Effective or elective: A character analysis of Nip/Tuck

Sabrina Monet Alipate

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds

Repository Citation
https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds/2208
EFFECTIVE OR ELECTIVE: A CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF NIP/TUCK

by

Sabrina Monet Alipate

Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2003

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in Journalism and Media Studies
Hank Greenspun Department of Journalism and Media Studies
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
December 2007
The Thesis prepared by

Sabrina Monet Alipate

Entitled

Effective or Elective: A Character Analysis of Nip/Tuck

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies

Examination Committee Chair

Dean of the Graduate College

Examination Committee Member

Examination Committee Member

Graduate College Faculty Representative
ABSTRACT

Effective or Elective: A Character Analysis of Nip/Tuck

by

Sabrina Monet Alipate

Dr. Gary Larson, Examination Committee Chair
Assistant Professor of Journalism and Media Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Why are the lives of plastic surgeons so interesting to watch? What is it about this show that draws viewers? Using the typology of character signs by Butler (2002) and the moral standpoints outlined by Krijnen and Meijer (2005) I argue that it is the character development and moral struggles of each character that draw viewers to this show every week. The Miami-based plastic surgeons believe cutting people into someone “beautiful” equates to happiness. It is the search for perfection and beauty and the belief that it will bring happiness that makes the show popular. This paper examines the characters of the show to learn if the glamorized plastic surgery is the draw of the show, or if it is just another metaphor for obstacles in life. Do we believe medicine and in the case of this show, plastic surgery, solve our life problems, or do we just want to look good while we are alive?
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my committee for taking the time to work with me on this project. I would like to thank Dr. Traudt for sharing his vast knowledge of television medical dramas. It greatly helped my literature review section. I would like to thank Dr. Ferri for contributing his thoughts on how medicine does not provide all the answers or happiness. He is right and I hope those points were evident in the paper. I would like to thank Professor Menendez for being my graduate faculty representative. I am grateful for his continued support throughout my academic career.

I would like to thank my parents for their support. They continually ask how this analysis will eventually lead to employment. I do not have the answers, but I believe I am on the right track.

Finally, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Larson, for his guidance through the process of my graduate studies. I thank you for bearing with me when my thesis began with everything from the origin of Judeo-Christian faith to reality weddings. You helped keep me grounded and focused.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................ iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..................................................................................................... iv

CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................... 1
  Purpose of the Study ........................................................................................................... 3
  Significance of the Study ................................................................................................. 6

CHAPTER 2  LITERATURE REVIEW .............................................................................. 8
  Medical Dramas .................................................................................................................. 8
  Morality on Television ...................................................................................................... 17
  Character Analysis ........................................................................................................... 23
  *Nip/Tuck* in a Nutshell ................................................................................................. 25

CHAPTER 3  METHODS ................................................................................................... 28
  Collection of Data ............................................................................................................. 28
  Treatment of Data ........................................................................................................... 31

CHAPTER 4  FINDINGS OF THE STUDY ....................................................................... 34
  The Surgeons ..................................................................................................................... 35
  Family and Friends .......................................................................................................... 46
  The Key Patient of Each Season ..................................................................................... 65
  Discussion of the Characters of *Nip/Tuck* ................................................................... 80

CHAPTER 5  SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS ............. 82
  Discussion of Results ........................................................................................................ 82
  Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 87
  Recommendations for Further Study .............................................................................. 89

REFERENCES ....................................................................................................................... 92

VITA ........................................................................................................................................ 94
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The credits of *Nip/Tuck* open with the sound of a heartbeat. As a surgeon’s hand draws red incision lines on the body of a mannequin, a woman with a soft voice begins to sing. She repeats the lyric “make me beautiful” over and over. She ends by stating that a perfect mind and a perfect face equal a perfect life. While the names of the actors appear in the credits, the surgeon continues to make lines on the mannequin. The next shot is of a row of boxes in a warehouse with mannequin’s torsos and heads being prepared for shipment. A perfectly formed mannequin with make-up appears in the next shot with the backdrop of Miami’s South Beach. The camera zooms in on the mannequin’s lower face, which transforms into a human face. The surgeon’s red incision line appears on her long neck for a moment before she gives a slight smile and the skies appear behind her. The opening credits dissolve to Dr. Sean McNamara and Dr. Christian Troy asking a patient, “Tell me what you don’t like about yourself”. With just the opening of the episode, a promise of happiness through beauty is given.

*Nip/Tuck* debuted on FX Networks in the summer of 2003. It was created by Ryan Murphy, a television screenwriter who would find his big break with this show based on the lives of two plastic surgeons in Miami. The first two seasons debuted in the summer, but the third season would find the show being upgraded to a fall schedule. It was a huge
risk, but the show had gained many viewers over the first two years. The finale of season
three averaged 5.7 million viewers ("Nip/Tuck Finale," 2005). Zap2it, an online
television magazine stated:

About 3.9 million of those viewers were adults 18-49, making the finale the No. 1
episode among the key advertising demographic of any cable series in 2005. It's
also the largest demographic number for any single telecast in the network's history

The show leads the adults 18-49 rankings, beating out MTV's The Real World
("Nip/Tuck Finale," 2005). Along with the shock value of the subject matter, the show
has famous faces that make guest appearances, such as Rosie O'Donnell and Joan Rivers.
The storylines read like a daytime soap opera and can possibly explain the large
following of young female viewers.

Why are the characters of the television show Nip/Tuck so interesting to watch? What
makes any television show interesting to watch? I argue in the case of Nip/Tuck it has to
do with the character development and moral struggles of each character that keep
audiences coming back. In other shows, characters will search for alien beings, others
will speak to the dead to find answers, and still others change the physique of patients in
the hopes of making the patients happy. I argue in this paper that the two main characters
on the television drama Nip/Tuck are characters that base their decisions on their own
moral compass and the belief that physical perfection equates happiness. They are in the
business of selling happiness and the unattainable. In the case of the plastic surgeons, the
unattainable is physical perfection, which they claim they can give their patients.
Plastic surgeons Dr. Christian Troy, played by actor Julian McMahon and Dr. Sean McNamara, played by actor Dylan Walsh, own a practice in image conscious Miami. Every episode of *Nip/Tuck* opens with the line, “Tell me what you don’t like about yourself.” The unhappiness of the patient then becomes the storyline for the entire episode.

*Nip/Tuck* is a show whose only actors apart from the two main doctors are their significant others and the patients they treat. When the doctors “treat” the patients with any of a number of surgeries, the surgeries act as a way for the doctors to make people happy. They’re in the practice of creating the illusion happiness by treating external problems in the hope of curing internal ones.

**Purpose of the Study**

Medicine cannot solve everything. There are risks to any operation, whether the operation is effective or elective. No matter the arguments made by people that get plastic surgery, in the end they are trying to “fix” something they believe is wrong. There are many factors in how a person judges their own appearance – the people around them, their childhood, the media, etc. – in the end, a cosmetic procedure is not going to make them happy. The plastic surgeons on *Nip/Tuck* are providing a service that will not change the well-being of their patients in the least. I examine how deeply that lie runs. It is important to note that the patients of *Nip/Tuck* are not burn victims or people born with cleft palates. The majority of surgeries are enhancements on “normal” patients, meaning they have no physical deformities. The patients believe that the procedure is necessary
and will change their lives. Do the doctors believe it as well? Are the surgeries effective or elective?

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the characters of this hit television show that uses plastic surgery as a metaphor for obstacles in life. When someone wants to change something on the outside, what are they really missing in life? I argue that the true purpose of the show is to examine the morals of the main characters, with plastic surgery as a metaphor for the main characters’ internal and external struggles.

There have been countless shows based on the lives of doctors, but *Nip/Tuck* examines the lives of doctors who perform surgery that is cosmetic, and non life-threatening. Every surgical operation on this show is an elective surgery that is not a matter of life and death. The procedures are simply an attempt to fix something that is painful on the inside.

Using the typology of character signs discussed by Butler (2002), I will collect data from each main character on the series. The moral standpoints defined by Krijnen and Meijer (2005) will be used to examine the characters to determine where their sense of morality lies. The analysis of each character using the character signs, as well as determining their moral standpoint, will impart insight into the show and will document a hit show on television better known for its shock value than for its moral compass. It is important to note that the four out of nine character signs chosen from Butler’s list were done so because they relate the most to appearance. Appearance is *Nip/Tuck* and the four character signs chosen reflect this.

Butler (2002) and Krijnen and Meijer (2005) tie together for this paper because the character signs defined by Butler will contribute to determining what moral standpoint
each character on Nip/Tuck exemplifies, which is outlined by Krijnen and Meijer. By using Butler’s character signs, if it is determined that a character is self-centered, superficial, and only cares about themselves, it can then be argued that they act from a rule-governed moral standpoint. I will use the character signs to first define each character, and then I will determine the moral standpoint of each character. The end product will be an understanding of the characters on Nip/Tuck. This understanding will support my argument that the show is more about the character development than the actual surgery taking place.

*RQ1: Do the four typology of character signs designed by Butler (2002) provide enough evidence to analyze the moral standpoint of the characters?*

Using the typology of character signs designed by Butler (2002), I will examine each main character by four character signs. The character signs being used as tools for the collection of data are appearance, objective correlative, dialogue, and action. The appearance of the character on Nip/Tuck is the definition of the character. The way they look is the foundation of the show. The patients of this medical drama are entering the world of McNamara/Troy in hopes of becoming more aesthetically pleasing as opposed to patients entering a hospital because they are physically sick. The objective correlative is important in that it is an extension of their beauty. Someone with a brand new face and body does not want to be picked up in a Ford Escort after all the painful medical procedures they have just experienced. For those who have to be physically perfect, the objective correlatives, the possessions in their life, must be perfect as well. The dialogue helps to add to each character as well. For example, the way Dr. Sean McNamara speaks will be quite different from the way his son Matt expresses himself. The action of each
character helps to exemplify what type of moral standpoint from which they operate. Each character will be analyzed in one episode centered around that individual, how they act in that episode will help define their character. The typology of character signs will give us a blueprint of each character and will be the evidence gathered to determine what moral standpoint each operates from.

RQ2: *Are the characters coming from a rule-governed moral standpoint, a sensibility-guided moral standpoint, or both?*

Following the work of Krijnen and Meijer (2005), I plan to apply either one or both of the types of moral reasoning to each of the main characters on the show. This second research question will be applied in the belief that every character no matter what their personal beliefs are, guides their life with their own individual definition of morality. Rule-governed morality will be defined as individuals who are “independent from each other and as having a sense of duty and obligation towards each other” (Krijnen and Meijer, 2005, p. 357). Sensibility-guided morality will be defined as individuals who are “individuals as interdependent and focuses on their mutual relationships” (Krijnen and Meijer, 2005, p. 357). The first research question will help with the second research question in deciding which group of morality each character belongs.

**Significance of the Study**

I hope to find a depth to *Nip/Tuck* that is granted more to obvious shows such as *The X-Files* or *Joan of Arcadia*. *Nip/Tuck* has just as much depth and character development and the reason audiences tune in every week is specifically for the trials the characters
face on a weekly basis. The surgery and glamour are just metaphors for the obstacles that the characters have to endure.

The significance of the study is that *Nip/Tuck* is a medical drama that is not about medicine or helping patients get well. The plastic surgeons are in a god-like position when they determine what physical changes have to be made to a patient for them to be "beautiful". Medicine and doctors do not hold all the answers, and they cannot make you happy, so when patients put their trust in a plastic surgeon it creates great television. *Nip/Tuck* acts as a reflection of society’s belief in the medical doctor and his or her power to make everything in life better. The opening credits of the show speak volumes, a woman can be heard asking to be made beautiful and then the episode begins with the doctors asking, “Tell me what you don’t like about yourself?” From the beginning of the hour-long show, it has already been determined that the audience and the patient in the consultation chair has something physically wrong with them that will be determined and taken care of by the surgeons. The need in the patients and the surgeons to fix something in each person is what I find significant.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

My first question about *Nip/Tuck* dealt with whether the depictions of these doctors were realistic. Before one can analyze the morals and inner struggles of a character, is the make-up of the character you are analyzing true to life?

Medical Dramas

Chory-Assad and Tamborini (2003) believed that the public perception of doctors has become more negative due to the portrayals of doctors on television. They analyzed viewers who watched primetime-television featuring doctors and found that after watching these particular shows, viewers believed the negative characteristics associated with those doctors. Their results found that respondents looked negatively at the medical decisions the doctors made, and interestingly enough, the highest scores in the analysis were for the television doctors’ personal characteristics and lives. (Chory-Assad and Tamborini, 2003, p. 204). This article leans towards the belief that medical doctors on television are watched for their character development. They are not valued for their medical expertise.

Tanne (2003) examined what plastic surgeons felt about *Nip/Tuck*. Most plastic surgeons felt the show was unrealistic and that most of the procedures performed would
never have followed the process that Dr. McNamara and Dr. Troy follow. One plastic surgeon did state that plastic surgeons are some of the only medical doctors who “have their own press agents and send out their own press releases” (Tanne, 2003, p. 305). It becomes clear in this article that though plastic surgeons are a bit more extravagant than most doctors, their personal and professional lives do not come close to being similar to the doctors on fictional television. Looking at episodes of *Nip/Tuck* and other shows that feature doctors and plastic surgeons in general, it becomes clear that the researchers who have examined these types of shows believed that lived reality and the fictitious world of television had nothing to do with each other. Shows featuring doctors were watched for the entertainment and not for the medicine (Chory-Assad and Tamborini, 2003; Tanne, 2003).

The image of a doctor on television and his personal life has always been important to viewers. Turow (1989) wrote extensively about the show *Ben Casey*, and how the lead character of the same name, a doctor, came to be an icon to those who tuned into the show. The character of Ben Casey, played by actor Vince Edwards, became synonymous with doctor. Audiences failed to separate the actor and the show from reality. Interestingly enough, it was Casey’s bedside manner to which audiences were drawn. Edwards, the actor, told reporters that “he was committed to perpetuating the “Godlike kind of man” he felt Ben Casey represented” (Turow, 1989, p. 68). Though Edwards was just an actor, he felt that his character must be portrayed as beyond human. Do audiences want to see a doctor on television that seems to be above the rest of society? Is this a doctor that individuals would want to meet in the emergency room? Writers and directors also perpetuated this god-like image of the character of Casey, a strong, no-nonsense type
of guy, by writing him as "surly, snarling, and growling" (Turow, 1989, p. 68). In the world of medical dramas during the reign of Dr. Kildare and Ben Casey, doctors were endearing the hearts of audiences if they were portrayed as something more than human. The belief that Edwards was actually the doctor he played on television was evident with the hundreds of letters he would receive each week with individuals asking him for medical advice. Turow (1989) argued that when it came to medical dramas there was a blur between fiction and reality. He also made an observation that for medical dramas, "television’s handsomest doctors had developed a powerful real-life following" (Turow, 1989, p. 69).

