run by CIA. They threaten Jax that if he will not become the new president of SAMCRO, the whole club will be taken into federal custody. Jax decides to stay. He makes Clay step down as president and takes his place at the head of the table. Tara decides to stay and stand by him instead of leaving Charming.

## **4 ANALYSIS**

I have divided my analysis into six main sections adapting Pearson's taxonomy of constructing a televisual character. Each section is divided into two, the first part concentrating on Gemma and the second part concentrating on Tara. If needed, there are sub-sections under these as well. I will illustrate the analysis with examples from the data, mainly concentrating on dialogues. Some of the sections are further sub-divided to clarify the layout of the analysis. After each section I will briefly discuss the main findings made in it.

### **4.1 Psychological traits/habitual behaviours**

In this section, I will look at the psychological traits and habitual behaviours that Gemma and Tara are described to have. I will illustrate these with typical examples from the data. As the first episode is the one that tags the characters with their substantial characteristics (Pearson 2007:42), I will pay special attention to it but I will also show other examples supporting my notions from the data.

#### **GEMMA**

Gemma is very open about her sexuality and she is cheeky, as well in her language as in other behavior. Gemma is often located in her kitchen in the mornings, drinking black coffee and smoking. These are habitual behaviors for her that can be seen repeatedly

during the four seasons. Moreover, she throws dinner parties and cooks for the whole club every now and then. It is also made clear several times that she loves to eat meat. Example 1 illustrates the first sequence in which this becomes evident. Gemma is talking to Jax on the phone.

### **Example 1**

Season 1, episode 1

Gemma	Still coming to dinner tomorrow night? I'm picking up steaks from the German.
Jax	Oh, you know it.
Gemma	You should bring Chibs and that new kid.
Jax	New kid doesn't eat meat.
Gemma	Don't patch him in. Can't trust anyone who doesn't eat meat.

In this example of the very first episode of *Sons of Anarchy*, Gemma is throwing a dinner party, as is typical of her, and Jax points out that the new prospect of the club does not eat meat. Gemma humorously tells Jax that the club should not initiate the new prospect as a member in the motorcycle club as she claims that vegetarians cannot be trusted. This example also shows how Gemma can be quick to judge other people, even though her comment has been humorous. Moreover, Jax's comment "Oh, you know it" suggests that she in fact is a very good cook, like a mother of a big family should be.

Gemma's manipulative nature becomes evident already in the end of the first episode of *Sons of Anarchy*. In Example 2, she is in her bedroom with Clay, as she is very often at the end of the episodes, and they are having a conversation.

### **Example 2**

Season 1, episode 1

Gemma	You gotta nail Jax down. You have to nail him down hard, Clay. Whatever it takes. I don't want the ghost of John poisoning him. Ruining everything we've built.
Clay	Nothings gonna get ruined, okay? Just don't throw your panic into high gear.
Gemma	They respect him. Jax is strong. And when you step down as presi---

Clay	Hey, hey. I'm not going anywhere.
Gemma	I know baby. I know. It's just. When you can't ride anymore... They'll vote my son in as president. I just wanna make sure he's following in the right father's footsteps. Okay?

Gemma tells Clay, her husband and the step-father of her son, that he needs to take control over Jax. When she says that she does not want Jax to "ruin everything we've built" she refers to herself as a builder of the motorcycle club, even though officially she is not a member of the club. John is her former husband, and Jax's father, whom Gemma and Clay plotted to get killed, as will be revealed in Season 3. Gemma is worried that "the ghost of John will poison Jax", as Jax has shown interest in his father's actions. Moreover, as Clay has arthritis, his presidency is at stake, as if one cannot ride, one cannot be the president of the motorcycle club. Also, as Jax is the son of the founding member, John Teller, he is likely to become the new president for SAMCRO. This is why Gemma is so worried, as she is afraid that Jax will also become soft like his father, wanting to earn money for the club in legal ways, which will decrease the club's – and Gemma's – power. Example 3 also reveals the manipulative nature of Gemma. She is at Jax's house with Clay. Agent Kohn has made a mess of the baby's room in the house, because he has been jealous of Tara.

### Example 3

Season 1, episode 7

Gemma	She's getting under his skin. I can feel it. It's bad for us.
Clay	I'm keeping an eye on it. Not letting anything turn Jax away from SAMCRO, especially pussy.
Gemma	Tara's not pussy. He loved her, probably still does.
(Tig arrives)	
Tig	Whoa. Hey, Anita just called. Lowell, MIA. She just found Moby in the apartment, crying and locked in the bathroom.
Clay	Shit.
Tig	Yeah, he probably went to Lodi looking to score.
(Clay sighs)	
Gemma	It's not your fault, baby. You've been taking care of Lowell since he was 16. You done everything you could. Just some shit you can't escape.
Tig	It's like father, like son.
Gemma	Yeah.
Clay	It looks like it's going that way.
Gemma	Gotta remember what's important. Big picture.

Tig                    I'll call Vista, see if he checked in.  
Gemma                No one blames you if Lowell don't come home.

(They look at each other for a long time)

Gemma's choice of words is interesting, as she claims Tara being "bad for us". Here she again includes herself as part of the motorcycle club. Moreover, as Tig comes in and informs them that Lowell has gone missing, Gemma hints Clay that nobody will blame him if Lowell will not be found, as he has become a burden because of his drug use. It becomes evident in the episode that Lowell's father has also been addicted to drugs like Lowell now, and Clay has been the one getting him killed with Gemma being the partner in crime but they have blamed it on the Mayan's motorcycle club. Gemma reminds Clay of the "big picture", for which people sometimes have to be killed. It is also noteworthy that Gemma is actively taking part in these conversations between club members whereas other women tend to keep quiet if club business is being talked about.

Gemma's motherhood is one of her key features in *Sons of Anarchy*. She acts as a motherly figure to her family, to the motorcycle club and to the whole town of Charming. Her motherhood is not only caring and nurturing but also fierce defending of her blood and her family. This can be seen in Example 4, in which Gemma is visiting Wendy, the drug-addict ex-wife of Jax, in the hospital with a bush of flowers. Wendy has recently attempted to commit suicide with an injection that Gemma has subtly given her inside a book cover.

#### **Example 4**

Season 1, episode 3

Wendy                What the hell are you doing here?  
Gemma                Something to brighten up your room. I understand you and the old girlfriend have become buddies.

(Wendy pushes the emergency button on her bed)

Gemma                It's a little late for the panic button.  
Wendy                I didn't say anything to anyone.  
Gemma                That's smart. No one would believe you anyhow. That whole junkie thing. All I did was give you an option, sweetheart. You're the one who took the coward's way out. You couldn't even do that right.  
Wendy                We all can't be rocks like you, Mother Gemma. I don't know how you do it.  
Gemma                What's that?

Wendy	Keep all the lies straight. All the dirty little secrets buried. God, your conscience must be locked up real tight.
Gemma	Nothing gets in the way of me taking care of my family. Especially my conscience. But then you obviously can't grasp that. Being a baby killer and all.

As Wendy is a drug-addict, Gemma's giving drugs to her has been an indirect attempt of murder. This example shows how ruthless Gemma can be when it comes to her family. It has been Wendy's fault that Gemma's grandson has been prematurely born with birth defects as Wendy has been using drugs during her pregnancy, and Gemma cannot forgive her that. Moreover, she has tried to eliminate the possible future problem of Wendy getting sober and demanding the baby's custody by giving her the possibility to easily commit suicide. When Wendy confronts her, she simply tells her that "Nothing gets in the way of me taking care of my family". It is also interesting that Wendy calls her "Mother Gemma", when characterizing her as a rock that does not have a conscience. This is in contradiction with how mothers in the Western culture are typically depicted as caring and nurturing. In Example 5, Gemma also acts ruthlessly because she is attempting to protect her family. It is an extract from season 3, in which they are in Ireland and Abel has been kidnapped. They have found out that Abel could be at an orphanage run by nuns. Gemma, Jax and Opie go to the orphanage in which they see babies in cots, but they cannot find Abel. A nun tells them that Father Ashby has told her they would come by. Jax insists to know where Abel is and the nun tells him that he was given to a family two days earlier but that she does not know what family it was, as "an independent mediator protects everyone's anonymity".

## Example 5

Season 3, episode 11

Opie	If they took Abel two days ago, Kellan knew he was gone.
Jax	That son of a bitch. I'm gonna kill him.

(Jax and Opie head to the door. Gemma groans)

Gemma	Ah! Wait a sec, guys.
Jax	Mom?
Gemma	Hold on. Just need a second.

(A man is standing in front of her. She pulls his gun and points it at him)

Gemma	Back off.
Jax	Oh, shit.
Gemma	Over there.

(Nun goes next to the man)

Gemma            Bring me that baby. The kid!

(A nun brings a baby girl to Gemma)

Nun2             What are you doing?

(Gemma points her gun at the baby)

Jax                Mom!

Gemma            You know the story of King Solomon, right, Sister?

Nun2             Yes.

Gemma            If I was that mother, I'd rather have a half dead kid than watch someone else raise my flesh and blood. You understand where I'm going with this? Now, you got to have done some kind of research on those scab parents. So we both know that this "anonymous" thing is bullshit. Now, you are gonna tell us where our grandson is, or I swear to God, I will cut this baby in half.

Nun2             Get the file.

(The other nun goes to get a file)

Nun2             Katey and Mark Petrie. We do a four-day transition period. Parents stay local to make sure it's a good fit.

Jax                Where is he now?

Nun2             The Europa Hotel.

Opie              Not a word to the priest or the Petries or we tell the cops about this little baby factory you've got going on, you understand?

Nun2             Don't hurt them.

Jax                I just want my son back.

Opie              I'm with you brother.

Jax                No, I should scope this out myself.

Gemma            Take this child.

(Nun2 takes the baby)

.

In this example, Gemma is like a fierce lion mother, taking ultimate measures to care for her family. Jax and Opie are ready to leave when the nun tells them that she does not know where the baby is. However, Gemma points a gun at an innocent baby to get information about her grandson's location. She shows no empathy to the little baby girl but is ready to kill her if she does not get the information about her grandson. Jax, even though he is also eager to find his son, repeatedly says "Mom" in order to get Gemma to stop threatening the baby.

Gemma is not depicted really religious but in Season 2 she begins to look for spirituality in her. She talks to a priest several times and is obviously thinking about spiritual matters, maybe for the first time in her life. In Example 6, Gemma is in a car together with Tara. Tara is driving and a club member is following them for their safety as they



are following a woman that has lured Gemma to be gang-raped. They have a conversation about spirituality.

### **Example 6**

Season 2, episode 12

Gemma            Was your dad a Catholic?  
Tara (scoffs)    No. Superstitious. You seem better. Little more at peace?

(Gemma takes a little Virgin Mary off of the front of the car)

Gemma            You believe in God?  
Tara              Not that god. Something. I believe there's something connecting all of us. You?

Gemma            I believe we all got a job to do.  
Tara              Fate.  
Gemma            Service. Our lot. For you, it's medicine. You're a healer. Nothing should ever stop you from doing that.  
Tara              For you, it's family.

Gemma (nodding)  
                      Yeah. I get it now. God wants me to be a fierce mother. That's my path.

(She puts the Virgin Mary back to its place)

This extract shows how Gemma is constructing her identity in a new way. Previously, she has not given any cues of being religious. However, during the second season she has met a priest that has changed her way of thinking, which now results in this conversation with Tara. It is not Gemma, but Tara who is the one saying that Gemma's job is family, which implies that it is evident for other people around her as well. Thus, in this example, their identities are constructed in dialogue.

In the 13th episode of Season 4, which is the second last episode of the season, Gemma again shows her skills of persuading in her dialogue with Jax. In the beginning of Example 7, Gemma arrives at the clubhouse in the meeting room where Jax is sitting at the table, looking through some papers. Her face has marks of Clay violently abusing her.

### **Example 7**

Season 4, episode 13

Jax I've been looking for you. Shut the door.

(Gemma shuts the door. She has a folder of letters in her hand. She takes a seat opposite to Jax)

Jax What happened to Piney?

Gemma Clay killed him.

Jax Look, I know Clay and Piney were beefing over this cartel shit...

Gemma It wasn't over the cartel. It was over these.

(Gemma hands to folder to Jax)

Gemma Maureen Ashby put them in your bag before you left Belfast. They're letters from your father. Tara found them before you did.

Jax Tara had these? Why didn't she tell me?

Gemma She knew they would break your heart. Same way they did mine. When Thomas got sick, your dad stopped going to Belfast... started writing to Maureen.

Jax What does this have to do with Clay?

Gemma JT and Kellan decided to get the MC out of guns, away from the IRA. Clay thought it was a mistake. He was afraid John would destroy the club. So he decided to kill him. The first time... he sent John into a Mayan ambush, unprotected. Your dad made it out. But he knew it was Clay who'd set it up. And he knew Clay would try again. He predicted it would be mechanical. He was right.

Jax The accident.

Gemma The only person JT ever let work on his bike was Lowell Sr. Clay must have... paid him off or threatened him. He had to be the one who sabotaged the Panhead.

Jax Lowell Sr. was killed by the Mayans a week later.

Gemma Yeah. Clay buried the secret.

Jax How do you know all this?

Gemma The letters. The speculation. The Mayan ambush. John knew Clay would kill him. And Clay knew those letters would prove it. Enough to get him voted out, undo everything he'd worked for.