Turow (1989) explained the creation of Ben Casey, came from the mind of James Moser, a writer for Medic, a medical drama that ran during the 1950’s. It was Moser who felt television needed an edge to its medical drama. Two elements that he added to the Ben Casey series was to give Casey a sidekick, Dr. Ted Hoffman, and he added a love interest. Speaking of Moser, Turow stated that, “he knew that in most doctor novels the love interest was usually a nurse or another kind of physician’s helpmate. Still, he made Maggie an anesthesiologist, in the hope of sparking more compelling interactions between her and Casey” (Turow, 1989, p. 50). Moser believed that in a medical drama, a doctor needed a love interest that was also an equal.

Keeping a show interesting over the seasons is a hard task. Turow (1989) explained that Moser believed there was a set formula for a successful medical drama. He wrote:

Moser drew up a short manual about the show and its characters that would be a bible for potential scriptwriters. It sketched the general premise of the series and the ground rules for characterization. He wanted
to bathe the program in an aura of tension and suspense...Characterization was critical, but it was to be intimately entwined with highly charged situations that touched on neurosurgery (Turow, 1989, p. 59).

The world of medical dramas being created in the 1960's was a world where the reality of hospitals had to be entwined with a bit of the mysterious to create characters that audiences would gravitate towards.

*Marcus Welby, M.D.* is another medical drama that touched the hearts of viewers during the 1960's. The show starred Robert Young as Dr. Marcus Welby, and his assistant, Steven Kiley, played by James Brolin. The premise of the show endeared itself to audiences because the doctor and his assistant approached each patient as an individual rather than an issue. They took a personal approach to each patient and they genuinely cared for their patients. Turow (1989) wrote about how executive producer David Victor envisioned the show as one that audiences would be drawn to because they cared about the good doctors. Like Ben Casey, audiences believed that Robert Young truly was Marcus Welby. Turow (1989) stated:

> More than even during the Kildare/Casey fad of eight years before, an actor became associated almost inextricably with both a role and a profession. Over the show’s seven-year life, Robert Young as Marcus Welby became the embodiment of norms for the American family physician (p.109).

The decision to make the doctors characters who cared about their patients and who took on each case individually not only helped in gaining viewers, but it helped the writers of show as well. When the concentration was on the wellness of each patient and the emotional struggles that they would face with their condition, it allowed the writers to
concentrate on each patient’s emotional background and allowed the medicine to take a backseat. “They learned that by varying the patient and the family problem, they could reuse diseases like epilepsy many times through the show’s life” (Turow, 1989, p. 117).

The show did not spend its seven-year run without its fair share of negative press as well. An episode involving the assault of an underage boy by his teacher caused controversy in the gay community, as well as in the education field. Some felt the premise of the episode stereotyped a negative portrayal of gay men as child molesters. The gay community was appeased when the description of the teacher was changed from “gay” to “pedophile”. Feminist groups also felt that women were being stereotyped in the series. One female critic wrote, “that Welby’s many female patients have no understanding of themselves or control over their lives” (Turow, 1989, p.128). These handful of bad reviews and protests from minority groups paled though in comparison to the anger from real-life doctors who felt the portrayal of physicians on the show was unrealistic and gave audiences the impression that receiving medical treatment was that simple. Turow (1989) stated “It marked the first time that the physicians establishment got involved in a large-scale argument over whether fictional images that were positive actually had negative affects on their status” (p. 128).

No matter the likes and dislikes of different groups and critics, Marcus Welby would be remembered as one of the best medical dramas on television and the character of Marcus Welby would be remembered as a figure that audiences’ believed real doctors should emulate.

Jacobs (2003) argued that the medical dramas of the 1970’s were written to showcase a more human side to doctors than the doctors of a decade earlier. Marcus Welby was a
father figure that people could admire. The 1970’s would see doctors that not only cared, but who had a bit more of a personality that audiences were accustomed. He argued that the way of reinventing medical dramas in the 1970’s was to add the element of comedy. One of the key elements of this comedy was the character of Hawkeye in *M*A*S*H* played by actor Alan Alda. Hawkeye was a character who could be unsure of himself and who knew he was capable of mistakes. Commenting on his character, Alda stated, “He knows he might fail. Not a god, he walks gingerly on the edge of disaster – alive to his own mortality” (Jacobs, 2003, p. 19). The character of Hawkeye is a vast difference from Ben Casey. It can be argued that the 1960’s to the 1970’s showed the medical doctor on television becoming human.

Jacobs stated:

*M*A*S*H* foregrounded several aspects that were to become essential to new hospital dramas- the hostile setting as a means to explore the relationship between personal and professional lives; the absurd juxtaposition of war with medical treatment; and the figure of the doctor as confused humanist (Jacobs, 2003, p. 17).

*M*A*S*H* was a medical show that spent a good deal of the episode examining the human experience and the emotions of the characters, rather than the medical procedures. It helped to transform the definition of the doctor from the father figure of Marcus Welby, to Hawkeye who is more on the same level as the audience.

The 1980’s saw patients becoming a greater part of the series. *St. Elsewhere* “exploited the fact that the cast allowed viewer identification, sympathy and alignment to be variously dispersed between characters, so we share ‘multi-dimensional
involvement” (Jacobs, 2003, p. 20). The writers and directors of medical dramas believed that to push the genre even further, the characters would all have to interact with each other and develop bonds. The doctor was not only human now, but also was just another member in society, equal to the characters that he or she treated. The success of *St. Elsewhere* was due to the fact that it did not only concentrate on the medical issues of the patients, but asked questions about the character’s personal, spiritual, and professional lives. “It’s realism was based less on the accurate portrayal of a hospital than the detailing of personal psychologies and interpersonal conflict” (Jacobs, 2003, p. 21). Tom Fontana, a coproducer of *St. Elsewhere* has stated that medicine was the byproduct and the show was truly about good people and their relationships (Stark, 1997).

The characters of *St. Elsewhere* were asking questions about life. The doctors were not only interested in the diseases and illnesses that they faced on an everyday basis, but they also questioned internal struggles. Unlike Ben Casey, these doctors brought their emotional baggage with them. The environment for *St. Elsewhere* was an urban area where the patients treated could easily harm you as ask for help. The introduction of a world where doctors and their patients could be cruel to one another was a new phase in medical dramas. The past three decades helped to shape what medical dramas would become in the 1990’s.

The 1990’s would give audiences both *Chicago Hope* and *ER*, two medical dramas that both debuted in 1994 (Jacobs, 2003). The two shows were both popular, but both came from two completely different worlds. *ER* was set in “the cash-strapped ‘County General’ servicing inner city Chicago patients” (Jacobs, 2003, p. 25). *Chicago Hope* was set “in a wealthy research hospital with the best surgeons in the world” (Jacobs, 2003, p. 26).
Both shows had different levels of seriousness, but *Chicago Hope* showed more of the quirkiness reminiscent of *M*A*S*H*. *ER* would outlast the other medical drama, and Jacobs (2003) believed it was due in part to the multi-ethnic cast and urban setting. To stand back and look at medical dramas, *ER* is the most diverse. Not many viewers could attest to being like Ben Casey, and not many would want to be as open about their insecurities as Hawkeye, but many may be able to find a character from *ER* to relate.

Empathy and interpersonal relationships, which became a part of medical dramas in the 1970's, were factors in the success of *ER*.

Jacobs (2003) believed that hospital dramas were reshaped in the 1990's and created a world where many different storylines could be interwoven to the medical worlds created on shows. He stated, “Hospital drama drew on these discursive contexts to combine the realization of the biological and melodramatic possibilities of the body in visual and narrative terms” (Jacobs, 23, 147). *ER* was pushing the envelope with its fast pace shooting style, and shorter segments. Its interpersonal relationships and shooting techniques were making it a show that was a cut above the rest.

Stark (1997) believed that *ER* owed part of its success to the healthcare reform of the mid 1990's. With baby boomers reaching an age where they started to think more and more about their own mortality, a show that graphically showed life and death scenarios were fascinating to watch. With the Clinton Administration making healthcare reform one of their top issues, they inadvertently “caused the public once again to focus on how it admired doctors – our traditional broadcast heroes” (Stark, 1997, p. 291). Another factor for the success of *ER* was its creator, Michael Crichton. A former doctor, he added the speed of *ER* to the medical drama world. He has stated that he wanted the show to
resemble real-life experiences that he had faced. In a world where reality television was beginning to rule the airwaves, medical dramas were smart to add as much “reality” to their shows as possible. It did not matter that the reality audiences were given was overdramatic and seemed to focus more on the interrelationships of the cast than on helping individual patients. ER in the 1990’s created a world where the ideal healthcare system existed. This ideal healthcare system involved extremely smart doctors who could perform close to miracles, and who were human as well. (Stark, 1997; Jacobs, 2003; Cohn & Shafer, 2004). Scalese (2001) argued that the medical drama ER was enduring due to its storylines that dealt with grace and redemption. It is a show that also deals with several storylines at the same time. “ER is an ensemble show in which the narrative strands of securing characters interlace in a single episode as well as from one episode to another” (Scalese, 2001. p. 138).

Thorburn (1982) made a good point about the maturity of medical dramas in its ability to look at situations that are close to impossible. Describing a scene from Medical Center, Thorburn (1982) analyzed a man who suffered an aneurism. He learns that the operation that may save his life may also make him impotent. Having recently married a much younger woman, he is reluctant to have the life-saving procedure done. The new wife just happens to work at the hospital and has connections to everyone on the staff that is treating her husband. The implausibility of this scenario Thorburn (1982) argued was due to the fact that melodramas on television were more “an operatic rather than a conventionally dramatic form” (p. 536). The hospital and the operating room were closed settings where characters had a chance to develop with any type of storyline that the
writer wants. In a medical drama, characters can be made to fit any type of mold; audiences are drawn to these different types of characters due to the pedestal on which medical doctors reside in the minds of the audience. (Chory-Assad and Tamborini, 2003; Stark, 1997, Jacobs, 2003).

These characters have been described both by the audience and the actors who portray them as everything from god-like to regular people with human faults. Whether they are plain mortals or demi-gods, every character has his or her sense of morality.

Morality on Television

How can we define morality? Krijnen and Meijer (2005) did so in their content analysis of moral panic and television. They used the studies of Carol Gilligan to define morality in two parts: rule-governed and sensibility guided.

Rule-governed morality is based on the ethics of justice. “In a rule-governed style of moral reasoning, the individuals involved are presented as independent from each other and as having a sense of duty and obligation towards each other” (Krijnen and Meijer, 2005, p. 357). This type of morality is when an individual feels responsible for the people around him or her and he or she believes that the problems of the people they care about are also their own.

Sensibility-guided morality is based on the ethics of care. “The sensibility-guided style of moral reasoning presents individuals as interdependent and focuses on their mutual relationships” (Krijnen and Meijer, 2005, p. 357). Sensibility-guided morality is when a group of individuals consider their problems as a group, a family unit that concentrates on their every obstacle together as a team.
Krijnen and Meijer (2005) believed that the different styles of morality portrayed people as either individuals with the weight of the world on their shoulders and the belief that they have to fix everything, or as interdependent people who believe problems take a group effort to fix. This article was interested in pinpointing what morality was and then deciding if it was evident in primetime television. Krijnen and Meijer (2005) identified morals by, “the basis of specific verbal statements.... moral statements can be recognized by their use of ‘ought’ and ‘should’, their aim on conduct and a good/bad evaluation” (p359).

Krijnen and Meijer (2005) stated about the two moral standpoints:

It is commonly argued that women are orientated more towards an ethics of care (and, thus, to a sensibility-guided style of reasoning) while men are mainly geared towards an ethics of justice (hence, a rule-governed style of reasoning (p. 357).

Along with describing the two moral standpoints that will be used in this research paper, they have presented ideas to think about. Sensibility-guided morality based on interpersonal relationships is considered predominantly feminine and is associated with women. Will this hold true for this research project as well? Will the female characters turn out to be sensibility-guided? Rule-governed morality is more associated with men due to its ethics of justice. From the research laid out about morality by Krijnen and Meijer (2005) it would seem that there is a generalization that women base their moral decisions on their feelings and relationships while men base their moral decisions on fact and reason. It will be interesting to see if these generalizations hold true for Nip/Tuck.
Stevenson (2003) believed that morality was neutral on television. "It is neither inherently evil and intrinsically designed for the corruption of society nor is it a divine microphone intended for the propagation of a particular religious point of view" (Stevenson, 2003, p. 9). He argued that everyone found morality in his or her own way from watching television and that the characters were interpreted as either moral or amoral by the viewers. "A reductionist approach that defines the moral value of a television show solely on the basis of how much sex, violence, and profanity is present is both simplistic and dangerous" (Stevenson, 2003, p. 11). He argued the understanding of morality could only be accomplished if the messiness and complexities of life could be accepted. Life is not simple; therefore the moral struggles of each individual will not be simple either.

Stevenson (2003) argued that the analysis of morality in television was clouded by the continual need of some critics who need to define morality through religion:

Most religious critics of television want morality painted in black and white strokes with no shades of gray. Complexity and ambiguity are deemed inconsistent with presentations of morality. Their focus tends to be on a show's portrayal of morality rather than on its perspective of morality (Stevenson, 2003, p. 11).