Jax Piney got a hold of these.

Gemma He must have threatened Clay.

Jax Oh, my God.

Gemma That's not all. I found the cover letter Maureen wrote telling you to read them. It was in your house. I knew Tara was the one who'd found them. I... I panicked. I told Clay.

Jax Clay knew... that Tara had these?

Gemma He tried to kill Tara. That thing that happened in the park, that wasn't the cartel. That was guys Clay hired to kill your wife, Jax.

Jax How did you get them?

Gemma Tara gave them to me. Don't be upset with her. She didn't want you to read them. She didn't know what you might do.

Jax Why are you telling me this, Mom? Why now?

Gemma Because I know how dangerous secrets can be. And it's time we all knew the truth. Clay Morrow killed your father. Stole that seat away from this family. Gunned down your father's best friend. And he tried to kill your wife. He's a murderous traitor. And there's only one thing to do now, Jackson. For your father, your family and your club. It's in you. It's who you are. Clay has to die. Read 'em. (Gemma gets up) See him in your father's own hand. And then you kill him, Jax. You kill Clay before he's on his feet and strikes first. And when it's done... you take your place at the head of this table... where a Teller belongs. Where you belong.

(Gemma leaves the room)

Although Gemma emphasizes the danger of secrets when talking to Jax and claims to tell him the truth, the viewer knows that this truth has been polished and that Gemma herself has been part of Clay's plan to kill John Teller. Gemma only tells him the truth that does not hurt their mutual relationship or her own position in the club. Moreover, she has taken out the letters that would reveal her participation in John Teller's death, so that Jax does not get to read those. In the end of this example, Gemma's speech is highly manipulative. Her last turn is very long: in it she attempts to persuade Jax to kill Clay. She provides reasons that she believes will justify the murder of Clay. For the viewer it is also evident that Gemma does not want to lose her power in the club even though Clay will be losing his presidency, if not his life.

To summarize, as these examples show, Gemma's psychological traits include her being able to manipulate even the closest people to her. Moreover, motherhood and family are her top priorities, which she will fight for any way that she needs to.

## **TARA**

In the same way as Gemma, Tara's habitual behaviors also include drinking coffee, but Tara takes her coffee with two sugars. Tara is very smart and reserved and she takes her job very seriously. She also gets anxious easily.

The first time Tara is introduced in *Sons of Anarchy*, she is working in the hospital. Jax, Gemma, Clay, Bobby and Chibs arrive at the hospital, as Gemma has found Jax's pregnant ex-wife Wendy unconscious at Jax's house in a pool of blood. Example 8's conversation takes place when Tara comes out of a ward to explain to them what is going on.

### **Example 8**

Season 1, episode 1

Jax                   What the hell happened?  
Tara                   When was the last time you saw her?  
Jax                    Couple of weeks.  
Tara                   Her hands and feet were full of cracks. Toxicology reports aren't  
back yet, but most likely crank.  
Jax                    The baby?  
Tara                   We had to do an emergency C-section. He's 10 weeks premature.  
Jax                    Holy shit.  
Tara                   Come on, let's sit down and I'll walk you through it.  
Jax                    Just tell me.  
Tara                   He's got a congenital heart defect and gastroschis, a tear in his  
abdomen. The gastro and the early birth are from the drugs.  
But the CHD is probably—  
Gemma                The family flaw.  
Tara                   Yes, it's genetic. Either one would be serious but not life-threatening.  
However, the two of them together... Dr. Namid gives him a 20 percent  
chance, and I'm afraid that's being optimistic.  
Gemma                Oh, my God.  
Jax                    She never wanted to talk to me. I didn't know.  
Tara                   Her OB said she missed her last three appointments. No one knew. Dr. Namid  
wants to fix his belly first. Then, if he stabilizes, he'll go in and try to repair  
the heart. I'm sorry, Jax. I can take you to see him now.  
Jax                    Tara. You don't have to do this. I'm sure you have other patients.  
Tara                   I asked Dr. Namid if I could assist. I wanna help your son.  
Jax                    His name is Abel.  
Tara                   That's a good name.

(Jax is leaving)

Gemma                Jax. Jackson.  
Jax                    Go with Tara. I've got something to do.

Tara is first introduced as a doctor. Her tone is very professional and the viewer cannot know in the beginning of the scene that Tara and Jax are familiar to each other from their past. Tara keeps her tone professional throughout most of the conversation until she changes to a more personal tone when saying "I'm sorry, Jax". This is when the viewer also finds out that they know each other from before, as she addresses him with the nickname Jax. Moreover, Jax continues that Tara does not have to take care of his baby, as if Tara was not only doing her job but doing him a favor. Tara, however, tells him that she wants to help his son and has asked to assist in the surgery.

Example 9 takes place the morning after Tara has taken a bullet out of somebody for the club for the first time. Then she has spent the night with Jax at his dorm room in the clubhouse. Tara walks into the living-room of the club house with a SAMCRO T-shirt and jeans on. There are several men passed out on the tables. She reaches for a cup of coffee when Gemma startles her.

## Example 9

Season 1, episode 9

Gemma Good morning.  
Tara Good morning.  
Gemma Thanks for saving the Irishman. He'd be dead if it wasn't for you.  
Tara (taking coffee) You're welcome.  
Gemma Can I ask you a question?  
Tara I'm tired. I'm not really up for a fight.  
Gemma Oh, not a fight. I'm just trying to figure out what's going on. You and Jax are obviously re-connected.  
Tara Honestly? I don't know what we are.  
Gemma That's what concerns me. You're clearly not one of them.  
(referring to the drunk men who have passed out on the tables)  
Tara Glad that's clear.  
Gemma So, what happens next?  
Tara I don't know.  
Gemma You become his old lady? What does that look like? Operating on kids during the day, patching up bullet wounds at night?  
Tara Okay, I get it.  
Gemma I know you hate me. But this isn't me being some overbearing bitch. This is someone telling you the truth. You and Jax is a bad idea. And someone better start thinking clearly before both of you get hurt.

(Tara starts to cry)

Tara Well, it wouldn't be my first bad idea. It seems to follow me wherever I go.  
Gemma You know, you are smarter and more strong-willed than anyone I've ever met. You need to shine some of that on this thing with Jax. He's not smart enough right now to do what's right. You have to be the one to break this off. Save both of you from something bad.

(Gemma leaves. Tara is left in tears)

In this example, Gemma refers to Tara as strong-willed and smart. Even though she does this to persuade her to end her relationship with Jax, it also gives the viewer an idea of Tara's traits. Gemma also implies that Tara is not part of the club, and she points out that Tara does not have the characteristics that old ladies usually have. However, it is the first time that Tara bends the rules of the hospital and helps the club with her doctor skills and it surely is not the last. Moreover, this is one of the instances in which Tara refuses to admit to herself that she is in love with Jax, when she tells Gemma "Honestly? I don't know what we are". She also tells Gemma that she does not know what is going to happen next, as she refuses to think about it.

As the plot progresses, Tara accepts her place as an old lady of Jax. In Example 10, she is with Gemma at Gemma's father's house where Gemma is hiding from the police. Jax has arrived there to get Gemma to Canada with him, where they are trying to find baby Abel, who has been kidnapped. Tara argues with him, as she would like to accompany them but Jax does not want her to come. Tara has recently helped Gemma kill Gemma's father's caretaker, as the caretaker has attempted to report Gemma to the police in the hope of a reward.

### Example 10

Season 3, episode 4

Jax	What I need is for you to go back to work. Go back to work.
Tara	He's mine, too. I want to be with my family.
Jax	We're not your family! Do you see how deep I'm buried here? You don't want this.
Tara	Don't tell me what I want! I asked for the truth, you gave it to me.
Jax	So you would stay put! You're not coming up north.
Tara	Yes, I am!
Jax	You want to be an old lady? Then act like one! Do what you're told! Pack your shit and head back to Charming.
Tara	I just helped your mother kill someone. That old lady enough for you?
Jax	What are you talking about?
Tara	The caretaker. She attacked your mother.
Jax	What the hell did you do?
Tara	I had no choice—it was self-defense. Tig helped us get rid of the body.

This example shows how Tara is getting more and more involved with the motorcycle club. She calls Jax and his son her family and claims that Abel is hers too, as she has been taking care of him since he got home from the hospital and living with them in Jax's house before the kidnapping. Jax tells her to act like an old lady and do what she is told, as the motorcycle club's traditional gender roles suggest. However, Tara does not submit to this. She then tells Jax that she has helped Gemma kill somebody, even though they had previously agreed with Gemma that Jax would not need to know about it. She then inquires Jax "That old lady enough for you?" This is one of the turning points in Tara's character development, as she desperately tells Jax about the caretaker's death so that Jax would allow her to be a part of the club and his family. She uses the killing of the caretaker as a merit to belong with Jax and SAMCRO.

As I previously discussed Example 6 on Gemma's point of view, it is now time to get back to it when talking about Tara. Gemma says that Tara is a healer and nothing should ever stop her from doing that. Tara's occupation as a doctor is one of the key elements of her character and something that her identity is constructed upon. Gemma's words can be interpreted in a wider sense as well, as in addition to Tara being a healer occupationally, she is also the healer of Jax and thus the healer of the whole club. This becomes evident later in *Sons of Anarchy*, as Tara becomes the one who takes care of Jax's house and his sons while Jax among other club members go to jail for a while. Especially in the end of Season 4, Tara takes her place as the first old lady of the club as she decides to stay in Charming and stand by Jax's side when he becomes the new president of SAMCRO. Moreover, in Season 4, when Tara is attacked and she hurts her hand in the way that she will have to be absent from being a surgeon for a long time, it is a major blow to her, since being able to practice medicine is one of the main building blocks of her identity. In addition, she and Jax were planning to move to Oregon with the boys, as Jax was going to leave the club, but with a broken hand the plans cannot come true. In Example 11, Tara is laying in her hospital bed after having her hand hurt. Jax has come to visit her. Tara has refused to talk to Abel on the phone.

### Example 11

Season 4, episode 10

Jax	Tell me what I can do for you.
Tara	Nothing.
Jax	Please, get mad at me, Tara. Scream at me or something. I know this is all my fault.
Tara	No. It's not, Jax. This had to happen.
Jax	What are you talking about?
Tara	Fate. We're supposed to be together, right? (Jax nods) But you can't leave here.
Jax	I am leaving here. With you.
Tara	No. The club won't let you. Gemma won't let you. Charming won't let you.
Jax	Come on. (stroking her hair) Babe, that's just the drugs talking. You should get some sleep.
Tara	The only way I can be with you is if I lose my way out. I lost that today, baby.
Jax	No.
Tara	I have a dead hand. No one will want me now. No one... I'll never save another life again. I'll never fix a tiny heart.
Jax	Hey, come on. Don't do this.
Tara	It's okay. 'Cause now we can be together—you, me, Gemma—here in beautiful Charming. Happy family. Maybe I should smash my other hand. That way I can just stay at home. Be a mom, raise babies.
Jax	Tara, stop. Don't... don't do that.
Tara	You should leave now.
Jax	Okay, I'm sorry.

Tara I can't see you. Anyone. Please just go.  
Jax Baby, come on.  
Tara Go! Go! Go!

(Tara starts to cry. Jax leaves the room.)

Tara's numbness is bothering Jax, so he asks Tara to get mad at him or scream. Tara claims that the accident "had to happen" in order for her to stay in Charming and be with Jax. For Tara, her profession as a surgeon was her "way out" of Charming and the club, as she had been offered a job in Oregon. The proper use of her hand is the only thing that enables her to work outside the club in the society, the one thing that defines her as something else than an old lady of a motorcycle club member. Moreover, Tara makes a remark that without her ability to work as a doctor, she can "just stay at home and raise babies". This is a major blow to her identity as well, as in addition for a way out, her profession has been something that has allowed her to work outside home as well, as she has created a 'working Mom' identity, which is now challenged as well.

In the beginning of *Sons of Anarchy*, Tara is very law-obedient. As the plot progresses, she begins helping the club in less legal ways, which among other things results in her being suspended from her work for a while. However, despite this, she believes to be part of the normal people and does not see herself as being part of the illegalities of SAMCRO. In Example 12, Gemma is getting Thomas's car seat from Tara's car when she sees a note on the driver's seat saying "I will hurt you, then kill you, doctor bitch". She takes it to Tara, who gets scared.

## Example 12

Season 4, episode 7

Gemma Could this be someone at work—a patient? Something happen to a kid?  
Tara You really think this has anything to do with my work?  
Gemma We should call Jax.  
Tara I'm calling the police.  
Gemma No, no. If this is the club, you get that new sheriff involved, everyone gets hurt. I'm gonna give Unser a call, too.  
Tara This is a death threat, Gemma, delivered to my front door.  
Gemma I know. Let's, uh, let's get you and the kids to the compound, make sure you're safe.  
Tara Normal people call the authorities when their lives are threatened.  
Gemma You don't have a normal life, baby. You have this one.



In this example, Tara is scared as her life has been threatened by someone unknown. Gemma tries to suggest that perhaps it has something to do with her work but Tara does not believe it. When Gemma suggests they should call Jax, Tara states that she is calling the police. She is fighting against her old lady identity, as she knows that it is not the way the club handles things such as death threats. Gemma reminds Tara that if it is the club and the sheriff gets involved, the whole club is at risk. It seems to be unbelievable to Tara that Gemma is expecting her to protect the club when her life is in question. Gemma wants to take Tara and the children to the compound so that they would be safe. Tara is still fighting towards the club's way of handling it telling Gemma that "normal people call the authorities when their lives are threatened", suggesting that she herself would be part of this normal people. As Gemma cleverly states, Tara does not have a normal life. It is evident that Tara's identity is constructed again in this dialogue with Gemma. She longs for her old, normal life in the moment of crisis but Gemma quickly reminds her that this life is the only one that she has and it is not normal anymore.

To summarize, Tara's psychological traits include her being passionate about her work as a doctor and believing to be part of normal society outside the club. She is also smart and strong-willed. In addition, she is also part of the motorcycle club, as being Jax's old lady, which is difficult for her to accept, as she avoids defining her relationship with Jax for a long time. However, her character changes in this aspect during the four seasons, as she later starts a family with Jax and becomes the mother and step-mother for his sons. The difficulty to accept the life with the motorcycle club continues throughout the four seasons, as after she has accepted that she wants to be with Jax, she starts to prepare possibilities for them outside Charming and outside SAMCRO. However, in the end of Season 4, she chooses love, even though it means also choosing the club, and stays by Jax's side.

## **4.2 Physical characteristics/appearance**

Now, it is time to look into the two women character's physical characteristics and appearance. Again, I will first introduce Gemma's physical characteristics, and then proceed to discuss Tara's appearance.

## **GEMMA**

Gemma is played by Katey Sagal, the wife of Kurt Sutter who has created *Sons of Anarchy*. Even though she is in her fifties, which in the Western society is not the sexiest age usually, she is portrayed as very sexy and feminine. She wears tight clothes and shows off a lot of cleavage. She has a scar on her chest from heart surgeries that is often shown as well, which is interesting in the sense that scars are not usually considered attractive. The scar represents Gemma's strength and weakness at the same time, as her heart condition makes her more vulnerable than others, yet she never lets it slow her down. She even uses it as a merit in the sense that she is a survivor.

Gemma's posture is slim even though she never spares butter or cream in her cooking. Her hair is dark with some blonde stripes and she wears quite heavy make-up. Gemma's non-verbal behavior is often very feminine too, as she walks like a cat and sits often with her legs crossed. However, she also tends to smoke often, which is not considered so feminine. Also, she uses a black leather coat, leather being a very masculine material.

## **TARA**

Tara is played by Maggie Siff. She is a brunette in her thirties. Her dark brown hair color implies that she is a smart girl instead of a dumb blonde, as is sometimes depicted in Western television. She wears quite casual and neutral clothes, such as jeans and a blouse in the beginning of *Sons of Anarchy*, but as the plot progresses and she gets more involved with the club, she begins to show off more of her cleavage as well and wear darker clothes including leather. Her style thus begins to resemble more that of Gemma's. She also cuts her longer hair shorter when this style shift takes place. At work, she is of course wearing the doctor's uniform.

Tara is also represented physically very feminine in her gestures and walking. She is also very slim, as the Western beauty ideals would suggest, which is quite common with major characters on American television. However, she has a tattoo on her lower back that she has gotten when she was young and dating Jax. It is the tattoo of the old lady, and it goes against her otherwise so restrained look. However, it can easily be covered with clothing. When Tara is questioned about her tattoo by Gemma the first episode of Season 1, she says that "I leave it there so I remember all that shit's behind me".

### 4.3 Speech patterns

For this section of my analysis, I will use the AntConc 3.2.4w software as a tool to demonstrate how some speech patterns are recurrent in the speech of Gemma and Tara. In addition, with examples from the script, I will indicate other speech patterns that are characteristic of the two women.

#### GEMMA

The first impression of Gemma's speech is that it is harsh and bold. She is not euphemistic, but she says what she thinks and she does not seem to care what other people think about it. She does not seem to have more than one register and she does not shift between styles. In Example 13, Tara wants to talk to Gemma. They are at the hospital discussing Jax's ex-wife who has had a C-section recently. The example shows what kind of speech is typical of Gemma:

#### Example 13

Season 1, episode 1

Gemma	What is it?
Tara	Wendy's in really bad shape. She's still detoxing. Can't stop crying.
Gemma	And?
Tara	I was hoping maybe you could talk to her. Just let her know she's not all alone.
Gemma	Trust me. Nothing I'm gonna say to that crank whore is gonna make her feel loved.

Tara I forgot just how forthright you can be.  
Gemma You forgot a lot of things, sweetheart.

Here, Gemma shows absolutely no sympathy, as would be conventional in the situation in which one tells the other that someone is "in really bad shape". Tara also gives Gemma instant feedback on her brutality mentioning that she forgot how forthright Gemma can be.

To show what kinds of utterances are the most frequent ones in the beginning of Gemma's utterances, I ran a cluster search on AntConc 3.2.4w. I adjusted the cluster size to include 3 to 5 lexical items and used "Gemma:" as the search term, as in SOA-corpus Gemma's turns are marked that way. Figure 1 shows 18 the most occurring word clusters in the initial position in Gemma's turns.

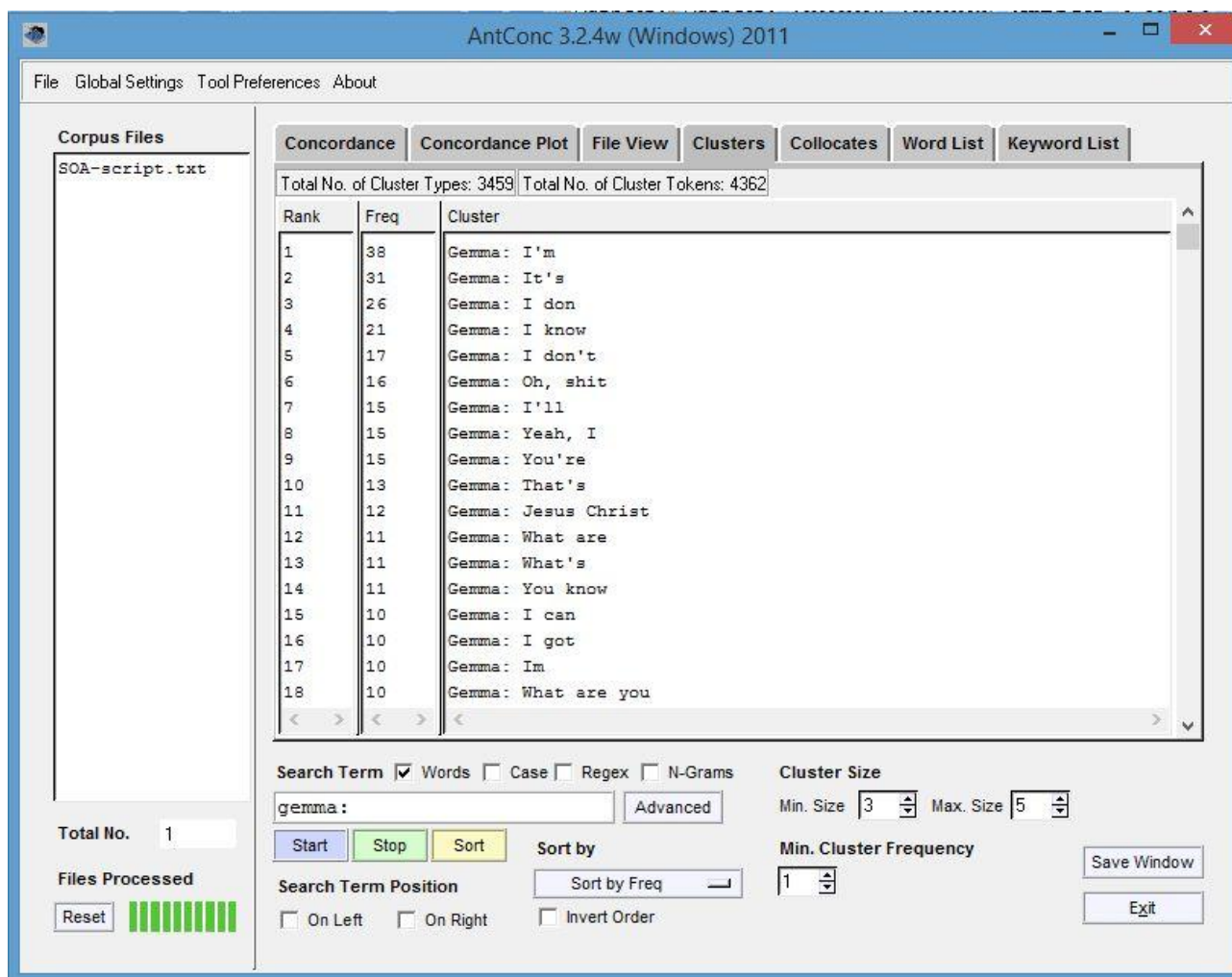


Figure 1

In Figure 1, the most frequent word clusters beginning Gemma's speech turns can be seen. According to Culpeper (2001:199), the high frequency of character's words does not necessarily tell anything about the individual character, as the list often contains words such as 'the' that occurs in all the characters' speech. However, by limiting the data to the beginning of Gemma's turns, it is possible to find some outstanding word clusters in them that are especially typical of her. Moreover, I will discard the word clusters that seem irrelevant and concentrate on what seems especially typical of Gemma to utter – such as foul expressions that stand out in the list. According to Figure 1, the most frequent beginning would be *I'm*. This could suggest that Gemma talks about herself often. However, as we can see later, when running a search for Tara's most frequent word clusters *I'm* is on top, too. In other words, this is one of the instances that Culpeper refers to about the frequent words not telling much about the individual character, as this kind of a beginning is probably typical in any spoken corpus. However, there is something interesting that the word clusters tells us about Gemma as an individual character. From Figure 1, we can see that Gemma has *Oh, shit* (rank 5) and *Jesus Christ* (rank 10) quite high on the list, which gives us the idea of how she tends to use profanities in her speech frequently.

#### 4.3.1 Oh, shit

<i>Oh, shit</i>	
Gemma	20
Jax	3
Kohn	3
Tara	2
Unser	2
Wendy	2
Clay	1
Tig	1
Half-Sack	1
Cherry	

Salazar	1
---------	---

Table 1

In order to find out how frequent Gemma's *Oh, shit* utterances are, I ran a concordance search for *Oh, shit*. Table 1 shows how Gemma is the one uttering *Oh, shit* 20 times out of the 37 hits that occurred. That is, Gemma says 54.1 % out of all *Oh, shits*. Other characters say *Oh, shit* remarkably less frequently when being in contact with Gemma or Tara, as the SOA-corpus only contains the dialogues that have Gemma or Tara participating or being the subject of, and therefore we do not know how many times in total in *Sons of Anarchy* these other characters utter *Oh, shit*. However, when looking at Table 1, it is safe to say that *Oh, shit* is a profanity that especially Gemma utters many times. This expression is usually used to indicate surprise or worry.

#### 4.3.2 Jesus Christ

<i>Jesus Christ</i>	
Gemma	16
Jax	11
Tara	4
Clay	4
Unser	2
Juice	1
Oswald	1
Stahl	1
Jimmy	1
Maureen	1
Bobby	1
Amelia	1

Table 2

*Jesus Christ* is a phrase that can be heard several times in discussions concerning or participating Gemma and Tara during the four seasons; 44 in total, according to AntConc 3.2.4w software's concordance search. Out of these 44 occurrences, 16 of them are spoken by Gemma, which forms 36.4 % of them. Jax is the second most likely to utter *Jesus Christ* with his 11 occurrences (25.0 %) that can be seen in Table 2. Thus, Gemma and Jax together say 61.4 % of all *Jesus Christs*, which could be interpreted that it is typical language for their reciprocal relationship and can also be generalized to the language used inside the motorcycle club. Tara and Clay both have 4 utterances of *Jesus Christ*, which might indicate that as the closest characters to Gemma and Jax who say *Jesus Christ* the most they might have caught the expression from them. However, as the SOA-corpus only consists of the dialogues that have either Gemma or Tara participating or subject of, it is not possible to draw conclusions from Clay's use of *Jesus Christ*. However, for Tara it is possible to infer that her uses of *Jesus Christ* can be the result of spending time with Gemma and Jax. The rest of the occurrences are spoken by separate individuals over the TV series. None of the occurrences refer to the actual Jesus Christ in the religious sense of the phrase. Instead, *Jesus Christ* is uttered as a profanity in all cases to express surprise, shock or annoyance.

### 4.3.3 Sweetheart

*Sweetheart* was not mentioned in Figure 1. However, when observing and watching the episodes, I paid attention to its vocative use among other things and noticed that Gemma called other people *sweetheart* often. Therefore, I decided to also include it in my analysis in this section of speech patterns.

I ran a concordance search for *sweetheart* and it turned out that it is uttered 44 times in SOA-corpus, out of which Gemma utters 25. This means that Gemma says 56.8 % out of all the *sweethearts*, which confirms that it is an expression that especially Gemma uses. In Table 3 below it can be seen that only Unser, Stahl and Tig use *sweetheart* more than once in addition to Gemma. Moreover, the occurrences that someone else than Gemma uses it are quite rare. In addition, for example Unser's six utterances of *sweetheart* all take place in dialogues with Gemma. Gemma uses *sweetheart* in two different ways. She either uses it as a sign of endearment or affection or she uses it

sarcastically. Example 13 shown above is one of the instances of the latter, when Gemma says to Tara: "You forgot a lot of things, sweetheart". In Example 14, Gemma also use s sweetheart in a less endearing way:

**Example 14**

Season 1, episode 2

Tara                    You still think you can just say or do anything you want in this town, don't you? Everything comes around, Gemma. No one is untouchable.  
 Gemma                You wanna touch me, sweetheart? That make you happy?