The point about morality made by Stevenson (2003) is very important for this paper. Morality will be examined for its perspective and not its portrayal. Characters cannot be presented as merely right or wrong; everyone is complex and the choices they make have to be examined from different levels. Religion will not be a factor in examining the morality of characters.
Blythe (2002) had a different approach to her research. She examined media literacy and how it could be studied to draw people back to the church. She believed that life was the message, rather than the media and that with a better understanding of the text; audiences could make more educated choices in their television viewing. Blythe (2002) found:

The audience using its power as producers of meaning – both in the sense of creating their own meaning from a text and of participating in the ratings system which determines if a show stays on the air or not (p.141).

She argued that when viewers watched a show and believed in the storyline, they returned every week to see what happens. It gives the message that what they’re seeing is believable and that they continue to come back and invest their time in the characters. She focused on understanding the texts of different shows, but that ultimately, the shows could be interpreted in several different ways.

The research by Blythe (2002) is helpful in that its results showed that religion could not be definitively found in shows, but that secular morality did exist. Characters made decisions based on their own set of moral beliefs that did not necessarily have to do with religion. Blythe (2002) concluded that morality could be found in several different ways and that shows would need to be more blatant if they wanted to show characters basing their decisions from a religious faith.

Clarke (2005) approached his research in a similar fashion. His hypothesis was that the faith-based channel PAX would have more religious characters on their shows than the major networks and that emerging networks would be more open to broadcasting shows with religious characters than major networks. His problem was that religious
characters on the shows were not necessarily labeled as such on the episode being coded. Clarke (2005) stated, “A follow-up study should either include all prime-time programs currently airing or follow all the characters in specific programs over an entire season” (p. 150). His research fits this study in that searching for religion in primetime television gave him instances of moral struggles, but that he could not identify truly religious characters or storylines. The series that he analyzed had characters with moral struggles, but they were not labeled as religious (Clarke, 2005; Blythe, 2002). Clarke (2005) faced similar problems in his research as Blythe (2002). They found several interpretations of morality on television, but they were unable to define this morality as specifically religious.

Elliott (2005) believed that the interpretation of a show could be completely open for all audiences. For his study, he examined the show Joan of Arcadia. Though Joan is a girl who purports to speak to God, her actions throughout the show are those of someone who is trying to do well for the world. Elliott (2005) stated, “one person’s religious television is another person’s secular mess” (p.11). She argued that after the research was finished, there still could not be a definite answer for whether the show was distinctly religious or not. In her analysis, she was searching for proof that Joan of Arcadia created a transcendental experience for viewers. Her results indicated that people interpreted the text differently, though moral themes did exist.

Peterson (2002) analyzed X-Files for its religious undertones. He believed that though the show was about the quest for extraterrestrial life forms, the show continually explored a higher meaning to life. He explained, “Several episodes are analyzed in depth to uncover an arc of religious themes that parallel the plot development” (Peterson, 2001, p.
181). He chose half a dozen episodes from the show and examined them for their religious undertones. His qualitative analysis examined the symbols that appeared in certain episodes. Murders on the show that resembled the crucifixion of Christ were analyzed, as well as an entire episode on FBI agent Dana Scully’s Catholic beliefs, which came up quite often throughout the series. Peterson (2001) discussed X-Files creator, Chris Carter, in his conclusion. He argued that with X-Files, “the undertones are there always, even though he gives us something of a secularized version of faith” (Peterson, 2001, p. 195).

The work by Peterson (2002) ties in with the work of Chory-Assad and Tamborini (2003) in that audiences are responding to characters that have depth and are not necessarily judging the characters by how true they are to their backgrounds and professions.

Lewis (2002) used comic frames to examine the series The Simpsons. He argued that television, and The Simpsons in particular, could be examined through the comedic frame by concentrating on two areas, acceptance and rejection. He used these two areas to examine religious rhetoric in the series. Lewis (2002) believed characters, no matter the genre of the film or television show, followed a set of beliefs established early on in the story and they would not sway from that. He concentrated on the main characters of the show and broke down moments he felt conceptualized religious faith. Analyzing Ned Flanders, a main character on the show, he states, “Although Ned Flanders may be the spokesperson for the forces that rant against all the evil or profanities in the world, and he does so with an innocence, a naïveté, that ingratiates him to many viewers” (Lewis, 2002,
p. 159). His breakdown of the main characters is similar to that of other researchers doing character analyses, they are making decisions based on their own personal set of beliefs. Every character can be argued of having a sense of morality. Is there a way to learn more about an individual character before concluding what moral standpoint they make their decisions?

Character Analysis

What does it mean to do a character analysis? I believe it means understanding who the characters are and how they create the show that we are watching. Butler (2002) talked about how it is easy to mistake characters for real people, and I believe that is a starting point for a character analysis. It is important to understand characters and it is important to learn about them in a way that would make the collection of data understandable. “While it is, of course, important to understand narrative structures, it is equally important to understand the characters that inhabit those structures” (Butler 2002 p. 33).

Butler (2002) used Dr. Mark Greene of ER, played by actor Anthony Edwards, as an example for the description of a character and the importance of a character. He argued that when we see a photograph of Dr. Greene on a magazine or see a commercial of ER, Dr. Greene has grown from just a character on a television show into something that has a life of its own. Butler believed that when we talk about characters and read about them, such as Dr. Greene, “we are carrying his significance beyond the show” (p. 33). Butler (2002) observed that without characters there would be no television. To visualize his meaning, I picture a hospital without patients and doctors or a Miami-basic practice
completely devoid of humans. The characters do make the show, and the analysis of them has to follow a structure.

Butler (2002) identified character signs that would work to better understand characters. He stated:

Still, we can better understand how characters are constructed if we identify the types of signs that signify character and investigate the code of character construction. This code comprises certain “rules” that govern what meanings a character signifies to us and how those meanings are created (Butler, 2002, p.35).

Butler (2002) lists a typology of character signs that were originally developed by Richard Dyer for the cinema. These character signs are viewer foreknowledge, character name, appearance, objective correlative, dialogue, lighting and videography or cinematography, and action. Viewer foreknowledge concentrated on the perceptions of the audience before the show begins. “If a program is advertised as a new police drama, then we can expect certain genre character types” (Butler, 2002, p. 36). Certain types of shows have particular types of characters, it is safe to say that a medical drama will have doctors. Character name is a way of identifying a character. One can analyze a character’s name thoroughly, but on a very simple level, it is a way of discerning a character’s gender and cultural background without much other information to go on. Objective correlative deals with the location and property of a character. “The living room and neighboring junkyard of Sanford and Son (1972-1977) help establish Fred Sanford’s social class and lifestyle” (Butler, 2002, p. 38). Dialogue and action deal with the speech and acts of each character and what it comes to say about them. Lighting and
videography or cinematography are technical elements that are used to signify certain aspects of a character. Butler (2002) used the example of light continually being brought into a dark room was used to establish the discomfort and disturbance of Dr. Greene. All of these elements of character signs are used to learn more about an individual character and acts as a way to define that character.

Newcomb (1982) stated about the characters of the television show *Dallas*:

Their actions are performed within the broad limits of the imagination, rarely bounded by the average person’s experience. Still, they amuse and thrill us, and they seem familiar... These characters are talking to us about ourselves, and their words come from some of popular culture’s most powerful and appealing language” (p.169).

Newcomb (1982) realized the importance of characters and believed that a reason why characters had to be studied was to try and understand why audiences gravitated towards particular characters and shows. He argued that though the popular shows and characters did not resemble much of the general populace, it was popular because the audience believed they saw themselves in the characters.

*Nip/Tuck* in a Nutshell

The literature reviewed helped in exploring *Nip/Tuck*. The section on medical dramas helped in understanding how audiences perceive shows that deal with doctors, medicine, and interpersonal relationships. The literature on morality helped in understanding where each individual character found their foundation of morality. The work of Krijnen and
Meijer (2005) was used heavily in determining the moral compass of each character. The literature on character analysis by Butler (2002) worked a roadmap for the analysis. The character analysis of *Nip/Tuck* was based on the knowledge I gained from the above literature and will be referenced in the analysis. Two research questions were formed from the literature review.

*RQ1: Do the four typology of character signs designed by Butler (2002) provide enough evidence to analyze the moral standpoint of the characters?*

Using the typology of character signs designed by Butler (2002) I will examine each main character by four character signs. The character signs being used as tools for the collection of data are appearance, objective correlative, dialogue, and action. The appearance of the character on *Nip/Tuck* is the definition of the character. The way they look is the foundation of the show. The patients of this medical drama are entering the world of McNamara/Troy in hopes of becoming more aesthetically pleasing as opposed to patients entering a hospital because they are physically sick. The objective correlative is important in that it is an extension of their beauty. Someone with a brand new face and body does not want to be picked up in a Ford Escort after all the painful medical procedures they have just experienced. For those who have to be physically perfect, the objective correlatives, the possessions in their life, must be perfect as well. The dialogue helps to add to each character as well. For example, the way Dr. Sean McNamara speaks will be quite different from the way his son Matt expresses himself. The action of each character helps to exemplify what type of moral standpoint from which they operate. Each character will be analyzed in one episode centered around that individual, how they act in that episode will help define their character. The typology of character signs will
give us a blueprint of each character and will be the evidence gathered to determine what moral standpoint each operates from.

RQ2: Are the characters coming from a rule-governed moral standpoint, a sensibility-guided moral standpoint, or both?

Following the work of Krijnen and Meijer (2005), I plan to apply either one or both of the types of moral reasoning to each of the main characters on the show. This second research question will be applied in the belief that every character no matter what their personal beliefs are, guides their life with their own individual definition of morality. Rule-governed morality will be defined as individuals who are “independent from each other and as having a sense of duty and obligation towards each other” (Krijnen and Meijer, 2005, p. 357). Sensibility-guided morality will be defined as individuals who are “individuals as interdependent and focuses on their mutual relationships” (Krijnen and Meijer, 2005, p. 357). The first research question will help with the second research question in deciding which group of morality each character belongs.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

My units of analysis are the characters of *Nip/Tuck*. I plan to collect information on the main characters on the show using four of the typology of character signs described by Butler (2002) and then determining if the characters come from a rule-governed or sensibility-guided moral standpoint defined by Krijnen and Meijer (2005).

Collection of Data

My first research question asks who are the characters on the show *Nip/Tuck*? Four of the typology of character signs laid out by Butler (2002) will be used to collect information on the characters of the show.

The first character sign being used for the collection of data is appearance. How a character looks is important in determining his or her personality. If George Clooney still had his character’s mullet haircut from *Return of the Killer Tomatoes!* (1988) while he was starring in *ER* (1994), would he still have been considered the ruggedly handsome and smart, Dr. Doug Ross? Staying with the example of George Clooney, would his strong female following have been the same if his physique on the medical drama were similar to his large physique in *Syriana* (2002)? Butler (2002) stated,

Corporeal (bodily) attributes carry clearer meanings than facial ones,

Selleck’s robust physique conveys strength and masculinity. In contrast,
Roseanne's physique during the early years of her sitcom (198-97) associates her with the “mommy” stereotype – the overweight woman who is sexually neutral but an expert at caring for others (p.37-38).

A person’s appearance is used to stereotype them. It helps people to have a definition for every individual by the way they look. Appearance is *Nip/Tuck*. The doctors make their living on how patients want to look because of how they believe it will make them appear. Part of the trust that the patients find in the doctors is because of their appearance. If you feel that you lack something in the looks department, would you entrust your face and body to someone that was unattractive? Appearance helps give Dr. Sean McNamara and Dr. Christian Troy the credibility they receive from their patients. In the world of plastic surgery, even the person operating on you has to embody the aesthetics you hope to achieve.

The second character sign being used for the collection of data is objective correlative. Objects or possessions that characters are continually seen with come to be identified as a part of who they are. In the case of Tom Selleck in *Magnum, P.I.* (1980), Magnum was well known for his red Ferrari. Beginning with the opening credits, it is evident that Magnum has a strong connection to his Ferrari and the island of Hawaii. Butler (2002) stated that environment also acts as an objective correlative. Any place, thing, or even pet can act as an object that helps to build a character. “Objective correlatives are objects (or sometimes animals) that are associated with characters and convey something about them” (Butler, 2002, p. 38).

People that covet money, fame, and beauty will surround themselves with products that look very different than those owned by members of the Peace corps. The objects...
associated with each character are not an accident and are placed there to symbolize something about the character. If the doctor is driving a Ferrari, it was not a vehicle chosen randomly, but one that was chosen for what it would symbolize about the doctor’s life. Each objective correlative examined for each character will help define that character.

The next character sign being used for the collection of data is dialogue. A person’s speech and the conversations others will have about that individual speak greatly about who they are. “These meanings range from the direct (character A saying that character B is a murderer) to the oblique (the inflections of Jerry Seinfeld’s voice as he cracks a joke)” (Butler, 2002, p. 39). I used the verbal communication of the characters to examine their dialogue. The doctor’s speech used with their patients and with the people in their lives will help in determining their personality. This character sign will be applied to the other main characters as well. Dialogue helps in identifying a person’s class, social status, education, and several other attributes that can be used to determine what type of person you are examining. For example, the doctors and the patients will definitely have different verbal markers as far as their knowledge on the subject of medicine. This would be an indication of a trait for that particular character.

The last character sign being used for the collection of data is action. What characters do in a story is important in shaping who they are. Using a character mentioned above, Roseanne’s character would come home from a hard day at work and would make dinner for her family. That action would be considered a part of her character and the audience would understand this act as being something her character would do. If she were to come home, pack her bags, and walk out on her family, she would be displaying a
character action that is unfamiliar to her normal routine on the show, and she would thus be changing the normal actions of her character. The actions of a character help to shape the storyline. When an obstacle presents itself, the audience believes that each character on the show will approach the situation with the style they have approached everything else on the show. This character sign is important in that it measures who characters are by what they do.

It is important to note that the four typology signs outlined by Butler (2002) because they deal with appearance. Appearance is *Nip/Tuck*, so a character’s appearance, material belongings, speech, and actions are extensions of who they are. I chose the four character signs that related the closest to the look of a character. I will also observe each character’s moral standpoint and as Butler (2002) stated, “Characters who do evil things come to signify evil” (p.39). The character’s actions may come to shed light on their own sense of morality. How will I approach measuring morality?

Treatment of Data

My second research question asks what moral standpoint each character on the show comes from, rule-governed, sensibility-guided, or both? I believe that along with character development, the moral struggles of each character help make the show. The moral standpoints defined by Krijnen and Meijer (2005) will be used to determine the morality of each character. The two moral standpoints are rule-governed morality and sensibility-guided morality, which were discussed in the literature review.