<i>Sweetheart</i>	
Gemma	25
Unser	6
Stahl	3
Tig	2
Wendy	1
Chibs	1
Clay	1
Piney	1
Oswald	1
Nate	1
Fiona	1
Ima	1

Table 3

To summarize, Gemma uses harsh language with plenty of exclamations and profanities. She also uses vocatives, such as *sweetheart*.

**TARA**



When Tara is at work, she uses medical register in her speech. Her casual language in her free time is very standard. Even in conflict situations she stays calm and speaks appropriately, like in Example 14. However, after she has been under Gemma's guidance for a while, she begins adopting Gemma's way of speaking. In the following example Ima, a porn star that has been in bed with Jax, has appeared at the clubhouse and pointed a gun at Lyla, Opie's new wife. Tara first questions her presence at the clubhouse and when Ima is leaving, Example 15 takes place.

### **Example 15**

Season 4, episode 6

Tara      Keep that .38 close, bitch. You're gonna need it.

In here, Tara speaks in a way that Gemma could speak. She threatens Ima that she had better keep her gun close to her, as a need might occur for it. Moreover, she calls her *bitch*, which she does not say often. In fact, as a concordance search for 'bitch' would suggest, Tara utters it three times, of which one can be seen above, one is "Son of a bitch" that she mumbles to herself when she sees Jax giving Ima a ride with his motorcycle and the last one she also says "You duplicitous bitch" to herself meaning Gemma, when she realizes that Gemma has stolen the letters in Season 4. On the other hand, Gemma utters *bitch* 24 times out of all the 45 of its occurrences in the data, which clearly indicates that it belongs to her register. Hence, it seems that this occurrence in which Tara calls Ima "bitch" is indeed something that she has adopted from Gemma.

I also ran a concordance search for Tara in the same way that I did for Gemma. Figure 2 shows the first 18 word clusters that were associated with "Tara:".

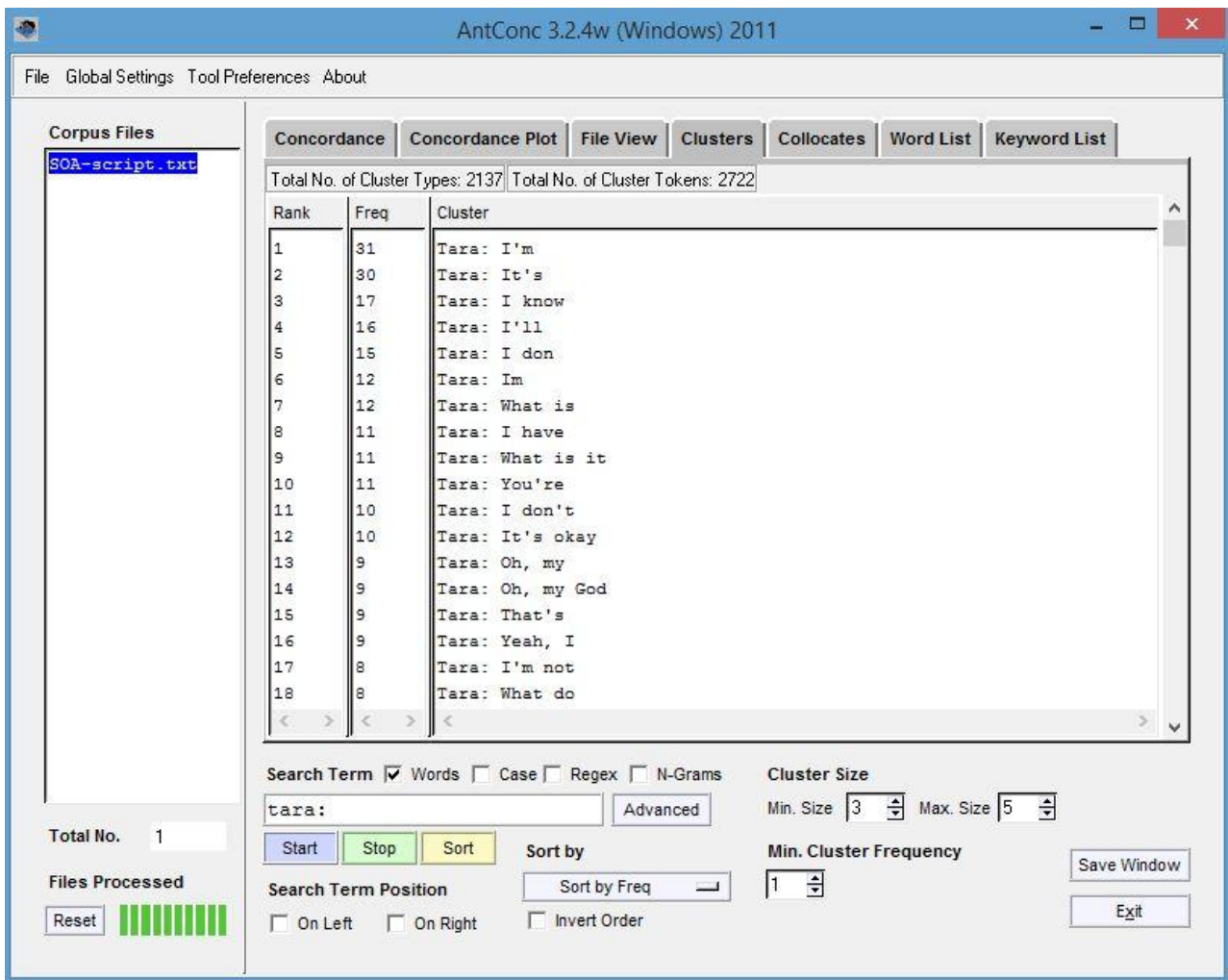


Figure2

As it can be seen in Figure 2, Tara also uses in quite many instances similar word clusters as Gemma did, such as *I'm* or *It's*. However, in Tara's word clusters there are also examples of specific language use typical for Tara. For example, *It's okay* occurs 10 times and *Oh, my God* is repeated 9 times. It is worth noting that these speech patterns recur quite infrequently if compared to the recurrences of Gemma's speech patterns, as she had 16-25 occurrences of her most frequent speech patterns. However, it is possible that they are especially typical for Tara. Hence, I ran concordance searches for them as well.

#### 4.3.4 Oh, my God

*Oh, my God* is repeated 34 times in SOA-corpus. As Table 3 shows, Tara utters it most often with her 11 *Oh, my Gods*, which makes her portion 32.4 % out of all of the occurrences. However, Gemma has 8 occurrences of it as well, which means that she uses it quite often too, 23.5 % of all of the 34 *Oh, my Gods*. Moreover, Gemma's heavy use of exclamations is seen here as well, although it is highly more frequent that she uses profanities such as *Oh, shit* or *Jesus Christ* in this purpose than *Oh, my God*. For Tara, it is the top exclamation that she uses, which suits her more correct style, if compared with Gemma. *Oh, my God* is usually used to express shock or surprise.

<i>Oh, my God</i>	
Tara	11
Gemma	8
Wendy	4
Jax	2
Cherry	2
Unser	1
Piney	1
Clay	1
Margaret	1
Salazar	1
Luisa	1
Receptionist	1

Table 3

#### 4.5.3 It's okay

*It's okay* was also on Tara's top speech turn beginners. I ran a concordance search for it as well, exactly like for the other speech patterns that have been studied here. Table 4 shows the frequency of its use by different characters. What was surprising is that even though I chose this speech pattern for Tara, it turned out that Gemma actually used it more often. Out of 40 hits 14 were uttered by Gemma (35.0 %) and 11 (27.5 %) were uttered by Tara. Jax was the third most frequent user of *It's okay* with his 7 hits. Interestingly when looking at Jax's utterances of *It's okay*, 6 out of 7 occurrences took place in dialogues with Tara. However, out of Tara's *It's okay*s only two were directed

to Jax. This could indicate that it is typical of their reciprocal relationship for Jax to reassure Tara that everything is okay, instead of Tara reassuring Jax. Moreover, Tara's uses of *It's okay* occurred mainly in situations when she was talking to somebody less close, when somebody is sorry for causing inconvenience, for example.

<i>It's okay</i>	
Tara	11
Gemma	14
Jax	7
Neeta	1
Stahl	1
Clay	1
Margaret	1
Chibs	1
Rita	1
Chucky	1
Agent	1

Table 4

The fact that the speech patterns chosen for Tara from Figure 2 were not so significantly typical of Tara's especially also means something. As mentioned before, Tara's language use seems to be standard and correct, which probably can be seen in these results, as there are not many speech patterns for her that would clearly attract attention.

#### 4.4 Interactions with other characters

Pearson (2007:45) argues that "all characters are partially defined by the other characters with whom they interact". Because of this, it is also very important to look at the interactions that Gemma and Tara have with other characters. For this section, I again used AntConc 3.2.4w (Windows) 2011 software to find out the most important other characters in *Sons of Anarchy*. I ran a concordance search for all the names of the characters, including Gemma and Tara. The number of hits includes the characters'

speaker turns as well as the instances when the character is being spoken about. Gemma's number also includes the 13 hits for Gem, as this is a nickname especially her husband uses about her. Tara's number includes the hits for Tar-Tar that she is referred to as four times in the first season. Moreover, Jax's number includes the 19 hits for Jackson which is his real given name. It is mostly Gemma who calls him that, especially when she is worried. In Table 5, the number of hits for each selected character is shown.

Character	Hits
Gemma	2034
Tara	1396
Jax	1268
Clay	808
Unser	295
Tig	202
Margaret	131

Table5

It is not surprising that Gemma and Tara are the first ones on the list, considering that the data consists of discussions that either of them is participating in or as the subject of. What is interesting, though, is the fact that Gemma's name is mentioned significantly more frequently than Tara's. This implies that Gemma's character is more significant in *Sons of Anarchy* than that of Tara's. Jax gets almost as many hits as Tara, which is natural with him being the protagonist and an important character for both Gemma and Tara, whereas the rest of the names on the list have more to do with only one of them.

I will now deal with the central other characters Gemma and Tara have the most interaction with, and illustrate their relationships with other characters with examples from the data. I have chosen three other characters for Gemma and two for Tara that I will have a closer look on. In the last part, I will discuss the reciprocal relationship between Gemma and Tara.

#### 4.4.1 Gemma and Clay

Gemma's husband Clay is the president of the motorcycle club. In the beginning of *Sons of Anarchy*, their relationship seems to be quite equal and loving. This is shown throughout the TV series, especially when Gemma worries about Clay's arthritic hands

and helps him inject cortisone into them. They are often partners in crime sharing secrets that nobody else knows. Although their relationship seems equal, there are some inequalities, too. As noted previously, Gemma often manipulates Clay to do what she wants. However, Gemma is expected to be monogamous, while Clay is allowed to have other partners, as long as Gemma does not have to know about them. This is shown in Example 16, in which a woman with whom Clay has engaged sexually on a run appears in Charming at the clubhouse.

### Example 16

Season 1, episode 6

Clay	What is she doing here?
Juice	She was getting out at Bakersfield.
Cherry	It's not his fault, okay? I know I'm not supposed to be here. Let me go talk to someone.
Clay	You talk to somebody in some other charter. You got that, sweet butt? (to Juice:) Get her the hell out of here now.
Jax	What were you thinking, man?
Juice	What was I supposed to do? Throw her out of the cab? Let's go.

(Gemma watches this from the window)

Juice	Let's go.
Cherry	Get me out of here.

(Gemma sees Half-Sack get inside and follows him.)

Gemma	Who's that girl?
Half-Sack	Um, I don't really—I don't know.
Gemma	Yeah. I saw your heart skip a beat from here. Who is she?
Half-Sack	Just a Tribe hang around.
Gemma	Clay hit that tart, didn't he?
Half-Sack	I wouldn't know who Clay's hitting except for you. I'm sure he's hitting you because you're his wife and all.

(Gemma sits down)

Gemma	Get out.
-------	----------

(Half-Sack leaves and Gemma bursts into tears.)

Everybody is shocked to see Cherry in Charming, as they know that she should not be there. Gemma realizes immediately what has happened between Cherry and Clay, based on how everybody is acting, even though she cannot hear them speaking clearly, as she is following the discussion from inside of her office. She sees Half-Sack's reaction to Cherry's entry and decides to ask him to find out if her suspicions are correct. Half-Sack stutters a little bit and is obviously nervous when answering her questions, which

makes it easy for Gemma to realize that Clay has in fact been intimate with another woman when he has been on the run. Gemma does not want Half-Sack seeing her being vulnerable, so she tells him to leave. Gemma's tears indicate, that even though according to the rules of the club it is fine that her husband is with other women, it is not fine with her. Later in the same episode, Gemma speaks to her best friend, Luann, about what has happened at Luann's porn studio.

### **Example 17**

Season 1, episode 6

Gemma	Can you believe the balls of that whore showing up at the goddamn clubhouse.
Luann	Clay couldn't have known.
Gemma	So what? The rules got broken. What happens on a run, stays on a run. It does not show up and slap me in the goddamn face. That does not happen to me! She's so young.
Luann	And dumb. And before she knows it, she's gonna be old and wise like us.
Gemma	How am I supposed to handle this? I just wanna rip his goddamn heart out.

It is obvious that Gemma is upset when she asks Luann if she can "believe the balls of that whore showing up at the goddamn clubhouse". Luann attempts to defend Clay that he could have not known about Cherry's intentions of coming to Charming, implying that there was nothing wrong in Clay's actions. Gemma's answer "So what? The rules got broken" suggests that she does not want any explanations, as it is a matter of principle, since the club's rules have been broken. Moreover, in her original opening of the conversation she is angry at Cherry, not Clay. However, later in the same scene she says she wants to "rip his goddamn heart out", which refers to Clay instead of Cherry. This implies that what has actually hurt her is Clay having sex with another woman, even though the dialogue is more concentrated on the moral code of the motorcycle club.

The unwritten rules of the motorcycle club do become evident in this scene; "What happens on the run, stays on the run". This implies that it is not morally wrong to engage sexually with other women for men when they are out of Charming, as long as nobody who was not there knows about it. "It does not show up and slap me in the goddamn face" refers to the fact that such sexual adventures are not desired to enter

especially the old lady's awareness. When Gemma says "That does not happen to me!" she puts herself in a superior position and highlights the fact that she is not upset because Clay has been with another woman but because she has found out about it herself in front of the whole club and she feels humiliated. Gemma ends her outburst by sighing: "She's so young!", which refers to Gemma feeling old compared to Cherry and possibly afraid that as a woman in her fifties she would not be as desirable to her husband as Cherry, who is in her twenties. This is due to the fact that youth is idealized in the Western society, and an aging woman is considered less attractive. Moreover, in the episode it becomes evident that Gemma has reached her menopause, which reinforces her feeling of getting old. There can be two layers noticed in this dialogue. On the superficial level, it seems that they are discussing the moral codes of the club and are angry at Cherry for appearing in Charming. However, on the deeper level, it is obvious that Gemma feels hurt that Clay has been with another woman, despite the moral legitimacy of it.

When Gemma is gang-raped in Season 2, she does not tell about it to Clay at first, as she realizes it happened because the rapists wanted to hurt the club. Instead, she lies that she has been in a car crash. She stops being intimate with Clay, telling him that she is still sore from the car crash. Obviously, after such a violent sexual assault it is natural that a woman would not feel ready for such actions but Clay is somewhat upset about this, as he has no idea what has actually happened. This is alienating them from each other, as Gemma wants to keep Clay at distance. Gemma only tells the club about her rape at the point that she feels that the club members wanting to revenge would be a unifying force, as Jax has started to talk about going Nomad and leaving the charter. Gemma believes that Clay would no longer love her after what has happened to her, which is shown in Example 18. In the beginning of it, Gemma is sitting in her kitchen smoking a joint the morning after the club has found out about the rape. Tara comes in and asks how Gemma is doing and comments on how she was brave when telling the club about what had happened.

### **Example 18**

Season 2, episode 11



Tara                   It was brave, doing what you did.  
 Gemma                Had to be done. Snap Jax and Clay out of their bullshit.  
 Tara                   Had to be done for you. Do you want to talk about it?  
 Gemma                There's nothing to talk about. Clay is never going to want to be inside  
                           something that's been ripped up like me.  
 Tara                   Jesus Christ, Gemma. Clay loves you.  
 Gemma                Love don't mean shit. Men need to own their pussy. His has been violated.  
                           He'll find another. It's what they do.

Gemma tells Tara that Clay will probably find another "pussy" instead of hers, as she herself has encountered sexual violence. Gemma talks about her "pussy" as a separate entity of herself, taking a very practical attitude against what has happened. It gives the viewer some insight to what kind of values the motorcycle club shares. Furthermore, it seems that by taking such a stance, Gemma does not need to talk about her feelings, which would not be characteristic for her. However, later in the same episode, Clay disagrees with what Gemma says here about him not wanting her "pussy". Example 19 takes place after Clay has been talking to Tig, who has told him that Gemma needs to know that Clay still loves her, as she is afraid that Clay does not want her anymore. Clay enters Gemma's office.

### **Example 19**

Season 2, episode 11

Clay                    Let's go home.  
 Gemma (sorting some papers)                Oh, honey, I should catch up. We'll be buried.  
 Clay                    Fine.  
 (Clay closes the door and throws all the papers from the desk to the floor)  
 Gemma                What the hell's the matter with you?  
 (Clay lifts her on the table.)  
 Clay                    I want my wife.  
 (They begin to make love)

In this example, Clay shows Gemma that he still loves her, both physically and mentally, despite the sexual violence that Gemma has experienced. He has to be advised to do so by Tig, though, but Gemma does not know that. After this scene, their relationship gets back to where it was before the sexual violence that Gemma experienced.

In Season 4 Gemma and Clay's warm relationship changes. In the beginning of it, they seem to have as warm and loving relationship as they did before, as Example 20 illustrates. Clay has recently returned from jail and they have been reunited and physically intimate with Gemma. Clay's hand is shivering and Gemma gently holds it in her hand.

### Example 20

Season 4, episode 1

Gemma	How bad are they?
Clay	The meds they gave me inside didn't do very much. I mean, it's all right on a day like this when it's warm but... I don't know how many winters I got left. One, two at the most.
Gemma	There's plenty we can do. I have Tara looking into a good surgeon.
Clay	No, I ain't lettin' nobody cut me open. I'd have to step down to recoup. Don't make any sense.
Gemma	Well, we'll just, we'll get better meds, keep doing the cortisone. You got plenty of time, baby.
Clay	Yeah.

Gemma shows Clay compassion as his hands are in pain. Clay says that he does not have much time as the president of the motorcycle club, as his arthritis is getting worse. They both know it is true but Gemma encourages Clay to keep his position as president of SAMCRO. Clay stepping down would also mean stepping down as the queen of the motorcycle club for Gemma. However, the relationship between Gemma and Clay changes during Season 4, as Gemma finds out that Clay is plotting to kill Tara. Gemma confronts Clay, as she finds Clay putting money into his safe.

### Example 21

Season 4, episode 10

Gemma	What's the matter? Change your mind? Get a refund 'cause they didn't kill her?
Clay	I don't know what the hell you're talking about.
Gemma	You promised me. You looked me in the eye and you promised me you wouldn't hurt Tara!
Clay	You're insane.

(He slams the safe door closed.)

Clay I had nothing to do with what happened to Tara.  
Gemma You took money out of that safe this morning. Hours later, somebody goes after Tara. She'd probably be dead if Jax wasn't with her!  
Clay You need to stop, right now!

Gemma You didn't know that Jax was going to be with her, did you? Or the boys. Jesus Christ, those babies could have been hurt!

Clay (kicking a chair)  
Enough!  
Gemma Maybe Jax needs to know that truth.

(Clay approaches her, Gemma takes a gun out of her purse.)

Gemma You stay away from me, you son of a bitch.  
  
(she points the gun at him)

Clay You stay away from my family.  
Or what? You're gonna kill me, Gemma? Huh? Like you did the first husband?  
Gemma You killed John.  
Clay Nah. Baby, you killed him. You played me for a chump, and I was. I was no match for that tight pussy and that broken, angry heart. Yeah, maybe Jax needs to read some of that truth.

(Gemma shoots the wall. Clay takes the gun off of her, and she punches him in the face. Gemma tries to run away but Clay catches her and punches her. She is pushed on the wall. Gemma kicks him in the face and gets off the table. )

Gemma Get away from me! You piece of shit!

(She finds a heavy object from the floor and throws it at him. It hits the wall.)

Gemma Now goddamn stay away from me!

(Gemma runs to the door but it is locked. Clay reaches her. He throws her on the floor. He hits her in the face five times.)

Domestic violence is not present in *Sons of Anarchy* often, which makes this scene exceptional. It is a turning-point in Gemma and Clay's relationship, and after this it is broken for good, at least by the end of Season 4. As a result of the violence that Gemma has experienced from her beloved husband, she decides that Clay must die.

#### 4.4.2 Gemma and Jax

Gemma has had two children, one of whom has died in young age. This could be an explaining factor to why she is very protective towards her other son, Jax. She lets him know often that she loves him. Also, she keeps many secrets from him, in order to protect him. Example 22 shows a typical conversation between them. They are talking

on the phone. Gemma is at her father's place as she is hiding from the police. She tells Jax about her mother's death.

## Example 22

Season 3, episode 2

Gemma	It was heart disease. A family flaw. Guess it got pretty ugly.
Jax	I'm sorry.
Gemma	Yeah. Well, she's still pulling the strings. Even dead, Rose is a control freak.
Jax	Sounds familiar.
Gemma	I am not my mother, you little shithead.
Jax	Okay.
Gemma	Thank you, Jackson.
Jax	I love you, Mom.
Gemma	How's our baby boy?
Jax	He's good.
Gemma	You—You go do your thing.
Jax	Yeah. You take care of yourself, Mom.
Gemma	Always.

In this example, Gemma and Jax show their affection to each other. It is typical of them to tell each other that they are loved. Also, Gemma's utterance "you little shithead" is a sign of affection in Gemma's style. When Jax says that baby Abel is good, he is lying, as he is trying to protect Gemma from the truth, as she has a fragile heart. It is also typical of their mutual relationship that they try to protect each other, sometimes by altering the truth. Moreover, as already noted in Example 7 before, Gemma has a way of manipulating Jax.

### 4.4.3 Gemma and Unser

Wayne Unser is the sheriff of Charming that SAMCRO has a long history with. He does not interfere with club business, and they do not let anybody bring drugs to Charming. Unser often offers useful information to the club. However, Unser has cancer and he is planning to retire soon. In Season 3 he is forced to leave his post as sheriff. Gemma and Unser have a platonic relationship, even though it is implied that Unser has always had deeper feelings towards Gemma. They have known each other since Gemma was 12. Unser is often put into a difficult situation, as his duty as a police officer would be to report crimes, yet Gemma or her loved ones being in trouble makes him do what is best

for SAMCRO, even if it were against the law. Their friendship does not seem very equal, as it is evident that Gemma gets more advantage of their friendship than Unser. In Example 23, Gemma goes to talk to Unser who she has seen talking to Jax.

### **Example 23**

Season 2, episode 10

Unser	Wanted to know about Caracara. I told him it couldn't have been Clay.
Gemma	Club's gonna need your help.
Unser	For what?
Gemma	You need to protect them.
Unser	Why? What are they going to do?

(Gemma kisses Unser on the cheek.)

Gemma	Thank you.
Unser (nodding)	Okay.

In this example, it is shown clearly that Unser does not need to know why Gemma says she needs help. He helps her unconditionally, even though his questions are often left unanswered. Moreover, it also shows how Gemma goes to him first when the club needs protection. It is also implied in Season 4, episode 13, that Unser also had something to do with John Teller's death, as Gemma says "We're safe" and explains that she has taken some of the letters out before giving them to Jax to read.

#### **4.4.4 Tara and Jax**

The most important character for Tara is Jax. As was mentioned above, Tara and Jax were originally high school sweethearts but they broke up when Tara left Charming shortly after graduation. After Tara's return to Charming, she and Jax begin to warm up their relationship relatively quickly and end up getting back together again, and Tara becomes Jax's "old lady".

In Example 24, Tara is demanding Jax to tell him the truth about what is going on with him, as Gemma has advised her. Tara is in Jax's house, sitting on a sofa, reading a book.

## Example 24

Season 2, episode 1

Jax                    Hey.  
Tara                    What happened to the party?  
Jax                    Saw Bobby. I didn't feel like staying. (grunts)  
Tara                    What's the matter?  
Jax                    I'm just tired. I'm gonna take a shower.

(Jax leaves and goes to take the shower. Tara goes to the bathroom door and picks up Jax's dirty clothes. She finds a pair of bloody gloves in his pocket. Jax comes out of the shower and notices Tara holding the gloves. He looks sorry.)

Tara                    You know why I run away from shit all the time? 'Cause I don't trust anyone. If I'm gonna stay, I need to know the truth.  
Jax                    I tell you the truth.  
Tara                    Not just what you think I can handle. I need all of it. It's the only way I'll know if I can do this.

(Jax takes the gloves and looks contemplative.)

Jax                    I helped Opie kill a man today. Retaliation for Donna. Shot him in the head. I'm going to bed.

This example is a turning point in their relationship, as Tara tells Jax that the only way she can be with him is that he tells her the truth about everything. Earlier in the same episode, Gemma has told Tara exactly this. Therefore, this scene shows that Tara has decided to commit to Jax. She also admits that "I run away from shit all the time", because she has trust issues. In Example 25, Jax is once again trying to push Tara away. Abel has been kidnapped and Jax believes that Tara would be safe if she was not with him. They are in Abel's empty nursery.

## Example 25

Season 3, episode 1

Tara                    I think you blame me.  
Jax                    This has nothing to do with you. None of it does.  
Tara                    None of it?  
Jax                    I'm sorry this happened. I had no right asking you for this.  
Tara                    Asking me for what?  
Jax                    Wanting you to stay, be part of what I am—I didn't think it through. Obviously, I do that. I don't think shit through—What it might do to other people.  
Tara                    I'm not other people.  
Jax                    You should have gone back to Chicago. The shit that happened with Kohn... That should have been the end.