Each main character on *Nip/Tuck* has had a medical procedure performed on them. For each character that I examine, I will concentrate on the episode where they had their
procedure and why they had the procedure done. To narrow down the approach to the analysis, the characters moral standpoint will be determined by the climax of the episode. What the characters do at the end of the episode will be used to define his or her sense of morality. Was the surgery effective or elective, and did they gain anything from the surgery? Whether the surgery was effective or elective will be judged by whether the surgery was medically necessary, or if it was purely for superficial reasons. For example, a character having their nose reset after it was broken is different than a character shaving the sides of their nose to give it a slimmer appearance. Did the characters admit to themselves or to anyone around them whether the procedure was effective or elective? These characters live in a fantasy world where beauty is prized above anything else and examining the episode where they each go under the knife shed light on how they truly feel about plastic surgery.

Dealing with the end of an episode as a point of reference, Krijnen and Meijer (2005) stated, “We have chosen (verbal) closure as the starting point of our analysis because, with the restoration of the narrative’s equilibrium, (moral) judgment may be passed on its preceding events” (p. 358). Following their lead, I will observe the closure of the selected episodes as a way of determining each character’s moral standpoint. Though shows have ongoing plotlines that are not resolved at the end of the episode, each episode has a singular plotline that will have a resolution by the end. (Krijnen and Meijer, 2005).

After collecting the data using the character signs outlined by Butler (2002) and examining the morality of each character following the work of Krijnen and Meijer (2005), I have results that show *Nip/Tuck* has complex characters who face moral
struggles and whose characters have a sense of morality in the same vain as any other show on television.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The characters are broken into three categories: the surgeons, family and friends, and the key patient of each season. The surgeons consist of Dr. Sean McNamara and Dr. Christian Troy. They own the Miami practice and are the stars of the show. The family and friends consist of Julia McNamara, Matt McNamara, Kimber Henry, and Liz Cruz. Julia is Sean’s wife and acts as the den mother for the characters. Matt is both Sean and Christian’s son and represents the younger generation on the show. Kimber is Christian’s girlfriend. She represents the best and worst of Christian’s work history. Liz is the anesthesiologist for the practice and quite often acts as the voice of reason for the show. The key patients of each season consist of Escobar Gallardo, Ava Moore, and Quentin Costas. Escobar is a Miami drug lord that causes trouble for the surgeons. Ava is a life coach that causes trouble for everyone in the McNamara family. Quentin is “the carver” that terrorizes the entire cast during the third season.

The three categories were chosen to break up the cast into areas of importance. The first tier are the doctors themselves, followed by their family and friends, and with plotlines that span the entire season, the final tier includes the bad guy for each season.
The Surgeons

Sean McNamara and Christian Troy have been friends for over fifteen years. The first season of the show marks the founding of their practice, McNamara/Troy. These two surgeons are more like brothers than business partners. When watching the show it becomes apparent that what affects one surgeon will soon become the problem of the other.

Sean McNamara

Sean McNamara embodies the American dream. He comes from a middle-class background and is proud of his achievements. He looks like a grown up boy scout. Everything about the way Sean looks would most likely appear on the questionnaire handed out to men applying for reality television show The Bachelor.

The three components that Butler (2002) breaks appearance down to are the face, the body, and costuming. Sean’s face can best be described as clean. He’s clean-cut in the same fashion as Robert Redford minus the prettiness. Dylan Walsh who plays Sean McNamara is often cast as the Boy Scout type. He has a good-looking, trusting face.

He is an average height with an average build. His body is neither threatening nor weak. He does not have a strong physical presence like his partner Christian, but he is not a wallflower either. Sean is a plastic surgeon, whose business relies on appearance, so one can tell that he works to stay in the great shape he is in for his forties.

Sean’s style of clothing is expensive, but casual. It would not be hard to imagine the Banana Republic catalog tucked under Architectural Digest on his desk. Above all else, he exudes the look of a happily married man. Being a good-looking, clean-cut guy is
something that not only comes naturally to Sean, but it is a persona that he wants others to believe about him.

The possessions that Sean cherishes are extensions of his love for his family. He owns a beautiful Miami home that looks to be in a community with a high association fee. He has a beautiful wife and two good-looking children who he has remarked on different episodes as attending good schools. He is proud of his practice and it becomes obvious that everything Sean owns is not by accident. He always wanted a perfect family and his possessions reflect this so-called wonderful family life.

The most important object that Sean is seen with is the scalpel. Early on in the series it is explained that of the two surgeons, Sean is the more talented. He performs the more complicated procedures and it is his expertise that carries the practice. His hands are said to be a gift on more than one episode. Whenever the business is in crisis, or whenever a new surgery is to be performed, Sean is the one with scalpel in hand ready to make history.

Sean is soft-spoken and kind, when meeting new clients or characters on the show, he immediately gives off the impression of someone approachable. To those who know him personally, Sean is known to be someone who holds in his emotions and does not communicate. When he speaks to his wife and children it is as if he learned every life lesson from a therapist. He tells them how he believes they should be living their lives and when this sometimes self-righteous attitude comes out in him, not even the anger of his wife can get him to break away from his monotone voice.
Other characters believe him to be a genuinely good person. There is not one person on the show who has had bad words for Sean. He is the mediator between the rest of the characters.

Sean’s actions show that he is a good person. There is nothing menacing about his character and rarely has he been violent. The few times when violence was an issue it was a situation where he was protecting his loved ones. Everything about this character screams nice guy. He believes that he can make a difference and he strives to do things that will benefit others.

The episode that best exemplifies Sean is “Sean McNamara” (Murphy, September 2004, Nip/Tuck). At this point in the series, Sean is in the middle of a divorce from Julia and he is unhappy about the practice. He feels that there should be more meaning to life and wants to find this meaning in his practice. He decides that a third of the McNamara/Troy business should be dedicated to pro-bono work. One of his patients is a victim of the “carver”, a serial rapist in the Miami area who carves his victim’s faces in the same fashion as the famous Black Dahlia case. The carver believes that beauty is a curse on the world and that by mutilating his victims, he is seeking justice.

Sean helps the victims that have been cut by reconstructing their faces. Sean is rewarded for his good deeds by getting a visit from the carver. Sean gets his face cut on one side. The cut is not as deep as the other victims, but Christian is unable to operate on him. Christian had learned earlier in the episode that a past sexual partner had tested positive for HIV so while he is awaiting his own tests, he cannot operate on any patients. He flies in the next best surgeon in the country, Dr. Quentin Costas, from Atlanta to work on Sean.
Before the surgery, Christian drills Quentin on the procedure over and over. Christian then tells Quentin, "I don’t so much as want his electric razor to know something happened to his face." Quentin responds with, "Don’t worry, a man has to look as good as his waiting room, right?" (Murphy, September 2004, *Nip/Tuck*).

With this exchange it is established that his best friend and partner is crushed by the attack and believes that the cut on his face must be obliterated for them to move on. Quentin acknowledges that the doctors have to maintain a certain level of beauty to match what their patients expect of them.

During the operation, Sean still wants to help. "It feels weird being on this side of this thing, can’t stop shaking from the adrenaline. Better give me 10 cc’s of Versed" (Murphy, September 2004, *Nip/Tuck*). Quentin tells him to relax and they begin on his face. Sean seems nervous as he goes under anesthesia and Christian sits close by nervously overseeing the operation. It is a vulnerable day for McNamara/Troy.

When the operation is over, Sean finds himself in a better place then the beginning of the episode. His relationship with Christian is solid and he is again reminded of their strong bond. Julia, his wife, is staying close by his side, nursing him back to health. Sean feels as if the cut on his face has brought his family closer together. A day after his surgery, his scar is almost gone. He also learns that the carver has claimed another victim, a high school homecoming queen. Her parents have asked for Sean specifically in reconstructing her face.

Sean finds himself questioning why he became a plastic surgeon. He tells his wife that he feels a part of the carver’s message is true. That the search for beauty is crazy and that he helps fuel this desire in people. His wife tells him that he’s wrong, that what he
does is help people. She tells him that she will support him either way and will not judge him if he decides to no longer help the victims of the carver. Christian tells him that they should no longer help the victims. He feels that the price for helping the victims, meaning the cut on Sean’s face, is too high a price to pay.

Sean thinks about it more and then decides to operate on the victim. We see Sean looking down at the victim on the operating table with fear and anxiety. He then calms down, grabs the scalpel and goes to work doing what he does best.

Sean operates from a rule-governed sense of morality. He believes that others problems are also his own and wants to help. When he is approached with the first carver victim he does not even think twice before he takes them on as a patient. After the attack on him, he is scared to help, but then decides that it is his place to help. With rule-governed morality, the individual believes that he or she is responsible for the problems that those around them have.

The last shot of Sean in this episode is of the scalpel being placed in his hand. His hand is one of his objective correlatives and so the dilemma that he faces in this episode, whether or not to allow the carver to scare him, is solved by being true to himself. He has a gift for reconstructing faces and he chooses to exercise this gift even if it means putting his life in danger.

Sean shows in this episode that he is a moral person in an immoral world. He is unhappy with the superficiality in this business, which he acknowledges as existing and questions whether his work is beneficial, or not to the world. He gets attacked for doing something positive without personal gain and so he questions what path he should take.
It would have been easy for Sean to drop pro-bono work and concentrate on augmentations and face-lifts. He was in a position that he could live the rest of his life without having to see patients such as the carver’s victims if he did not wish. In the end, because he operates from a sense of rule-governed morality, he felt the victim needed his services and he would continue to help. Sean is a good person that tries to do that best he can in the environment that he lives.

The operation that Sean has is mandatory. There was not much muscle damage in the cut, but he needed an unmarred face for business. His business is the promise of beauty and happiness and it would be hard for him to sell this with a face like the Joker from Batman. Though the surgery is cosmetic, it was a necessity for his job so that he could provide for his family. There was no vanity behind his decision to have his surgery.

Christian Troy

Christian Troy, played by actor Julian McMahon, is the epitome of beautiful. He has the looks, the great job, the shiny toys and he knows it. On the surface he possesses every material object that one would believe creates happiness, but in truth, his life is missing people who love him and he tries his hardest to hide that fact.

His appearance is very important to him. He is the type of guy that people will turn to admire when he enters the room. His face is chiseled and tan and he has hazel-green eyes with light brown hair. He has a golden look to him from the tanning that it seems he does religiously. He also has a perfect, white smile.

He is 6’4 with a trim, muscular build. He gives off a leading man vibe and one can observe that the love and admiration from women comes easily to him. There is nothing
amiss in his physical attributes and it can be said that he is physically perfect if there is such a thing.

His clothing is metro and expensive. He is a person that pays attention to labels and he is often seen purchasing the very best that fashion has to offer. This is a character that is dressed to the nines even when he is relaxing at home. He will not be caught looking anything but perfect.

His objective correlatives would indicate his wardrobe. When Christian enters a room he can be found brushing imaginary dirt off of his shirt or smoothing an unwanted wrinkle. He also has a very expensive car that he loves to drive. He lives in the high-rent, trendy part of Miami and his loft is centered on his bed. Every piece of art and furniture in his home is meant to accentuate his large four-poster bed. His sexual prowess is something that he advertises and is very proud of.

Christian speaks with a very stuck up air about him. He is sarcastic and does not care if he hurts people’s feelings with what he says. There has not been one person on the show that has not defined his character with an expletive and he is hated by most of the women with whom he had relationships. He speaks his mind and though he may come off as obnoxious, those around him know that he does not lie.

His actions are sometimes contradictory. Though he always states that he only cares about himself, a lot of the things that he does are for the people that he loves, which is exclusively his co-workers and Sean’s family. His decisions are based on the well being of these select few and rarely does he care about anything else. Examining his character, one realizes that the superficial lifestyle he leads is a mask for his vulnerable character. Coming from an abusive background, the last thing he can handle is more emotional pain.
He is vulnerable to others who he senses come from a broken home and though he can be verbally cruel, he would never harm anyone physically. Christian can be an enigma to those around him at times, but viewers can see he is just a very sensitive person that realizes he can do or say anything he wants because his beauty allows him.

The episode that best exemplifies Christian Troy is “Christian Troy” (Murphy, June 2004, Nip/Tuck). Christian’s nose is broken during bedroom acrobatics and he finds himself in need of rhinoplasty. He is in a very vulnerable state because as he explains to Sean, he hasn’t so much as had a pimple on his face his entire life. This broken nose marks the first thing that has ever been imperfect about his face and it scares him. The best surgeon in the world is his partner, but he cannot rely on him at the moment because Sean is having spasms in his hand. Christian finds himself in a tough situation, he has a problem that is marring his beauty and the one person he would trust to fix it cannot.

Christian has two things that are greatly troubling him in this episode. He hates that his face is imperfect and he is scared to death that Sean will never recover from his spasms. Sean’s problem with performing not only affects the business, but also affects everything that Christian has. Sean’s problem presently means that he cannot fix Christian’s face, but in the long run, Sean’s problem can equal the end of the business and the end of the life that Christian is used to living. He is in a position during this episode where he can lose everything.

Christian begins to shop around the Miami area for a plastic surgeon. True to his nature, while in the waiting room of a colleague, he steals a client for McNamara/Troy before his own appointment. When Sean learns that he has been shopping around for a surgeon, there is a rift in their friendship.
Angry about his disagreements with Sean, Christian seeks approval from a woman. During his second consultation with his chosen plastic surgeon, a woman, he undresses for her and asks if she sees anything that needs improvement. Smiling at her, he believes that she will see his perfection and compliment him on it. She instead suggests liposuction on his hips and a bit of work around his eyes. Angered by her response, he dresses, and leaves her office informing her that he does not care for her opinion and does not believe in her expertise.

Christian heads home and has a dalliance with one of his old flames. She senses that something is not right with him and when she realizes that she is being used to help stroke his ego, she leaves. Before she leaves she tells him that he truly is hideous and his nose now makes him look as ugly on the outside as he is on the inside. After she leaves, Christian heads into his bathroom and takes a long look at himself. The next shot is an array of medical supplies lined up on his bathroom counter.

He first injects himself with what one would believe to be a numbing substance. He then makes an incision inside of his nose, then inserting an instrument to break the bridge. With the first chip at the inside of his nose he becomes dizzy and everything becomes black. That’s where Sean finds him, sitting alone in the dark with blood all over his face.

He explained to Sean that the reason he could not finish his own rhinoplasty was because his hand began to shake. He tells Sean that his broken nose taught him a lot about their friendship, their business, and Sean’s daily burdens. He stated:

I was staring at myself in the mirror and I realized that I’m all alone. My nose was bleeding and the only person that I trusted was myself. I couldn’t handle the pressure.
I choked… Now I understand what you’re going through, Sean. That anxiety. If I treated every patient the way I treated my face, I couldn’t manage. That’s what you do, everyday. I scheduled myself for surgery, tomorrow at 8 a.m. You’re going to fix this properly (Murphy, June 2004, Nip/Tuck).

When they are prepped for surgery, Sean does not believe he can do it. Christian tells him that he will be able to get through it because Christian will be with him the whole time. He informs Sean that he will forfeit the anesthesia, numb his nose, and be with Sean the whole time. Christian’s solution to all of their problems is for the both of them to go through his rhinoplasty together. The experience gives Sean the confidence he needs to get over his psychological roadblock that has been plaguing him for the season and his rhinoplasty gives Christian back his perfect face.

The procedure gave both surgeons something back that they had been missing. It also showed that they needed each other to succeed. Christian acts from a sensibility-guided moral standpoint. He looks at all of his problems as a family problem and something that they will solve together. He is just shallow enough that he equated his broken nose with the issues that Sean had with performing under pressure. He believed that the key to solving both of their problems was for Sean to get over his fear while repairing his nose. His idea worked and he was able to gain back the great partner that he knew he could trust and he was given back his beautiful face.

Christian saw their current situation as one that could ruin both of their lives. His broken nose came at a time when he could not imagine things getting worse. He prides himself in his beauty so that temporary marring of that beauty provided him with an insight into what an imperfect life would be like. He used his broken nose as a way to
bring Sean’s confidence back. We learn that Christian’s beautiful life depends heavily on

Sean, who is the foundation for both of their lives.

Christian has his own warped sense of morality. The issues in his life are usually tied
to what others do or what others think about him. When what he holds dear is unbalanced
he relies on his beauty and perfection to make things right. In this instance, his beauty
was unable to help him, but it was able to bring his partner back to the operating room,
which fixed all the other problems Christian had. Christian’s life is stable and happy if
the people around him are stable and happy. His problems arise when he feels that he is
alone with no one to help him. It is easy to see that as long as he has the trusted Sean by
his side, he will always feel safe.

Christian’s surgery was reconstructive. He had a broken bridge that needed to be reset
and he saw an opportunity with his operation to get Sean’s mind back on track with their
practice. Having a broken nose opened up a lot of issues that Christian had with his
appearance. He acknowledges that he is beautiful and would not be able to handle living
a life without the face that he is accustomed, but he also states that his beauty and vanity
take a backseat to having their business running at a hundred percent. His business, his
livelihood, and his friendship with Sean are more important to him than his looks, but he
does understand that there are instances when all of the factors begin to intertwine in their
line of work.
Family and Friends

Sean and Christian’s family and friends are part of their world. Aside from their practice, their family and friends is all they have. Following is a look at the people who make up the surgeon’s life.

Julia McNamara

Julia McNamara, played by Joely Richardson, has been married to Sean for over fifteen years. She was a classmate of both Sean and Christian and they both loved her. After graduation, she chose Sean and worked to support him through medical school, putting her own career goals on hold. She had two children and became a stay-at-home mom. Over the years, she has wondered if maybe her life was meant to be different. A lot of her thoughts and second guesses have led to the decline of her marriage and she finds herself unhappy with her life.

Her appearance is that of a trophy wife, though she is more than just that title. She is a tall, blue-eyed blonde and fits the profile of what a retired supermodel turned housewife must look like. Joely Richardson is part of the Redgrave family and she exudes that British aristocrat look that most of her family has. Her looks add to her role and sometimes you forget her heritage when she plays the convincing role of a bored American housewife.

Her objective correlates are her wedding ring which she has on depending on her relationship with Sean. Her clothing is simple, but expensive. A testament to her rocky, unstable character is the changing of the objects she finds valuable. At the beginning of the show, she was attached to her books when she decided she was heading back to medical school. When she decided that she and Sean were not going to make it, that a
divorce was eminent, she decided that possibly owning a business could be her new life goal. The objects that Julia surrounds herself with are pastimes to make her happy for the time being. There are rarely things in her life, besides her husband and children that are constant.

The conversations that Julia has with other characters tend to be confrontations when they are with either her husband or her son. The conversations usually have to do with people being unable to understand where she is coming from and what makes her happy. She is genuinely a good person, but her frustrations with herself tend to come out as accusations towards the people she loves. Her constant target is Sean and she does not realize how much she does not hate him until their relationship is already over. It is a strong, love-hate relationship between them.

The actions that she takes are that of someone who in the end cares for her family. Though she feels suffocated by Sean and the children, she is always the first one there when times are rough. Though she has a strong attraction to Christian and vice versa, they keep their distance because of their love for Sean. Her actions show that Julia is more unhappy and upset with who she has allowed herself to be and not with the people around her. She learns a lot about herself during the course of the series and realizes that it all comes back to you when one is unhappy.

The episode that best exemplifies Julia McNamara is “Julia McNamara” (Murphy, September 2004, Nip/Tuck). The episode begins with Julia having taken a fall through a plain-glass window after swallowing a bottle of pills with alcohol. She has cuts all over her face that she needs reconstructed. She goes to McNamara/Troy to ask for help from Sean. He is still angry at her lack of control, but agrees to fix her face.
This is a fantasy-life episode that is reminiscent of *Alice in Wonderland*. When Julia is put under she awakens in an alternate world. She finds her life coach, Ava Moore, is her guide in this new world. She soon learns that she is seeing what her life would have been like if she had married Christian instead of Sean back in college.

She learns that she finished medical school and she’s a plastic surgeon who co-owns a practice with Christian in Miami. At first, she is happy to see the glamorous life that they lead. They operate together on patients during the day and have fun nights out on the town, which sometimes include recreational drug use. She soon feels that she is missing something in her life and realizes that she wants to have children. A visit to her OB/GYN tells her that she will have trouble conceiving, being that she is now in her mid-thirties. She is disappointed, but adamant about having children. Her and Christian decide to bring in a third partner to lighten the workload.

Her first thought is to look into what Sean is doing. She invites him to the practice to see if he would be interested in a position. She is jealous to learn that he is happily married with children and he dedicates half of his time to pro-bono work. Sean is living the exact life he had with her, this time with another women. She is amazed to find herself drawn towards him more than Christian. Even Christian likes having Sean around in the alternate reality.

During a day at the office, she makes a pass at Sean who immediately tells her that he is not interested and that she should get a hold on her life. She is shocked to find herself in a similar position in her dream world, she is being lectured about her life by Sean. She tells Sean that she does not care about his opinion because this new Julia is a successful plastic surgeon who makes a lot of money and does not care what others think about her.
Sean tells her to get help and leaves. She immediately goes home and drowns her sorrows in alcohol and prescription pills. A similar scenario happens in this alternate reality and she falls through the plain-glass door in her bathroom. Her alternate reality turns into the same scene as her real-life; her on the operating table with Sean and Christian trying to fix her face.

She asks Ava what will happen to her and she is a bit angered to find herself in the same scenario though her life is completely different. Ava explains to her that it is not her circumstances that makes her life turn out the way it does but her own actions. Ava then tells her that she will not have to worry about it for much longer. She explains that she is not her life coach in this alternate reality, but the angel of death. Julia flatlines in the alternate reality and the next thing she knows she is flying through the clouds in a beautiful couture dress with all of her family and friends standing on the sidelines, dressed in all white and waving at her. At the end of the line is Ava dressed in a black suit beckoning her forward. The site of Ava scares her and she beings to scream, “I’m not ready” over and over. The real Julia’s heart rate flatlines for a second before it goes back to normal.

She awakens to find herself in the recovery room of McNamara/Troy being looked after by Sean. She looks up at him and says, “Sean, it’s you. All along, it’s been you.” (Murphy, September 2004, Nip/Tuck). He does not know what she is talking about but nods his head and holds her hand.

The time under anesthesia in this episode gave Julia time to think about her life. Whether her alternate life was something she was allowed to see by death or a figment of her imagination, the outcome of her thoughts are clear. She loves Sean and realizes that
he is the rock that keeps them all together. Julia uses a sensibility-guided sense of morality. Her anger and frustration throughout the show has always been about things that she was unable to do or have. Hitting rock bottom in this episode and being allowed a glimpse into an alternate life proved to her that Sean was the man she was supposed to be with and that had made the right decision fifteen years earlier. She also realizes that not only did she need Sean in her life to be stable, but that Christian needed him as well. Maybe the attraction between these two was due to the fact that they are so much alike in many ways and that Sean is the foundation they both need to live selfishly without fear of failure.

Julia is never content with her life, but with a glimpse at a world without Sean she realizes how much she would truly miss him. This character is written as a very needy, person who is dependent on her spouse. I believe this is more a testament to the rock that Sean is. Every character on this show would be lost without the guidance of Sean and Julia is definitely one of them.

In return for the comfort and safety that he creates, Julia and Christian provide the wild, rebellious side that Sean dares not be a part. Julia is a great other half for Sean because she is a contrast to his character. If he were to end up with someone more like him, he would be the person in her alternate reality, a very dull, boring rock. In her fantasy world, the only thing that Sean was missing from his life that was not the same from reality was Julia. Maybe in her mind, Julia feels that he needs her to be complete just as much as she needs him. She is just as shallow and narcissistic as Christian and they both use the sensibility-guided moral standpoint to justify how their world just works better when Sean is in it.
Julia’s reconstructive surgery was elective, but she pushed for it for two reasons: she wanted an excuse to be near Sean and she did not want to have any evidence of having hit rock bottom with her overdose. She wants the cuts taken off her face but sees it more as an opportunity to mend the rift between her and her husband. She does not once question her beauty and whether or not her life would be different with her new face. Rather she questions what her life would be like if she had not invested the past two decades in Sean. The questions that plague Julia deal more with her life choices than her aesthetic qualities.

Matt McNamara

Matt McNamara, played by John Hensley, is the only teenager on the show. While the rest of the cast is going through issues of mid-life crises, divorces, etc., he is experiencing the trials and tribulations of high school. He offers the unique perspective of growing up a privileged child of a father who makes his living selling the promise of happiness through beauty.

His appearance is that of a good-looking teenage boy. He has a clear face with soft brown eyes and jet-black hair. He does not have the blonde beauty of his mother and he is not the Boy Scout that his father is, but he has his own look to him. He is an average height and build. He does not stand out as the athletic type, but one can tell that he did not grow up with any of the awkwardness of being too short, or fat, or any of the other aesthetically unappealing traits that some teenagers have to suffer through. He is a normal, good-looking high school student.
His objective correlatives are his guitar and his music. His room is like the average suburban teenage boy’s room. He has posters of bands that he likes, he has the trendy clothes, and he dresses the part of the misunderstood teen that just wants to be left alone well. He is a walking advertisement for Abercrombie and Finch.

His dialogue is that of a well-educated student. One can tell that Matt is a smart kid that probably does not apply himself as much as he can. The conversations that he has with his father reveal that his parents are possibly a little hard on him when it comes to academics. He has a strong opinion about his life and the decisions that he makes and he is not afraid to share that with his parents.

His actions show that he is a normal kid in school who is not a star in sports or academics, but is not a failure either. His friends give the impression that he is somewhere in the middle and is comfortable there. He does not give in to the peer pressures around him and has a normal interest in girls. His actions are only a bit different from his peers in that early on he becomes aware of a world where people can be beautiful and innately insecure about the way that they look. Having visited his father’s place of work, one can tell that he understands the desperation that clients have and feels sorry for them. At times he expresses his pity for Sean and Christian that they believe what they are doing is actually helping the people around them.

The episode that best exemplifies Matt McNamara is “Nanette Babcock” (Murphy, August 2003, Nip/Tuck). In this episode, Matt’s one real insecurity is revealed. His foreskin embarrasses him after his girlfriend reveals that she finds it unattractive. Having an open discussion with his parents about his issues, they tell him that he was quite small when he was born and that they were afraid a circumcision was an unnecessary trauma.
for the newborn baby. When Matt asks to have the procedure done, his father is against it believing that it is unnecessary.

Showing a bit of the stubbornness that both Julia and Christian have, Matt looks up a how-to on circumcision from the Internet. After reading through the directions carefully, he locks himself in the bathroom to complete the procedure. After taking a scalpel to his genital area, he sees blood on his hands and proceeds to faint. He immediately asks for his father’s help.

Sean surveys the damage that Matt had done to himself and realizes that after cutting part of the foreskin, he had actually done damage to his urethra. He informs Matt that he will give him the circumcision that he wants. While Matt stands in the bathroom with a bag of ice over his genitals, his father lectures him on doing things without first communicating with him. He begins by lecturing him on mutilating your own body, the birds and the bees, and strikes a deal that Matt has to be more open with him when it came to his life.

Matt agrees and is happy about the chance to have done with the one thing he did not like about himself. When the surgery is completed he is informed that urinating will be a problem for the first few days. He informs his father that he will be fine. Walking into the bathroom, Sean offers to hold his hand during his first urination. Matt seems indignant and refuses, but he does confide something in his father. “I can’t dance. I mean I really can’t dance. You’re right about the prom thing. She’s already asked me to go. I really can’t dance” (Murphy, June 2003, Nip/Tuck). His father advised him to simply tell her that it is not his thing, and he would prefer not to dance. Matt thanks him and then begs for his hand when he begins to feel pain from his first urination.
Like his mother and Christian, Matt finds himself leaning on Sean and agreeing to what Sean feels is best to get his way. Up until this point, Matt was uninterested in his parent’s life and did not communicate his needs and feelings. When the self-circumcision goes wrong, he realizes that being a team player would help his cause. He comes from a sensibility-guided moral standpoint. His problems become the problem of the group and the resolution can be found as a group. He took it upon himself to fix his problem and when it failed he realized that it was something he could not do alone. For the purpose of getting what he wanted he agrees to be part of the group.