Tara            You're not making sense.  
 Jax             This has to be the end. You got to get out from Charming, away from me.  
 Tara            Jax, you... You can't just expect me to—  
 Jax             Just—Tara... Please, don't complicate it, okay? It's simple. You don't belong here.

Example 26 takes place later in the same episode, Jax is cleaning Abel's room, as Tara has trashed it earlier, because she has been upset for what Jax has said to her. Tara comes in.

## Example 26

Season 3, episode 1

Tara            I'll finish up.  
 Jax             I got it.  
                   You should go.  
 Tara            No. I didn't come back to Charming to run away from Kohn. And I didn't stay because of what we did to him.  
 Jax             Doesn't matter now.  
 Tara            When Donna was killed, those things you said to me in the hospital about my life being a series of hit and runs, that my face was the only one you saw—  
 Jax             I shouldn't have said that shit.

(Tara throws Jax with a diaper.)

Tara            It was the truth! I have created this very serious life for myself. And when I'm inside it, I barely know myself. I have these moments sometimes in the middle of a surgery when suddenly I'm aware of my—my hands, you know, doing these extraordinary things. And I think, "Whose hands are these? What am I—What am I doing here?" When I'm with you, I never ask that question.  
 Jax             I'm not the answer. Look at me. Look at this.  
 Tara            I am always looking at it. My brain never stops. Why am I here? You know, should I be here? Am I afraid to stay, afraid to go, afraid to be a mother? Shit, it's endless. I drive myself crazy.  
 Jax             None of that matters.  
 Tara            I know. That's become so clear to me. The noise doesn't matter. We don't know who we are until we're connected to someone else. We're just better human beings when we're with the person we're supposed to be with. I wasn't supposed to leave. I belong here.

(Jax wipes tears from her face and hugs her.)

Examples 25 and 26 show how Tara and Jax repeatedly attempt to break up but then get closer to each other again. Moreover, in Example 26, Tara constructs her identity, as she is explaining Jax how she believes that she belongs with Jax and in Charming. She even says that she does not know if being a doctor is what she is supposed to do, as she explains how she sometimes in the middle of surgery starts to question herself: "Whose

hands are these? What am I- What am I doing here?" She then concludes that with Jax she never asks that question, implying that she should stay with him.

In Example 27, Jax is talking to Opie about Tara wanting to take a leave out of her job. Opie's old lady is a porn star.

### **Example 27**

Season 3, episode 3

Jax	You'd kill to get your old lady out of her day job. All I want is mine to go back to hers. Tara wants to take a leave.
Opie	Maybe it's the best thing. All the shit she's been through.
Jax	Yeah, I don't know. I'm struggling with it. My old man's manuscript, he said there's only two ways an old lady makes it. Either you tell them everything, or you tell them nothing. Anything else, shit falls apart.

Jax refers to the manuscript of his father that he has found in Season 1. It appears that John Teller has given Jax exactly the same advice as Gemma has given to Tara.

In Example 10 in chapter 4.1 Tara and Jax were arguing about Tara going to Canada with Jax. Jax told Tara to act like an old lady if she wanted to be one and do what she was told. Tara is a modern woman, in the sense that she wants to decide herself what she does, but the hierarchy in the club is different—the old lady must obey her man, even if she knew he was wrong. The power an old lady has is subtle and indirect. In this sense, the club holds very traditional gender roles and values, which causes major problems for Jax and Tara's relationship.

#### **4.4.5 Tara and Margaret**

Margaret Murphy is Tara's supervisor at St. Thomas Hospital. At first they do not get along at all. Margaret dislikes the fact that Tara spends time with the outlaw motorcycle club, as she thinks it might damage the hospital's image. Her fear is justified, as Tara does do things that jeopardize her career at the hospital. Margaret is introduced in



season 2. In Example 28, Tara looks beaten as Gemma has accidentally punched her in the face. This worries Margaret.

### Example 28

Season 2, episode 5

Tara	Almost finished with the ROs.
(Margaret looks at Jax who is leaving and sighs.)	
Margaret	If you need to speak with someone, file a report, you can take--
Tara	Why would I want to do that?
Margaret	I know your guy is part of the motorcycle gang here.
Tara	Club. It's a motorcycle club.
Margaret	Right. Well, I hope the club doesn't become a problem.
Tara	My personal life has nothing to do with the hospital.
Margaret	I know. But when that personal life hits you in the face hard enough, can't help but impact your work, and then it does become the hospital's problem. It's just a heads-up from a friend.

Tara looks literally beaten, as Gemma has accidentally hit her in the face. Margaret draws her own conclusions about it and assumes that Jax has hit her. Her non-verbal behaviour – looking after Jax and sighing – implies this, especially as it is accompanied with a worried "If you need to speak with someone, file a report, you can take-". Tara acts as if she does not understand at all what Margaret is talking about. Margaret continues that she knows that Tara's "guy" is part of "the motorcycle gang". Both *guy* and *gang* are dismissive expressions, and Tara cannot resist the urge to correct her: "Club. It's a motorcycle club." In this example, Tara also defends the club, even though she has been reluctant to do so before. In this way, Margaret helps Tara to construct her identity as an old lady.

During Season 2, Tara helps a SAMCRO member, Chibs, to stay at St. Thomas hospital, as he would be transferred to another hospital, where he would not have any protection. Margaret finds out about this and gets Tara suspended. Tara also hits Margaret in the face in Episode 10, as Margaret calls Gemma *biker whore*. However, in Season 3, their relationship develops into a friendship. Gemma has escaped the hospital, as Tara has helped her.

## Example 29

Season 3, episode 7

Margaret           Where's Gemma Teller?  
Tara                Uh, I-I don't know. She pulled a gun on me, took my key card.  
Margaret           You expect me to believe that?  
Tara                I don't really care.  
Margaret           You're committing a crime. Do you understand that?  
Tara                That Irishman... that killed the prospect... he kidnapped Jax's son. It wasn't in the papers. The cops, the FBI, they don't give a shit. It's all on Jax and the club to find him, and Gemma wasn't going to jail before she knew that baby was safe. You know, maybe there was nothing I could have done to stop him from taking Abel, I don't know, but helping Gemma was my way of making up for it. And... I'll deny all of it. And if the cops don't believe the lie, then I guess I'll suffer the consequences. Thank you.  
Margaret           For what?  
Tara                I know you're trying to help me.

(Tara heads to the door.)

Margaret           Wait.

(Margaret hits Tara in the face.)

Tara                Oh! What the hell are you doing?

Margaret (handing a cold bag)  
                      They'll never believe Gemma didn't slug you. Let's go.

This example shows the turning-point in Tara and Margaret's relationship. As Tara tells Margaret the truth, Margaret decides to help her lie to the police.

In Example 30, Margaret and Tara have been kidnapped on their way to the abortion clinic, where Margaret was giving a ride to Tara, as she had confided to her about her pregnancy. They are then captured and held hostage by the former president of MC Calaveras, an associate of Mayans, one of the other clubs in Charming.

## Example 30

Season 3, episode 10

Margaret           Are you okay?  
Tara                Yeah. You?  
Margaret           Yes.

Tara I don't know why they're doing this.  
 Margaret I'm sure it's about money.  
 Tara Yeah, well, then they're out of luck, 'cause the club doesn't have any. I'm sorry this is happening to you.  
 Margaret So am I.  
 Tara The, um... tattoo on your back?  
 Margaret Another life.  
 Tara What is it?  
 Margaret I thought I was in love.  
 Tara That's a... serious amount of ink.  
 Margaret I was in deep. Started out just another groupie. Before I knew it, I was giving him my money, buying him drugs, then dealing for him. Christmas Eve 1989, we both O.D.'d on fentanyl-laced heroin. He died... and I woke up.  
 Tara I'm sorry.  
 Margaret I'm not. I leave it there so I remember all that shit is behind me.  
 Tara Yeah.

Tara is sorry that Margaret has been also kidnapped with her, as she has nothing to do with the club. However, as they have both been kidnapped, they get closer to each other. Margaret reveals something about her past and says the same thing about her tattoo as Tara said about hers to Gemma in the first episode of Season 1: "I leave it there so I remember all that shit is behind me". This reinforces their connection, as their experiences in the past are likened. Later in *Sons of Anarchy*, Margaret also helps Tara to find a job in Oregon, as she wants to get her family away from Charming and they are clearly on the same side and not enemies anymore.

#### **4.4.6 Gemma and Tara**

The reciprocal relationship between Gemma and Tara is complex from the beginning. At first, Gemma is angry at Tara for breaking her son's heart when they were young. Later, Gemma is not sure whether Tara is suitable to be an old lady, as she does not appear to be committed enough to the club. Tara, on the other hand, feels that Gemma interferes with her relationship with Jax too much. However, they grow closer as Tara and Jax's relationship develops into a more serious one, and Gemma becomes a kind of a mentor to Tara. Tara is often reluctant to take advice from Gemma when she gives it, but usually she ends up acting as Gemma has advised her to.

Example 31 shows one of the instances in which Gemma is giving Tara advice on her relationship with Jax in relation to the club. Gemma is feeding baby Abel with a bottle in a rocking chair at Jax's house when she hears somebody coming in.

### Example 31

Season 2, episode 1

Gemma            Jax?  
Tara              It's me. I told Jax I'd come by.  
Gemma            You didn't need to do that.  
Tara              I wanted to.

Gemma (gets up and talks to Abel)  
                    Come on. There we go. That's a good boy.

(Gemma puts him in his crib.)

Gemma            You on the pill?

(Tara looks at Gemma puzzled)

Gemma            Just wondering. You got that look.  
Tara              The aching, empty-womb look?  
Gemma            Something like that.  
Tara              You think I'm using Jax to get knocked up?  
Gemma            No, Jesus, I hope not. You gonna trap someone, make sure they've got money.  
Tara              Where are you on this, Gemma? Me and Jax.  
Gemma            What do you care what I think?  
Tara              Jax cares.  
Gemma            You really want my advice? Total disclosure.  
Tara              What do you mean?  
Gemma            It's the only way it works with you and him. You're too smart. Too... Too neurotic to live in the vague. He needs to tell you everything. No truth, no pussy. You draw the line.

Tara              I'm not sure I want to know.  
Gemma            Then this will never last.  
Tara              Did John Teller tell you everything?  
Gemma            You love the man. You *learn* to love the club. If you can do that, there's no truth you can't handle.

Gemma (kissing Tara on the cheek)  
                    Good night.

(Gemma leaves. )

This is the first instance in which Gemma is giving Tara advice. She tells her how she will make her and Jax's relationship work. Also, she states that their relationship will never work if Tara does not want to know everything and that she will learn to love the club if she loves Jax. It seems as though she is speaking from her own experience.

In Season 3, after Gemma has found out that Abel has been kidnapped, she has had bad arrhythmia and been hospitalized. She has handcuffs, as she is arrested. Tara comes to visit her in Example 32 and Gemma wants to know what had happened when Abel was kidnapped.

### **Example 32**

Season 3, episode 5

Gemma	Why don't you tell me?
Tara	It's what Jax said. Cameron killed Half-Sack, tied me up and took Abel.
Gemma	Nothing you could have done about that?
Tara	Had a gun pointed to my head.
Gemma	What if it was your baby?
Tara	What the hell does that mean?
Gemma	If it was your flesh and blood, you would have thrown yourself in front of a bullet.
Tara	That's unbelievably cruel. I did everything I could.
Gemma	Everything except save him.

(Tara starts to cry.)

Gemma	How far along are you?
Tara	Six weeks. No one knows. With everything else going on, doesn't make sense.
Gemma	You're quite the secret queen lately.
Tara	Yeah, well, I learned from the best.
Gemma	I'm assuming it's Jax's.
Tara	Yes.
Gemma	Good.
Tara	That's it? Good?
Gemma	For now. Not exactly in a position of influence (shows her handcuff).

In this example, Gemma confronts Tara and says that Tara should have saved Abel. She concludes that as she did not protect Abel with her own life, there must have been something that she was protecting. She guesses that Tara is pregnant and Tara confirms her suspicions. Gemma remarks her being "quite the secret queen lately" and Tara says she "learned from the best" – meaning Gemma. At this point, Tara begins to resemble Gemma in her actions.

In Season 4, Tara has grown to be an old lady in the club. In Example 33, Gemma gives her credit on taking care of things while Jax and Clay, among other club members, were in jail. They are waiting for the motorcycle club members to come back home.

### Example 33

Season 4, episode 1

Gemma	You okay?
Tara	Yeah. Anxious.
Gemma	Mmm. I'm proud of you. Ain't easy making things work when they're inside. You done great.
Tara	I couldn't have done it without you.
Gemma	Wasn't just me. Was the whole club.
Tara	Yeah, it's true.
Gemma	I love you.
Tara	Me, too. (kisses Gemma on the cheek)

This example shows how their relationship has gotten better and more personal as the leading old ladies of SAMCRO. Gemma says she is proud of Tara and Tara points out that she could have not done so well without Gemma. Moreover, when the men arrive, Gemma tells Jax about Tara that "she did good".