His sense of morality is self-promoting just like any other teenager that just wants things to go their way without looking at the consequences. Once he is healed he returns to his girlfriend who still does not feel the desire for him that she had earlier blamed on his foreskin. He learns a valuable lesson after going through the ordeal. He learns that his outward appearance cannot make anyone happy and changing himself for another person still cannot make that person love you. In the first few episodes of the series, Matt learns a lesson that the patients of McNamara/Troy still have not figured out. Beauty cannot create happiness and medicine can only do so much. This rejection causes Matt to draw even deeper into himself, but he has learned a few things along the way. He learns that he can count on his father when the time arises and he learns to see beyond the lies that people may tell him.

Matt is an important character in that he comes of age on the show. He goes through his latter teen years while the McNamara/Troy business booms. Not only does he learn things for himself and live his own life, he is an important objective correlative for the other characters on the show. For Sean, he is the son that he has to groom into the perfect
man who will achieve everything he has and more. For Julia, he is the product of a one-
night stand with Christian that she must keep secret. The secret eventually comes out but
instead of crushing the family, it simply means that Matt has two fathers who will always
be there for him. For Christian, he is a person to love and spoil. Matt is a lot of different
things to people on the show and it becomes evident that he is treasured in the same
fashion as other objects on the show. He is the three main characters’ ultimate work of
art. He realizes that he means a lot to the people around him and at times he is resentful
of the love and attention and expectations that are so often heaped upon him. After a
while he realizes that it is just a part of his life that he will have to live with.

Matt’s surgery was elective. Though the part that McNamara/Troy performed was
reconstructive, his self-mutilation was his own doing. He was unhappy with something
about his body that was natural and felt that it needed to be cut off for him to be normal.
The disgust of his girlfriend and the ridicule from boys in the locker room was enough for
him to take matters into his own hands when his father vetoed the circumcision. He is a
teenager and his need to fit in is stronger than the adults on the show in that he actually
turned to self-mutilation. Christian operated on his own nose, but he is a trained medical
doctor, a far cry from a teenager using a website manual to perform a self-circumcision.
After this incident, Matt has a better hold on his self-confidence and what he will allow
others to make him feel.

Kimber Henry

Kimber Henry, played by Kelly Carlson, can best be described as a child. She is a girl
in her late-twenties who came to Miami with the hopes of finding fame and fortune. What
she finds is Christian Troy at a bar that informs her that she is not a perfect ten, but in fact
a mediocre eight. After a breast augmentation and a few changes to her face he says she is finally worthy of being called a ten. By this point in their relationship, she is no longer interested in being the best looking person in the room, but simply wants his love and acceptance.

Kimber is extremely beautiful. She is a short blonde, with soft brown eyes, and an exceptional body. The enhancements given to her by Christian have turned her into an unnaturally perfect female prototype. She looks like the girls who tend to be on the arm of someone rich and powerful. Her face is flawless, but she gives the impression of being lost as well. She is not mean or cruel, but comes off as simply self-centered.

Her objective correlatives all depend on whom she is dating. When she was with Christian she shopped constantly and had on a new outfit every time they met. With other relationships, she has had cars, jewelry, etc. It is not hard to see that the men in Kimber’s life will provide her with plenty of beautiful things. She is unhappy either way because the object that she has set her happiness on is Christian’s love. She soon learns that there are some things even her beauty cannot capture.

Her speech indicates that she is smart. She is not the stereotypical ditzy blonde and actually has feelings and her own thoughts. Others describe her as being a wolf in sheep’s clothing and her appearance of being a helpless beauty is merely an act. Her conversations with Christian indicate that she genuinely cares for him and would be willing to give up the glamorous life if it meant a life of settling down with him. Her anger stems from the fact that he does not believe her to be the settling down kind.

Her actions show that she is most definitely a spoiled child. When she does not get her way she goes about making the people that she deems responsible suffer. When
Christian trades her for a Porsche in season one, she goes back to his place, takes the Porsche and informs him that she has a new boyfriend. Every action she takes is meant to get a reaction from Christian. She does not have an opinion on something until she knows how Christian will feel about it. Her obsessive love for him drives her to make the decisions she does in her life.

The episode that best exemplifies Kimber is “Kimber Henry” (Murphy, August 2004, *Nip/Tuck*). In this episode she approaches the surgeons of McNamara/Troy with a business proposition. The adult film company that she now works for will pay them $50,000 if they can replicate Kimber’s genitalia for her Kimber doll. She explains that the real-life doll, a life-size doll that looks exactly like her has all of the physical qualities that she does but lacks the proper texture in the private area. She is asking them for their help because she feels that as plastic surgeons they would know how to recreate the perfect part for her doll.

Kimber and Christian have recently separated and he wants nothing to do with her. Sean believes the money from her doll will help the practice, so he agrees to help her. The procedure involves creating a mold from Kimber to recreate the part for the doll. During the procedure, Kimber and Sean have a heart-to-heart about their relationships. Kimber had recently tied Christian to her bed and threatened to kill him because he was breaking off their relationship. Sean was going through a trial separation with Julia. They felt there were similarities in their relationships because they were both too trusting with their hearts to the people they loved. These similarities lead to a night spent together. In the morning, Julia who had stopped by to pick up some of her belongings interrupts them.
At this meeting, Kimber appears ashamed of being found at Sean’s house by his wife. She keeps her eyes to the ground and tells Julia that she apologizes for the way they had to meet. Julia is too shocked to say anything to her. It is Sean’s reassuring voice that allows Kimber to raise her head. He kisses her and tells her to wait in the car for him while he speaks to Julia. It is all the reassurance Kimber needs and she smiles slightly before heading out the door.

Kimber has a rule-governed sense of morality. She believes that the actions she performs are from the goodness of her heart and that she cares for other people. When she initiates an intimate relationship with Sean, she tells him that she did so because he looked lonely and needed company. Sean had told her earlier that she too trusts a person and it shows that he is correct to a certain extent. She has the mind of a child and believes that Sean’s loneliness and sadness is something that she can fix. Within two conversations she believes that she has built a foundation for a meaningful relationship with Sean.

The intrusion of Julia into her life does not deter her from her plans or threaten her. She is actually amicable, telling Julia that she has heard many wonderful things about her and she apologizes for the way she has to meet. In Kimber’s world, being caught with another woman’s husband is not something that is greatly shocking. She believes it is just the hand they were dealt and she immediately goes about trying to make the best of the situation.

It is important to note that at no time is she malicious about her relationship with Sean towards Julia and she also does not try to involve Christian. She truly falls for Sean in the afternoon that she had a mold of her made and believes the conversation they had was
enough to built a life together. It is this trusting nature and child-like mentality that I believe gives Kimber a sense of morality. The decisions she has made in her life were made on a whim and she does not look at her decisions on a deeper level.

When she started her relationship with Christian she genuinely believed that they were in love and were going to spend the rest of their lives together. When she accepted gifts from other men, she believed that they were just being nice and understood that they wanted to have a relationship with her. Entering the porn industry was a business decision and she does not look at it as exploitive. She believes that she came to Miami to be an actress, but found her true calling. She stated, “I realized it wasn’t my talent for playing a character that people responded to. It was my raw, simmering sensuality. I simply got tired of fighting my nature” (Murphy, August 2004, Nip/Tuck). She says this with a straight face because it is what she believes to be true. She then goes on to explain that she only has to perform in five pornographic films total before she is allowed to become a producer and a director.

Kimber is a fighter and she uses what she has, mainly her beauty, to create a life for herself. She falls into the category of rule-governed morality because she does everything independently. Other than the men with which she has relationships, she does not have any friends. She is mostly alone and relies on her own company to get through her day-to-day struggles. This would create loneliness in people, such as Sean, who is lost without Julia, but with Kimber she is okay. Maybe it is because she feels responsible for making people happy when they are down. She continually goes back to Christian whenever he calls her for companionship and she immediately enters a relationship with
Sean when she sees that he is alone. Her trusting nature is a trait that does lead her into trouble and rarely is it ever a happy ending for her.

Kimber has had several procedures done over the course of her life but in this episode that I examine her in the procedure is for business. The construction of a more realistic part for her doll will be good for business and would boost the sales of her products. Though the procedure may seem elective and unnecessary, the same can be argued for her business as well. Kimber has always seen herself as a work in progress and the procedures that she gets on the show are always explained as obstacles that lead her to a more fulfilling life and career. It can be argued that she can live her life without these enhancements, but in Kimber’s life and reality, they are necessary, and they help her reach the goals that she has set for herself.

Liz Cruz

Liz Cruz, played by Roma Maffia, is the anesthesiologist for McNamara/Troy. She keeps the men in the office in line if the antics get to be too much. She often makes comments about how she gathers evidence for her growing sexual harassment suit, but they are empty threats. The love between the three doctors in the office is strong and it is obvious that they are a family.

Liz is in her early forties and she is a lesbian. She appears to be of Hispanic descent, but her ethnicity is never mentioned on the show. Her appearance is completely different from any other woman too. She is larger than the women on the show and fits the physical description of a normal woman in her forties. If the rest of the cast critiqued her she would be considered unattractive for not fitting the profile of beauty that the doctors promise. She is unattractive by Nip/Tuck standards because she is not thin, young, or
blonde. Rarely is Liz out of the office in her scenes, so aside from her scrubs, her clothing style tends to lean towards comfortable choices. What stands out about Liz is her curly hair. She is the only woman on the show with so much curly hair. Every other female on the show has sleek, flat-ironed hair, but Liz has thick, full curls that seem to have a life of their own. The only time her hair is not noticeable is when she is wearing her scrubs and it has been put back in a manageable bun.

She does not have any objective correlatives and this may be on purpose for her to completely embody her plain-Jane persona. She is possibly the smartest woman on the show and because of this she lacks any of the accessories such as clothing, jewelry, a flash car, or anything else that may be considered extravagant. Modesty is a word that fits every aspect of her life and there is nothing extravagant about her lifestyle in the least. She has to make a considerably good living working as an anesthesiologist for McNamara/Troy, but she does not flaunt her earnings or position in any type of way.

Her conversations with the surgeons usually involve lectures. Most of her arguments in the office are between her and Christian. She feels that he is an arrogant, know-it-all and she never misses and opportunity to tell him so. Their fights take on the tone of sibling rivalry more so than two colleagues having a disagreement. She is a good person, and she is good at her job, there are never any complaints about her in the work place.

Her actions on the show are simple and straightforward. She is good at what she does and takes pride in her work. She has hang-ups at times because she realizes that their work adds to the culture of beauty, but at the end of the day, it is her job. She complains quite frequently about the breast augmentations they do and about the women who walk into their office everyday with self-esteem issues they will try to solve through surgery.
and she wonders why she continues to do it. Her nemesis Christian will then question as well why she is there if she is so against what they will do. This usually leads to another argument which they will never finish before they get back to work. The few times that Liz has threatened to leave the company, she has been offered a pay raise or given a bonus to stay. She is a staple in that office and they could not make it through the day without her.

The episode that best exemplifies Liz Cruz is “Agatha Ripp” (Murphy, August 2004, *Nip/Tuck*). In this episode Liz is a few weeks pregnant and Christian was the donor. She realizes that it will be a difficult pregnancy since she is in her early forties, but children is something that she finds she wants now in her life though she does not have a significant other. She did research on donors, but when Christian volunteered, she thought it would be a good idea since she already knew him and his history.

When this episode begins she talks of wanting to raise her child in the Catholic faith and how it is important to her. She explains that though becoming a pro-choice lesbian has caused her to move away from the church, she believes that a child has a better upbringing when they have a bit of structure. She has disagreements about child rearing with Christina, but both are excited about the child.

She comes to Christian with concerns when she detects spotting. A visit to her OB/BYN reveals that there is a strong possibility her child may be born with Down Syndrome. She explains to the doctor that she does not do well with uncertainty and the doctor tells her to think about it. Liz searches through her lost faith for answers and she wishes for answers about what to do.
When she runs into Christian in the coffee room a few days later she informs him that she is no longer pregnant. She tells him that she has had an abortion and she does not want to talk about it any further. When he prods her for more answers she explains to him that she made the right decision and it would have been highly unlikely that Christian would want to be seen with a handicapped child anyway. He begins to cry and tells her that he would have loved the child no matter what and that he would have been able to help her through any rough times that she may have had. She tells him that at the end of the day when she thought about it she realized that the only thing she was sure about was that she did not trust herself to raise a child with special needs. She was honest with herself and realized it would be too much work.

Christian questions her further and asks why he was chosen as a donor if she did not care to inform him of her decisions. She tells him honestly that she only chose him for his looks and that she did not care to have him in her child’s life. He is taken aback and cannot believe that he was chosen simply for his beauty. She tells him that his beauty was the only thing she cared about and when she was pregnant she prayed he had passed it on to her child. Speaking about beauty, she stated, “It makes life easier, or haven’t you noticed? The guarantee of beauty. Something I so desperately wanted, but never had? I’m ashamed to say it, but yes” (Murphy, August 2004, Nip/Tuck).

This conversation between Liz and Christian brings out truths about Liz that she has never confided before. The anger with the augmentations they do, the pity for the women with low self-esteem that litter their office were all tied to feelings about her own self-image. She acknowledges that she does not believe herself to be attractive and when she thought about having a child, she chose Christian with the belief that his beauty would

63
help her child live a better life. She is a doctor who could have provided for a child and given that child a loving home, but one of her fears that kept her awake a night was the fear that she would give birth to a child that was unattractive who would suffer through the same feelings she did.

Liz does not go into detail about why she believes herself to be unattractive and she does not speak in more detail about her feelings of inadequacy. There is a strong possibility that her feelings of being unattractive are simply because she works in a business where the people around her do not look like her. It never seemed to bother her in the past, but after having the abortion, she comes clean to Christian about some of the feelings she has always had about the so-called beautiful. In the end, she felt as if beauty allowed you into a club that had greater benefits than intelligence or hard work could provide.

Liz operates from a rule-governed sense of morality. She makes all of the decisions for herself because she believes herself to be alone. When she was looking for the faith to believe her child would be okay, she only saw herself and her inability to raise a special needs child alone was all the answer she needed to make her decision. It was a decision that she made alone and it will always be something that will affect her, but she did not make the decision lightly. She understood that this would be the last chance for her to have a child biologically, but she made the decision based on how much she felt she would be able to handle.

Liz's medical procedure was elective, but because of the factors involved with the procedure, it was something that was in her best interest. She was told that if she were to go through with the pregnancy, she would most likely be raising a child with special
needs and it was not something that could fit into her lifestyle. This was not a cosmetic procedure, though it does bring up several questions about appearance and how heavily it plays a role in our lives. For this instance, I believe that the uncertainties of lifestyle changes affected her decision more than aesthetic preferences.

Key Patient of Each Season

The key patient of each season is someone that the surgeons operate on whose storyline spans not just one episode, but the entire season. Each key patient has issues and themes that relate to that particular season and the resolution with each patient usually indicate the resolution of particular issues with the surgeon’s lives.

Escobar Gallardo

Escobar Gallardo, played by Robert LeSardo, is a drug lord in Miami. He met Sean and Christian when they unknowingly reconstructed the face of a man who was running away from him. When Escobar learns of what the two surgeons had done, he decided that they owed him indefinitely. He begins to bring in women to the office whose implants are really filled with drugs. He looks at Sean and Christian as his employees who have to remove these drug-filled implants from his mules whenever they come into Miami. The trade-off is that he won’t kill them and they are too afraid of him and his threats to stop him.

His appearance is that of a street hoodlum who has made quite a bit of money. He wears expensive street clothes brands and when he is conducting business wears a suit. His body is covered in tattoos and he seems physically threatening. Whenever he is in a room with others he throws his weight around in an aggressive manner so others will
know that he will resort to physical violence. He is of Hispanic descent and an antithesis to the other men on the show. When he is with Sean and Christian his sociopath manner makes the surgeons look extremely tame and passive in comparison to him.

His objective correlatives are the women that he abuses and uses as drug traffickers. Whenever he is seen with women they are always in a submissive role and he makes it clear that he does not consider any woman his equal. Other objects that define him are drugs, guns, and large amounts of cash in briefcases. He is the epitome of a drug lord and he has all of the toys associated with one. You can imagine that this character has seen Scarface a handful of times.

His conversations with other characters are usually commands. He tells people what to do and they do it or suffer the consequences. The only character who has verbally stood up to him is Liz. He laughs at her courage as if it is a form of stupidity that allows her to speak to him at all. There does not seem to be anyone in his life who cares about him and he does not speak of anyone fondly. He is a bully and it is clear that there is no one in his life who cares about him.

His actions show that he is a bad person. He traffics drugs into the country by storing them in implants in young girls. He recruits them by telling them that they will become American citizens and begin modeling careers once they enter the States. He does not care whether these girls live or die once they arrive in the country and he has retrieved his drugs. He threatens almost everyone who comes into contact with him and he is not remorseful over any of the criminal acts he has committed.

The episode that best exemplifies Escobar Gallardo is “Escobar Gallardo” (Murphy, October 2003, Nip/Tuck). At the end of the first season he has run McNamara/Troy into

66
the ground. The surgeons are exhausted from conducting his surgeries in the night and they have lost a lot of other business. They are in financial ruin and Escobar has just told them that he is going into a new venture, organ harvesting. Sean and Christian refuse to help him and in anger Escobar shoots Liz in the leg. He threatens to kill her if they do not harvest one of the kidneys from the mule they were currently operating. They agree and after the surgery the surgeons decide to send Liz on a paid vacation while they try and deal with Escobar.

Sean is frustrated and angry and he finds himself in a situation that he never imagined. In a moment of insanity, he buys a gun and heads to Escobar’s house to kill him. When he arrives, Escobar is lifting weighs and seems to intuitively know why Sean is there. He stands up and tells Sean to take his best shot. Sean raises the gun to Escobar’s chest, but is unable to bring himself to commit murder. Escobar laughs and tells him to take a seat. Being a sociopath, he believes that Sean attempting to take his life is a sign that he was an influence in making Sean a real man. He believes that violence and murder are characteristics of masculinity. He feels that they have bonded over this experience and shares personal information about himself with Sean.

He feels trapped in the drug world. He is unable to leave his house in fear of being arrested and he cannot leave the country. He tells Sean:

“I gave you the balls to come here with a gun. Now, you return my favor. You do for me what you did for Silvio Perez. Give me a new face. Get rid of all this paint. The snake wants to shed his skin” (Murphy, October 2003, Nip/Tuck).

The surgeons construct a plan to get Escobar out of their lives for good. During his consult, Escobar’s only worry is that the face they have chosen to give him is not
attractive enough. They assure him that he will look great and he agrees. We then see the
new Escobar walking through the Miami airport. The FBI immediately arrests him. They
tell him condescendingly that if he wanted to leave the country he should have changed
his face along with his name. They show him a list of the FBI’s most wanted and beneath
the photograph of Escobar is a photograph of his new face with the name Jorge Barco,
who is wanted for robbery and the murder of a federal agent. The scene prior to the arrest
is of the McNamara family having dinner with Christian. They are all happy and appear
to be the typical middle-class American family. Escobar’s arrest marks the end of the first
season.

The surgeons got rid of Escobar using their intelligence and skills. Instead of going
up against Escobar with the same weapons that he used, brute strength and intimidation,
they pretended to be on his side and tricked him into handing himself into the feds.

Escobar represented a world that is foreign to the characters of Nip/Tuck. Though he had
more money and power than all of the characters combined, he was from a dark, seedy
underworld that above being scary to the other characters was considered distasteful.
Whenever they talked about Escobar it was with a mixture of fear and pity. The surgeons
referred to him as the “drug dealer” and Julia referred to him as “that man”. His actions
were equally deplorable to them as the world that he was born.

Escobar operated from a rule-governed sense of morality. He was not a moral man
but he believed himself to be a just man. He met the surgeons because they reconstructed
the face of the man who raped his daughter. In Escobar’s mind, they were as much to
blame as the perpetrator. Though they had not hurt him or his family, the association with
a man who had meant that they now owed Escobar. There was no monetary amount
discussed, they were simply his workers and one would assume that employment was indefinite. The deal of services rendered with his new face may have been real, but there was always a chance he would return wanting more. Escobar was obviously more powerful than the surgeons and they only way they could come up with getting rid of him was to find an entity more powerful to take him away. Their answer was the FBI.

His surgery was elective but it was necessary if he ever wanted to leave the country and return to Columbia. He was a confident man who found himself attractive and he initially rejected his new face because he believed himself to look better. He agreed to the face not because he is happy with it but because he realized it his only chance of going undetected by the feds. His new face is what lands him in prison, and ultimately it is his trust in the surgeons that gets him caught. He uses strength and fear to get what he wants and not once during his dealings with the surgeons did he ever consider that a clever trick would be able to bring him down.

Though Escobar goes to prison, he plays an ongoing role on the show. Whenever Sean is down or is indecisive Escobar will appear in his dreams or thoughts with advice for him. The advice he gives Sean usually deals with violence and conquering. In his Sean’s thoughts, Escobar appears to ridicule him for being effeminate and not standing up for himself. To Sean, though Escobar was a criminal who needed to go to prison, he had a certain strength and control that Sean admired. It is this admiration for Escobar’s deplorable behavior that has him showing up in Sean’s dramas from time to time to lend advice.
Ava Moore

Ava Moore, played by Famke Janssen, is the villain of the second season. She enters the shows as a life coach for Julia, a pseudo-therapist and friend who was supposed to help Julia out of her emotional rut. Instead of being a shoulder for Julia to lean on, Ava betrays her trust by beginning a sexual relationship with Matt. To make the situation even more unethical, Ava has a son, Adrian, who is the same age as Matt.

Ava is a tall, beautiful woman, with long black hair and dark eyes. Her face is flawless and she has high cheekbones that make her stand out. She is definitely someone who gets noticed when she walks into the room. She has a physical strength to her as well. Just short of six feet tall, she would be considered big if she weren’t extremely slender. Her style of clothing is glamorous and she always looks good in public. She always dressed as if she’s headed to a power lunch or a black tie event.

Her objective correlatives are her clothing and her expensive car. Ava is someone who knows what the finer things in life are and relishes them. She makes no excuses for her extravagant taste and spoils her son with expensive things as well. Her most obvious toy is Matt, who becomes a type of pet for Ava. She loves the attention and blind obedience that she receives from him and one can tell that the adoration of someone so young is sort of a drug that she cannot live without.

She is very intelligent and prides herself on her knowledge. She generally thinks that the people around her are weak and does not hesitate to tell them so. As a life coach, she would tell her patients that it was within all of them to find who they were truly meant to be. When someone angers her, she lists their faults and why they will never be able to

70
overcome them. Her mood dictates whether she will help someone become more confident or tear them down.

Her actions are self-serving. She purports to care for the people around her but will manipulate a situation to get her way. When she believed that Matt would leave her halfway through the season she tells him the truth about his parentage, that Christian is his biological father. This drives Matt to leave his home and move in with her. She cuts off his ties to his family in order to have all of his attention. When her own son complains of her relationship, she grounds him and tells him that he will simply have to accept the new arrangement. There is an emotional gene missing in Ava where she does not see the vulnerability of other characters. She can understand the way people think, but she has yet to acknowledge that Matt’s love is most likely due to his young age and not true devotion, and she does not understand her son’s cry for help either. She is a self-centered character that only thinks of her own gains when making decisions.

The episode that best exemplifies Ava is “Joan Rivers” (Murphy, October 2004, *Nip/Tuck*). In this episode, it is revealed that Ava has had an incestuous relationship with her own son, Adrian, and it explains their weird relationship. It becomes clear that Adrian’s anger with Matt was partially because of the age difference and the disruptions to their own family, but also because the arrival of Matt ended his own relationship with Ava. Though it was realized with her relationship with Matt, it became clear with her relationship with Adrian that Ava does not understand boundaries.

Matt suggests that they run away and she tells him that she has medical issues that do not allow her to be without medication for long. He tells her that he will steal the meds from McNamara/Troy and they can leave together. Christian confronts Ava after he
catches Matt trying to steal the drugs and their heated argument leads to an intimate situation. In that moment, Christian realizes that Ava is in fact a transsexual. He immediately tells Sean and Julia and they come up with a plan together.

The three of them confront Ava and tell her that she had better leave town or they will report her to the police. They had threatened her before and she never cared, but after her secret is out she is completely vulnerable. She tells them that she will leave town and never speak to Matt again if they agree to give her one last surgery. She wants to get rid of the last bit of evidence that could give her away, she wants a more realistic private area. The surgeons agree, but there only question is where did she get Adrian.

It is learned that she had a relationship with the man who gave her the sex change in the 1970’s. She provided him with rich clients who invested in his research, he provided her with a loving home. They were married, but it was a platonic relationship. She had the operation to gain the surgeon’s love, but he could not love her in the way that she wanted. She thought that an addition of a child might bring them together so they adopted a boy. When he still could not bring himself to be intimate with her, she ran away with the child.

All of the decisions that Ava made were to find someone to love her for the woman she knew herself to be. She tells Julia off for offending her when they first sit down for their meeting. “Be careful with your choice of pronouns, Julia. Have some Goddamn respect! I am a woman. I don’t care what this file says” (Murphy, October 2004, Nip/Tuck). When Julia asks her if she truly cares for Matt, she responds, “I loved that he loved me” (Murphy, October 2004, Nip/Tuck).
After the surgeons perform the last surgery she returns home and packs. When Matt shows up she tells him to go home, that she no longer wants to be with him. He leaves crushed and returns to his family. Ava kept her part of the bargain and let him go. When Adrian comes home she tells him to pack because they are leaving the country. He tells her that he loves her, but he cannot trust her and does not believe that she meant to take him with her. She embraces him and tells him that things will be different once they leave and that they will talk on the plane. He stabs himself in the stomach and tells her it was his only guarantee that she would never leave him. As he dies on the floor, Ava loses her cool for the first time. She breaks down and screams out his name, trying desperately to resuscitate him. When she realizes that he is gone, she lies down and cries on the floor while holding him. Adrian’s death and Ava’s breakdown are intercut with scenes of the McNamara family having dinner with Christian. It is similar to the last shot of the family in the first season, they are eating and appear to be your average American household.

Throughout the season, before it was revealed that Ava was a transsexual, several transsexuals had confided in the doctors that the security check at the airport was the most frightening scenario for them. They admitted that handing their ID over and being scrutinized by authorities was a moment that they did not relish. It was a place and time that they felt they were the most vulnerable.

The last scene with Ava is reminiscent of the last scene with Escobar. She is walking through the Miami airport and arrives at the security check. She is wearing a flesh-colored dress, a big hat, and large black sunglasses. She looks more beautiful in this scene than she has in the entire season. She is stopped by a TSA agent who asks her to remove her sunglasses, she nervously does so and hands over her passport. He refers to
her as Ms. Moore and wishes her a safe flight. She thanks him and continues walking to her gate. It is the last we see of Ava.

Ava acted from a sensibility-guided sense of morality. She believed her problems were only because someone else brought them on. She cared about the few people in her life, but not more than she cared about herself. Her secret was something that she carried around every day like a burden. When she realizes that Julia knows about her identity, she replies, “Angry villagers with torches here to drive out the monster the doctor made” (“Joan Rivers, Nip/Tuck). Julia does not bring up any references of Ava being a freak of nature, nor does she ridicule her. Ava compares herself to Frankenstein and one realizes that she feels a lot like the character from the Mary Shelly novel.

Her surgery was elective but it was necessary for her to live an open and free life. Her relationships with adolescent boys was due to the fact that an adult male would most likely figure out that she was not born a female. Her final operation allowed her to live as a complete woman without fear. Though she does not need the surgery to survive she had undergone such a long and hard road filled with operations and medication that by the time she meets the surgeons of McNamara/Troy she is just one small surgery shy of completing what she had start almost twenty years prior. The surgeons simply help her finish what she had started long ago.

In the same fashion as Escobar with Sean, Ava shows up in Matt’s dreams. When he is unhappy about something or when he is trying to make a decision about his life, Ava will appear in his dreams to help guide him through it. He is both disgusted and thankful of her appearance. Like Escobar, Ava represents an assertiveness that Matt does not have
and he finds it in speaking to her. Even after her departure from the show, Ava is still acts as a life coach.