However, by the end of Season 4, Tara and Gemma are represented more as rivalries. This can be seen in Example 34, which takes place in the second last episode of Season 4. Tara has arrived to the clubhouse and asked to speak in private to Gemma who has been chatting with Unser. Unser leaves them alone. The dialogue of Example 7 has happened between Gemma and Jax right before this scene.

### Example 34

Season 4, episode 13

Tara	I've been waiting for you.
Gemma	Yeah, I know.
Tara	Where are the letters? Did you bring them to Clay?
Gemma	No.
Tara	How many did you take out before you gave them to Jax?
Gemma	If you knew... why'd you tell me where they were?

Tara                    Because I'm smarter than you are, Gemma... and I know Jax better than you do.

(Jax gets out and joins them. Gemma is a bit further away.)

Jax                    You should have told me.

Tara                    I was going to. When you got out, you were so eager to leave, I just... I was afraid it would push you back in. I'm sorry.

Jax                    I have to kill him, Tara.

Tara                    I know.

(Tara takes something out of her bag.)

Tara                    And this is how you do it.

(Gemma comes to see what it is, Jax opens the little bag. There is a syringe.)

Tara                    It's a blood thinner. Inject it into his IV line and pull the tube from his chest. He'll bleed into his lungs and... drown. It'll happen quick. You know, just... look like he pulled it out in his sleep.

(Chibs whistles on the other side of the yard. )

Chibs                  Jackie! Time for the meet! We got to go, brother.

(Jax puts the syringe back in its little bag. Tara gets up and takes Jax's hand. They both stand up.)

Tara                    You kill him... and then you come and get me and our boys and drive us out of this poisonous town.

Jax (nods)            I will. I promise.

(Jax kisses Tara passionately. Gemma does not look very happy. They both look at her. Jax leaves.)

Gemma                What are you doing?

Tara                    Everything you taught me. He's mine.

In the example above, Tara is represented to be in charge. It is a remarkable difference, if compared to Example 9, in which she gets immediately defensive and tells Gemma that she is "not really up for a fight", when Gemma wants to ask her a question. In Example 33, Tara tells Gemma that she is "smarter than her" and that she is doing "everything you taught me". Moreover, she uses a similar persuasive style when talking to Jax to what Gemma used earlier in Example 7 when telling him that he should be the president of SAMCRO. In addition, even though Tara has usually been described as law-obedient, despite breaking the hospital policies and helping to kill the caretaker of Gemma's father, this is the first time that she herself suggests that Jax should kill Clay, and in addition to that she gives him the murder weapon and advises him how to use it. It is exceptional and shows the progress of her character from the always appropriate doctor to a murderous old lady. She is still persuading Jax to leave the club, though, which is the ultimate reason behind her actions. The rivalry setting is evident, as Tara

ends the scene by telling Gemma "He's mine". Jax is being pulled in two ways by the two most important women in his life. Gemma is clearly represented as inferior in this example.

In this section, I have discussed the interactions between other characters. I began with the relationship between Gemma and Clay that transformed from a loving marriage into domestic violence and then murder intentions. This had great effects of Gemma's identity construction, as from a dedicated wife she turns into a wounded victim. In addition, it was seen that a great deal of Gemma's self-esteem consists of her sexuality, as Cherry appearing in Charming was such a major blow to her. Moreover, the turning point of Gemma and Clay's relationship reminds the viewers of Gemma's murderous and cruel tensions. With Jax, Gemma could fulfill her protective maternal instincts and also her possessiveness that she had with Clay before the domestic violence, too. The relationship with Unser was found to be platonic from Gemma's side and also an unequal one, as Gemma seemed to get more advantage of it. However, Gemma could always trust Unser, as she knew that he could not resist her.

Tara's relationship with Jax was discussed to find out that Jax appeared to be the answer for Tara. Her identity was constantly progressing towards an old lady in the club, until she had the baby with Jax, after which her top priority broadened to her family, including Jax's children, but not the club. Moreover, she even changed from law-obedient to assisting Jax in murdering his step-father by supplying the murder weapon for him. When defending the club to Margaret, Tara constructed her identity as part of it. Moreover, later Margaret assisted Tara in finding her way out of the club.

The dialogues between Gemma and Tara helped both of them in constructing their identities. Tara grew from an insecure young woman into a passionate and superior old lady of the president of SAMCRO. However, Tara began to resemble Gemma more as the plot progressed, and she mentioned several times that she "learned from the best", referring to Gemma. Thus, Gemma acted as a mentor for her. However, for Gemma, Tara's more superior position made her even more vulnerable after Clay assaulting her. Gemma's character diminished into less powerful than before.



## 4.5 Environment

The typical environments that the characters most often appear tell a great deal about the characters and also about their identity construction. I will now briefly present the most important environments in which the characters Gemma and Tara usually appear and discuss how they contribute to their characterization.

### 4.5.1 Charming

The town of Charming is the main environment in *Sons of Anarchy*. Charming is a small town where everybody knows each other's business. Part of the authorities are co-operating with the outlaw motorcycle club. It is depicted as a normally very cozy and peaceful town, yet the motorcycle club is said to bring about all kinds of restlessness.

Gemma seems to be quite satisfied with living in Charming but Tara is struggling with it throughout the four seasons. In Season 1, episode 4, Gemma reminds Tara that "You left Charming because it was incestuous, backward and small-minded. That's pretty much an exact quote. I don't forget". In Season 1, episode 2 Tara explains Jax about her leaving after high school: "No, I didn't hate Charming, just me in it at the time" when Jax points out that Tara "always hated it here". In Example 11 (Season 4, episode 13), Tara told Jax that "Charming won't let you", as if it was a person instead of a town that would not let Jax leave. Moreover, in Example 31, Tara asks Jax to drive her and their boys "out of this poisonous town" after killing Clay. However, in the end of Season 4, Tara decides to stay, as it becomes evident that Jax cannot leave. In the end, being with Jax is her ultimate goal in life instead of getting the children away from Charming, even though it is an option she seriously considers.

Charming is a reflection of the club, which is why Gemma feels at home in there. However, Tara struggles with Charming as much as she struggles with the club and her role in it.

#### 4.5.2 The clubhouse

The clubhouse is mainly a men's world in *Sons of Anarchy*, as that is where the club members gather for meetings and parties, for example. In addition, the clubhouse operates also as Teller Morrow Automotive Repair, and some of the club members actually do fix cars in there, which is also a masculine activity in the American culture. Despite the very masculine atmosphere, both Gemma and Tara are also seen at the clubhouse often. Gemma even has an office there, in which she does paperwork for the club. Moreover, the clubhouse has an own dorm room for each of the club members where they can spend the night or simply spend time. Very often after parties they take women in there. Consequently, it is also a place for extra-marital affairs of the club members. For example, Jax spends a night there with Ima, "a crow-eater", to scare Tara away from the club in order to protect her.

The clubhouse is a place that is often seen in the beginning and in the end of the episodes and seasons. It is a home base for the motorcycle club and it reflects the motorcycle club's values. It has a sense of viciousness to it, and it is decorated very much in a way of a traditional American pub. It has a kitchen and a big bar table and many tables with chairs. It also has the headquarters of the club, the room with a big table around which the club members gather to discuss club matters and to make their important decisions. Outside there are garages and offices.

The clubhouse acts as a safe haven for the club members and their families in Season 2, episode 12, when the whole club is threatened and they are about to retaliate to White Power, who have been attacking the families of the club members. When the clubhouse is trashed by the sheriffs in Season 4, episode 2, everybody is very upset, as the clubhouse represents the club. When it has been damaged, it figuratively represents what is happening to the motorcycle club as a whole, since in Season 4, the whole club is tearing apart.

For Gemma, the clubhouse is like a second home. As she is often found in her office, it also represents her. It has a great deal of post-it notes on the wall and she usually has some paperwork on her desk, and also a phone and a computer. When she is in emotional distress, the condition of the room reflects her state of mind. For example, after she has been raped, she has plenty of paper work to do, which Clay throws on the floor in Example 19 before making love to her.

#### **4.5.3 Gemma's house**

What I call here Gemma's house is the house where Gemma and Clay live together until Season 4. Gemma's house is often a place for bigger gatherings and celebrations. Her kitchen plays a big role in the house, as she is a very good cook and makes everything by herself to parties and fund-raisers. She has a long table that fits most of the club members and their families too. When Gemma is home alone or somebody comes to visit her, she is very often in the kitchen too, which reflects her traditional role as a mother and wife. Moreover, the big kitchen and the dinner parties also emphasize Gemma's role as a mother.

Another room that can be seen very often is Gemma's bedroom. Usually, she has been recently having sex with Clay or is about to when the bedroom is shown. Hence, the bedroom represents Gemma's sexuality.

#### **4.5.4 The hospital**

Tara is very often seen at the hospital, as being a surgeon is a major feature of her character. The world of medicine is shown to be strict, filled with rules and policies. Tara is very law-obedient, especially in the beginning of *Sons of Anarchy*. Therefore, the strict and simple hospital environment reflects Tara's character in this sense. However, as has been discussed above, sometimes Tara finds it difficult to obey the rules of the hospital when it comes to the motorcycle club and her role in it. She helps the club several times by either borrowing medical supplies, helping someone escape the hospital or helping someone to stay in the hospital. In a way, this dichotomy reflects her position in the motorcycle club and in the TV series as a whole. She wants to follow

the rules but she also wants to help the motorcycle club, and often it is impossible to do both.

The hospital environment is very clinical and sterile, which also makes it a neutral environment for several discussions. The club members often go talk to each other or to Chief Unser in the hospital chapel, which is considered a safe place from curious ears. Also Gemma and Tara have several confidential discussions in it. Whereas the hospital is a neutral environment, the hospital chapel is clearly religiously committed. Yet no religious speech usually takes place in it. As a setting, it is peaceful and candle-lit, which provides quite a contrast with the dark secrets that are spoken about in it. However, it also provides a peaceful moment for many one-on-one discussions.

#### **4.5.5 Jax's house**

Jax's house is also an environment where Tara is seen often, as her relationship with Jax gets more serious. In Season 4, she permanently lives there also with the children. In Season 4, Tara's role as a mother is emphasized in Jax's house. Also, she is very often heading for work, which emphasizes her being a "working mom", operating in both private and public spheres of the society.

In the beginning of *Sons of Anarchy*, Jax's house is a typical house of a young single man. It is messy and has motorcycle posters on the walls. Gemma helps him decorate one of the bedrooms into a nursery when Abel gets home from the hospital, which creates quite a contrast to the other parts of the house. Tara's role in the house grows as her relationship with Jax deepens. Jax makes an amused remark about this when he gets back home from prison in the beginning of Season 4, as can be seen in the example below. Jax has just recently come home from jail and he has been physically intimate with Tara. They are in bed afterwards, when Example 35 takes place.

#### **Example 35**

## Season 4, episode 1

Tara                    I think we should talk about some things, Jax.  
Jax                      Yeah, we should talk about all the chick shit you decked out my house in.

Tara (chuckles)  
I'm sorry, Maxim posters and Harley mirrors aren't really my style. (they kiss)  
I want to talk about the boys, Jax. About what we're gonna do.

Tara remarks that Maxim posters and Harley mirrors are not really her style, which is why she has decorated the house in a more feminine way. In Season 4, the house is not only Jax's anymore, as it is the home of the whole family and it can be seen in the decoration as well.

## 4.6 Biography

In this section, I will shortly provide an overview of the biographies of Gemma and Tara. Pearson (2007:47) argues that "[a] character's biography performs two functions; it augments the reality effect of the quasi-human being and it provides plot lines". Hence, the biography gives depth to the characters.

### GEMMA

Gemma grew up in Charming but left the town when she was 16. Ten years later, she returned with John Teller and baby Jackson. In Example 36 below, Unser tells Tara about this:

### Example 36

#### Season 2, episode 4

Unser                    Known her since she was 12. Me and Emily Koza's the ones that tried to talk her out of running away. She split when she was 16. Came back ten years later with a baby and a motorcycle club. Sort of like you did, except without the baby and such.

This example contributes to Gemma's unpredictable characteristics.

Gemma is not reported to have any education. John Teller, Gemma's first husband, founded SAMCRO with Piney Winston. Hence, Gemma has been part of SAMCRO's history ever since the beginning. Gemma had two children with John; Jax and Thomas who died at the age of 6 due to a heart defect that runs in Gemma's family. Gemma herself has a scar on her chest from heart surgery, as she has the same "family flaw", as she calls it in the first episode of *Sons of Anarchy* when it becomes evident that newborn Abel also has congenital heart defect. Also, her mother has died of the same "family flaw" recently in Season 3. It is interesting how she talks about the genetic heart defect as family flaw. In a way, it also symbolically shows how the most important thing for her also has this major flaw in it. Moreover, Gemma becomes a grandmother first in Season 1 and the second time in Season 4 and she takes this role very seriously. It emphasizes the motherhood aspect of her character.

Gemma started a relationship with John's friend Clay Morrow, who was also the vice-president of the club, while John was in Ireland in club business. Clay and John had severe differences of opinion in many club-related issues. Eventually, Gemma plotted John Teller's death together with Clay and helped him set it up to look like an accident. Subsequently, Clay became the president of SAMCRO and Gemma continued to be the old lady of the president for many years. This reinforces the viewer's conception of Gemma as cunning, manipulative and always getting what she wants. After that, she becomes the mother of the president, as Jax becomes the new president for the club in Season 4, and attempts to plot Clay's killing as well. Hence, she still does not lose her position as the highly valued mother of the whole club.

## **TARA**

Tara grew up in Charming and left the town, just like Gemma, in her late teens. Her mother had died when she was 9 years old and her father was a drunk, according to the ATF agent Stahl in Season 1, episode 10. She and Jax had been high school sweethearts

and after breaking up with him, she ran away from the club and from Jax. This shows how her character tends to run away, when things get difficult. She studied medicine in Chicago and after graduating worked at Chicago Presbyterian. This contributes to her character's smart and academic aspect. While working there, she met the ATF Agent Kohn. She got pregnant with him but decided to have an abortion, as he was very possessive and violent. Then, she got a restraining order on Kohn and fled back to Charming. Her father had passed away recently, so she had a valid reason to come back, but running away is a recurrent theme in her characterization and is seen here as well.

After returning to Charming, she reconnects with Jax. Jax kills Agent Kohn after he had attacks Tara and Tara had shoots him in the stomach, which makes them partners in crime. Moreover, it reinforces the viewers idea of Tara being the 'princess in trouble', who Jax saves. Finally, Tara becomes Jax's old lady, a step-mother to his son Abel and has baby Thomas with him a little bit later. They also get engaged in the beginning of Season 4. Subsequently, she hurts her hand in a club-related incident, which causes her to have a long break from working as a surgeon. Moreover, Tara plans getting away from Charming throughout Season 4, which, again, shows her tendency to run when it gets difficult.

#### **4.7 Summary**

In this chapter, I have dealt with the female character construction from six different points of view. Firstly, I examined the characters' psychological traits and habitual behaviours, showing that Gemma is characterized as manipulative, sexual and motherly, whereas Tara was characterized as smart and law-obedient, yet contradictory when it comes to helping Jax and the club. Secondly, I described the characters' physical traits and appearance. Gemma was noted to be very feminine and sexy, but her sexiness was distracted with the scar from her heart surgery showing that she was strong and weak at the same time. Tara was found to change from a more appropriate highly educated woman to a 'biker chic' that resembles more Gemma. Thirdly, I dealt with the speech patterns of the two characters. I used the help of a corpus tool to find out the utterances the two characters used most often in the beginnings of their speech turns. Gemma was found to use more harsh language and plenty of exclamations and foul language,

whereas Tara's speech had two registers, the professional one in the hospital setting, and the standard casual one elsewhere. However, it was also noted that Tara began to adopt some of Gemma's speech style as her character got influence from Gemma's character. Fourthly, I investigated the interactions with other characters. By the help of the corpus tool, I found three other notable characters for Gemma and two for Tara that I had a closer look at. In addition, I also discussed their reciprocal relationship. It became evident that Gemma's manipulative nature was dominant in all of her closer interactions with other characters, especially the male ones. Tara, on the other hand constructed her identity in relation to other characters more than Gemma. Their reciprocal relationship seemed to be of the mentor – apprentice type at first, but in the end Tara used what she had learned from Gemma against her. Fifthly, I dealt with the environments the two characters were seen most often and found that the environment often reflects the character's state or personality traits. Sixthly, I looked into their biographies and showed how their histories deepen the viewer's perception of them as characters.

## **5 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

The aim of this thesis was to study the construction of the female characters in the American TV series *Sons of Anarchy*. My data consisted mainly of the transcribed dialogues that had the two most important female characters either participating in or being a subject of in the four first seasons that were comprised of 53 episodes. I also paid attention to facial expressions and tones of voice in the dialogues. I divided my analysis into six categories according to a taxonomy introduced by Pearson (2007) about anatomising a televisual character. The categories were psychological traits/habitual behaviors, physical characteristics/appearance, speech patterns, interactions with other characters, environment and biography. I analyzed the characters primarily qualitatively by investigating 36 examples from the transcribed data. In addition, with respect to the characters' speech, I also relied on corpus linguistics methods to show their typical speech patterns. It was only possible to scratch the surface of, for example, interactions with other characters due to the limitations on the length of the thesis. Moreover, each category could have been the target for study on its own. Hence, although the taxonomy provided an overview of a range of ways with which the



two female characters were constructed, a more narrow focus could actually be considered, if I were to revise and reconduct the study.

In the category of psychological traits and habitual behaviors it was found out that Gemma's character remained relatively static during the four seasons, whereas Tara's character developed from a rule-following, sensible surgeon into an outlaw old lady of a motorcycle club president. Moreover, it was found that Gemma's character's main building block was family, with a strong emphasis on motherhood especially, and Tara's character was largely constructed on her healer profession and qualities. In the category of physical traits and appearance it was pointed out that Tara's physical appearance coincides with the Western beauty ideals of a smart woman, as she is slim and dark-haired. However, her character's development was also seen in her appearance, as the style of her hair and dress changes during the four seasons. Gemma was found to have an untypical physical appearance for a woman of her age, as she uses plenty of black leather and shows cleavage that also reveals the scar from her heart surgery. The scar from was seen as a sign of weakness and strength at the same time. Both women were found to possess mainly feminine qualities. In the category of speech patterns, Gemma was found to use exclamations and profanities significantly. Tara was found to not have so many typical speech patterns of her own, of which it was concluded that her style of speech was not so outstanding. In the category of interactions with other characters, I examined the relationships with three other notable characters for both central female characters. In the end of this section, I concentrated on Gemma and Tara's mutual relationship. Gemma's relationship with Clay changed from loving companionship into domestic violence, which led Gemma to decide to get Clay killed. Gemma's relationship with Jax was found to be that of dedicated motherhood, and with Unser Gemma had an unequal friendship that she was superior in. Tara's relationship with Jax was complex, as they attempted to end their relationship several times, yet Tara's identity as an old lady was reinforced during the TV series as a result of their deepening relationship. Her relationship with Margaret also helped Tara develop, as she has to first defend the club to her, and as she also got Margaret who represents rules and regulations, to accept her illegal actions in the name of the club, she also got justification for her actions being acceptable. Gemma and Tara's mutual relationship defined both of their characters in turning points, as Gemma acted as a kind of a mentor to Tara, which emphasized her mothering skills, and Tara "learned from the best" to become a proper old lady. In the

category of environment it was shown that the surroundings of the events often reflect the mental setting of the characters and the surroundings can also be modified according to the characters' development. In the biography category I provided a brief overview on the profiles of Gemma and Tara that made their characters person-like and increased their character credibility and discussed how the events in their history contributed to their characters.

To summarize, the central female characters are constructed in *Sons of Anarchy* from different building blocks, such as motherhood and profession. Moreover, the characters are continuously developing in interaction with other characters. The gender roles of the motorcycle club remain more traditional than in the contemporary United States in general, as in the end women are expected to obey the male club members and support them in all situations. However, it was observed that the female characters had subtle power through manipulation and persuasive speech. Moreover, in the motorcycle club's moral code it was fine for men to have extra-marital affairs, as long as their old ladies did not find out about them, which created an imbalance between the sexual relations of men and women, as women did not have such a sexual freedom. Hence, the female characters remained inferior in this aspect.

Pearson (2007:50) argues that "[t]he core psychological traits and behaviours of film characters can alter as they experience narrative trajectories that bring them to the denouement; indeed, such alteration is seen as the hallmark of 'good drama', as when the heroine of *Now Voyager* (1942) goes from awkward spinster to sexually confident woman". This is what also happens with Tara's character during the four seasons of the TV series. In the beginning of *Sons of Anarchy*, she is a law-obedient doctor who carefully follows the rules and guidelines set to her but during the four seasons that I have here analyzed, she develops into a good old lady, who bends and breaks the law if she must for the motorcycle club's sake. Also, as appearance and clothing tell much about the character (Culpeper 2001:224-225, Pearson 2007:43), it was interesting to find that Tara's style changed whilst her character developed in other aspects too.

As Kozloff (2000:41) points out, dialogue and speech acts often work as pivotal vehicles in furthering the plot, this was also shown in my analysis of *Sons of Anarchy*. For example, when Gemma disclosed the club that she had been raped, it had a massive effect on the narrative, as it created a stronger group spirit in the club that had been tearing apart. Culpeper (2001:167) and Rimmon-Kenan (2005:65) have argued that, in addition to what a character says about herself, it is also important to pay attention to how others talk about her and to her. For example, in Example 4 Wendy characterized Gemma as a mother with no conscience. Moreover, in Example 6 Tara and Gemma both reconstructed each other's identities by telling each other what they think their paths are. As Kozloff (2001:45) notes, dialogue is also a way of self-revelation of the characters. This could be also seen in Example 6, in which Gemma pondered how God meant her to be a fierce mother. Kozloff (2000:47) also argues that "dialogue serves as character revelation because it navigates in the relationship between two people". In my analysis, it could be seen especially in Tara's character and how her discussions and arguments with Jax reconstructed her identity and how she eagerly attempted to find her place in the club as Jax's old lady.

Both Tara and Gemma are examples of the daughter coming back to her family and home town after many years, as Hunter (2012:321) has described as typical for many female characters in cinema and TV series. However, with Tara, it is not as traditional as Hunter has depicted, since Tara only returned to Charming when her father had passed away and when she did not have her family there anymore. Also, Gemma returned to her father's place in the beginning of Season 3, when she has escaped from custody and tended to her demented old father before placing him into an old people's home. Moreover, as was discussed in her biography, Gemma had also returned to Charming after spending some years away. What is thus common for Gemma and Tara is that they both returned to their home in the time of crisis, when they wanted to hide from something and feel safe. For Tara, it is Agent Kohn, who has appeared to be too possessive, that makes her leave Chicago and come back to Charming, and for Gemma it is the legal force that would want her in jail that pushes her to leave Charming.

LaGamba (2012:2-3) notes about powerful women in cinema that they "often suffer the consequences of their authoritative personalities", Accordingly, in *Sons of Anarchy*, it is

possible to see this in Gemma's character. First, in Season 2 she was violently gang-raped and later, in Season 4 she was beaten by her husband, Clay. The gang-rape happened to Gemma because she is the strong mother of SAMCRO and her rape was an attempt to break the club. The domestic violence, in turn, happened, because Clay felt threatened that Gemma knew about him trying to get Tara killed.

Gemma and Tara both also sustained some masculine traits – this was also suggested by Fine (2012) of Gemma. Especially when *Sons of Anarchy* progresses, Tara's character began to resemble more of Gemma's in toughness and aggression, which, according to Fine (2012:155) are usually assigned to the male gender. Moreover, Gemma's harsh language use and significant use of profanities can be seen as masculine traits. LaGamba (2012:24) argues that female characters' identities are often shaped by their relationships with male characters. In *Sons of Anarchy*, this could also be seen as the case, since the old ladies of the present study, Gemma and Tara, were primarily old ladies of important male club members, and old ladies are principally wives and mothers. Aarons (2013:165) also argues that Gemma and Tara dedicate their lives to SAMCRO and its men, and it would be difficult to say who they would be without SAMCRO. For Tara, there was life outside SAMCRO in the public sphere as well through her profession as a surgeon, as was noted before, but when she hurt her hand, all of this changed. She felt that the proper use of her hand was the only thing that enabled her to work as a surgeon outside the club in the society, and it was the one thing that defined her as something else than an old lady of a motorcycle club member. It was therefore devastating for Tara's character to temporarily lose this asset. However, she could have got a job in Oregon after rehabilitation of her hand, but she chose not to.

Gender roles on American television, based on this study, still seem to be quite traditional – and unequal, as the society is heavily patriarchal. Women characters in *Sons of Anarchy* had power only to some extent, whereas the leading characters in the TV series were male. Moreover, the men had more sexual freedom than women and often times women could only be seen as a source of pleasure. The female characters were useful for the male characters but they could not stand on their own, as Gemma's notable position in the club could not exist without the all-male club. Tara also ended up choosing love of Jax instead of starting over with her children safe outside of Charming.

This could reflect the general attitudes towards women in the American society, and therefore the whole Western target area of contemporary popular culture. In this view, women remain inferior to men, although they are said to have the same rights and privileges.

As it was only possible to scratch the surface of the characterization of the female protagonists in *Sons of Anarchy* in this thesis, it could be studied more in depth in further studies. It is possible, for example, to use Pearson's model to investigate the characters more in detail, or they could be studied with a completely different approach, such as using corpus methodology with a reference corpus, for instance, to distinguish their speech patterns from typical speech of real people. Also multimodality could be paid more attention to, in order to analyze the dialogues more in depth. The male characters could also be worth studying, for example how their representation relates to the typical American men. It could also be possible to include other female characters of *Sons of Anarchy*, for example, the crow-eaters and sweet-butts who only seem to have an instrumental value in the TV series. On the other hand, it could also be possible to concentrate on either Gemma or Tara only, in order to deepen the analysis of character construction. As the key elements of the theoretical framework for this study were characterization and television dialogue, the results could be interesting for those who work in similar fields of study. Moreover, as television reflects the underlying social structures and attitudes, it could be useful for the scholars in the field of social studies, especially those that study the Anglo-American society. As the study revealed traditional gender roles in the social structure of the imaginary motorcycle club, its further study would be important because it can subtly affect the social attitudes of the viewers.

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The quotation in the heading "Old ladies – they got a way of coming back and biting you in the ass" is uttered by Clay in Season 4, episode 5.