**Quentin Costa**

Quentin Costa is the plastic surgeon from Atlanta that was brought in to reconstruct Sean’s face after the carver attacked him. During the course of the third season McNamara/Troy bring Quentin on as a third partner in the hopes of expanding the business. They soon learn that three is a crowd. Quentin cannot seem to bond with the other two surgeons and when it is learned that he was born without genitalia, a degenerative disease from his childhood, they become even more uncomfortable with him.

Quentin is tall, dark, and handsome with blue eyes. He has a level of beauty that is on par with Christian. He works out and one can tell that he is aware of his attractiveness. Aside from being born without genitalia, he is aesthetically perfect. He is of Hispanic descent and is fluent in Spanish as well. His clothing style is similar to Christian, in fact, they are a lot alike when it comes to outward appearances.

He does not have any specific objective correlatives that are revealed until the end of the series when it is learned that he is the carver. Once his true identity comes out everything associated with the serial rapist who carves up the faces of his victims becomes associated with Quentin.

He is an intelligent man who shares his views with his colleagues. Since his introduction onto the show he has shared his opinion that plastic surgery should be mostly dedicated to reconstructive surgeries and that breast augmentations and liposuction are a waste of time. It is easy to understand that his own conditions most
likely lead him to his line of work and that he feels there is a deeper purpose to the work that surgeons do beyond making people aesthetically pleasing. The other two surgeons dislike him, but he is considered charming by the female characters on the show.

His actions reveal him to be a deranged psychopath. After it is learned that he is the carver he tells the truth about his crimes. He uses rape as a form of breaking the other person’s spirit so that they can be a more open person. The assault opens their mind and the carving of their face lets them know that beauty is a curse on the world. Quentin feels that he is liberating these victims when he violates them and mutilates their faces. He is on a deluded quest to rid the world of vanity.

The episode that best exemplifies Quentin is “Quentin Costa” (Murphy, December 2005, Nip/Tuck). This is the episode when the identity of the carver is revealed. For an entire season he has terrorized the city of Miami and all along he was a plastic surgeon working at McNamara/Troy. While Quentin is torturing and mutilating men and women in the city, the employees of the practice are being called in for questioning by the lead detective in the case, Kit McGraw, played by Rhona Mitra. She accuses Sean and Christian, as well as Liz, of being the carver. By the end of the season, you are unsure who the carver is and it is still a shock when it is revealed to be Quentin.

In the beginning of the episode, Quentin cuts his own face so as to throw suspicion off of him. After Sean and Christian reconstruct his face, he attacks them revealing his true identity to be the carver.

In his final act in Miami, Quentin decides that he is going to cut off Sean’s hand as punishment. He states that one victim in Miami was all he was initially going for, but when the surgeons decided to reconstruct the faces of all of his victims, he realized that
something more drastic needed to take place. He decided that his final act of taking away
Sean’s hand would immortalize him as a surgeon with only good intentions, the intent to
rid the world of vanity.

When he goes to cut off Sean’s hand, Christian begs him to take his instead. Quentin
is surprised by Christian’s request and his momentary pause gives detective Kit enough
time to shoot him dead. While the usual police steps are taken to close the case, Kit
informs the two surgeons what she’d learned about Quentin.

He was the product of incest and he and his sister were left an orphanage, both with a
birth defect. He was born without genitalia and she was born with a mangled face.
Though his secret could be hidden, her face was another story and no one wanted to
adopt her. He vowed that he would become a surgeon and fix her face so that they would
both be loved by the society that shunned them. She died a few years back and it was
probably what led to his insanity. With this information, Kit gathers her things and
leaves.

Sean is still unhappy with the events. He needed answers about Quentin that he felt
were unresolved. He tells Christian that the only way for them to get closure is if they
visit the orphanage and get answers for themselves. Upon arrival they inform the mother
superior that they are there to inquire about Quentin Costa. They are told that he was
once an orphan at their establishment along with his sister, but that he had a successful
practice overseas. When they inform her that he is dead, and that his sister had died as
well, she is saddened and shares with them Quentin’s last Christmas card from the
previous year. Inside of the card was a recent photograph of Quentin with his sister, Kit
McGraw. The surgeons realize that they have been duped and so have the Miami police department. Sean and Christian simply stare at each other in amazement.

The last scene we have of Quentin and his sister is the two of them lounging poolside in Malaga, Spain. They are congratulating themselves on their latest job and are taking a much-needed vacation. When Kit pays too much attention to the waiter, Quentin gives her a warning. “Careful, sis. You remember what I had to do to you the last time you got too involved with a man. I spent too much time on your face to carve it up again” (Murphy, December 2005, Nip/Tuck).

Quentin is still upset that Kit had to reveal so much of their past to the plastic surgeons. He feels exposed. She tells him that she had to so that they would understand that he wasn’t a lunatic but a just man who was trying to help people. During their debate a beautiful woman in a bikini walks past smiling at Quentin. Kit remarks that her only birth defect was being born rich and she still had plenty of cosmetic surgery done. Quentin remarks that his work is never done. He gets up and gestures for his sister to follow as they approach the unsuspecting female.

The same dinner scene that ends each season of Nip/Tuck immediately follows the scene of brother and sister approaching their next target. With the season’s monster safely out of Miami, the family is able to enjoy a nice meal without fear of the monster jumping out to harm them.

Quentin operated from a rule-governed sense of morality. Though he was a completely amoral character he wholeheartedly believed that his actions were helping his victims. He believed that it was his sole responsibility to rid the world of vanity and that they only way to do that was to torture and mutilate the beautiful and privileged. He had
sympathy for those that were born with defects and who were underprivileged and he was passionate about helping them. Somewhere along the way, his passion turned into a sick obsession with hurting others. Morality is a sense of right and wrong and this paper was aimed at deciding whether the characters of the show had it. All of the characters are moral characters, but Quentin is the most complex. He understands the difference between right and wrong, but being psychotic he cannot see that the actions he takes are amoral. He believes that what he is doing is helping others.

There are moments in Quentin’s argument where his point is valid. He laughs at the insecure women that come into McNamara/Troy believing that their inner turmoil will be healed with more surgery. They insult him because of what he had to live through. He sees that there are bigger problems in the world but his answer to the problem is rape and mutilation. He calls his torture art and believes that his legacy will free everyone in the cosmetic world.

The surgery that Quentin has is needed to fix his mutilated face, but he had it done to hide the fact that he was the carver until the very end. He reveals that the cosmetic surgeries he had in his childhood to try and give him proper genitals all failed and he realized that their field was something that needed to be improved. More attention needed to be given to issues such as the one he had to grow up with and less with breast augmentations and liposuction.

Though Quentin’s acts were amoral, he was brought this state due to being fed up with his work environment. He did not believe that the work they were doing was meaningful and the only way he saw to bring attention to this was to become his alter ego, the carver. Quentin may have just been a lunatic who used his childhood and beliefs...
as an excuse for the pleasure he derived from torture, but there were definitely valid
points in the argument he presented.

Discussion of the Characters of *Nip/Tuck*

All nine characters possess their own unique form of morality that fits into the
superficial Miami world they have been written for. The rule-governed group of
characters includes Sean, Kimber, Liz, Escobar, and Quentin. It is interesting to note that
all of these characters consider themselves loners and tend to put the weight of the world
on their shoulders. All in their own way are responsible for the survival of the world that
they live. Sean is the talented surgeon that is the backbone of the McNamara/Troy
practice, and his greatest fear is that a misstep on his part can ruin everything. Kimber is
a loner who only believes in the power of her beauty and uses her greatest asset to
achieve all of her goals. Liz considers herself a loner in a sea of beautiful people, and she
holds her faith close to make decisions that will keep her safe and taken care of. Escobar
is the head of a drug cartel and he sees himself as responsible for keeping his business of
crime together as to afford him the lifestyle he believes he deserves. Quentin is a
sociopath killer that believes his crimes are a social response to the world’s
preoccupation with beauty.

The sensibility-guided characters include Christian, Julia, Matt, and Ava. It is
interesting to note that the three people closest to Sean fall into this latter group. Sean
operates from a rule-governed sense of morality, meaning he constantly has the weight of
the world on his shoulders. He believes that he is directly responsible for solving his
family and friend’s problems. Though Julia, Matt, and Christian have all complained
about how he meddles, they all operate from a sensibility-guided moral standpoint. Though they all want to be independent, they look at their problems as a group issue. Christian measures his life by how he stands up to Sean, and any shortcomings or problems with Sean equate problems in his own life. Julia is similar to Christian in that the pain and misery, as well as the comforts of life revolve around Sean. Matt is a minor and his life decisions for the most part revolve around what his parents tell him to do. His moral decisions are always based on what the outcome with his parents will be. Ava was a life coach and when life happens she believes it is something that has happened to the entire group. For everything negative that has happened to her, she holds another individual responsible as the catalyst. The four sensibility-guided characters place their fate in the hands of others.

The characters and their moral struggles create a world that is uniquely *Nip/Tuck*. The surgeries that they underwent were all elective, but they were effective for the progress of their storylines. Everyone has reasons for why they want to change themselves physically, the analysis has shown that for every basic cosmetic procedure, there are a million different reasons for why someone would want it done.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I have stated before in this paper that I believe this show is about character development and morality. I stand by that argument and I believe the breakdown of the main characters on the show suggest that *Nip/Tuck* goes beyond surgery, asking questions about each individual’s personal demons and beliefs. Every good television drama tries for this, but with *Nip/Tuck* they are more honest about the lies they tell. Though the patients are not privy to the facts at all times, the audience is always aware that the surgeries during every episode are unnecessary and are simply to mask a deeper issue. This is fascinating in itself, but what makes for great television is how far the patients are willing to delude themselves into believing that the surgeries make a difference. The audience is further pulled into the show by how much the doctors delude themselves into believing that what they do changes people for the better every time. The world created on *Nip/Tuck* is based on lies and fantasy, and the surgeons are made gods and the creators by their patients.

Discussion of Results

The typology of character signs outlined by Butler (2002) guided the collection of data for each character. The first character sign used for analysis was appearance. The surgeons need their appearance as a reflection of their business. The reconstructing of
Sean’s face was effective for the business. Though it was a superficial wound that did not sever a muscle, he could not successfully run a practice with a face that was a constant reminder of imperfection and the “carver”. Christian resetting his nose was elective, but it was effective in bringing Sean and he closer together again. Christian used his broken nose as a way to bond them as partners after they had drifted apart during the second season. Julia’s broken face was elective as well, but the pills and alcohol binge that made her face look that way was a problem that needed to be addressed. Her broken face was the wake-up call she needed to straighten out her act. Matt’s self-circumcision was elective and it worked as an example of how far adolescents will go for acceptance.

Every surgical enhancement Kimber has had on the show has been elective and unnecessary. She is a beautiful woman with a void in her life that she tries to fill with surgery. She is the epitome of the Nip/Tuck patient. Liz’s abortion was effective for her own life, but it did raise questions about her own struggles with beauty and fitting in. Escobar and Ava both had surgeries to hide their true identities. They were elective procedures, but they were effective for hiding who they truly were. Quentin reconstructive surgery on the show was elective, and the scar was self-inflicted for the purpose of hiding the fact that he was the “carver”. Though he fit the criteria of beauty on the show, his lack of genitalia was the motivation behind his anger and resentment. All nine characters had surgeries that were elective, but that were important to their way of life. Appearance was the main reason for their decisions to have the surgery.

The next character sign used to analyze the characters was objective correlative. What objects did the characters possess that helped to define them? The McNamara family, including Sean, Julia, and Matt had the possessions that make up an upper-middle
class family. They are the 21st century’s answer to the Cleavers. Sean drives a modest mid-size vehicle to his practice, Julia has the friends and social life of what one would believe is a typical housewife, and Matt is the angry teenager with a guitar to express his turmoil. Christian has the possessions of the stereotypical casa nova. He has the fast car, the expensive bachelor pad overlooking the ocean, and the gorgeous girlfriends. He surrounds himself with objects of success and power as a way of shutting others out.

Kimber’s assets were always the possessions of her current partner. She is written as a woman that enjoys the gifts showered upon her by admirers. Liz is singled out as the unattractive, yet smart character and her modest way of living supports the claim. She is not extravagant like Christian and she does not need to support a family household like Sean. We never see her place of residence, but we imagine an average sized apartment with not too many frills. Escobar was the richest character on Nip/Tuck. He had everything everyone else did, plus more. He was the most extreme character on the show and his wealth proved it. Ava was an extravagant character with nice things that came to represent a want to be accepted as someone she had created, but was not necessarily born.

Quentin had all of the possessions that Sean and Christian did, but he loathed everything. Though the last time we see him he’s laying poolside in Spain, the anger he carries within does not allow him to enjoy the things around him for a moment.

The verbal dialogue used by the characters was their form of communication. In each episode, the verbal dialogue was exemplified by their arguments. Sean doesn’t at first want to have surgery and he argues with Julia and Christian over keeping the “carver’s” victims as their clients. Christian has to convince Sean that he is the right surgeon to reset his nose. Sean and Christian chastise Julia for getting drunk and falling...
through a plate-glass window. Matt has to answer to his parents for trying to perform surgery on himself without talking to them about it more. Kimber has to convince Sean and Christian that reconstructing her look-alike doll is a good business investment. Liz has a cathartic fight with Christian over why she chose to have an abortion. Escobar, Ava, and Quentin all have their confrontation with the doctors when they are revealed as the bad guy for their respective season. Anger is a strong emotion that is expressed in the verbal dialogue for each character in their episode. If beauty is the main characteristic of their appearance and objective correlative, anger at having it disrupted or changed is the main emotion expressed in their dialogue.

The last character sign used for analysis was action. The action that each character took in their episode was to have the surgery performed. Their action showed that they were willing to go through a grueling, medically unnecessary procedure to better their appearance. Though there were several motives behind their surgery other than appearance, it is the first factor that becomes apparent. Every excuse can be made for why an action was taken towards surgery, but in the end, the biggest motivation was appearance. Appearance is Nip/Tuck and it shapes all of the decisions made by the characters.

Determining what moral standpoint each character came from was clear-cut once the data for each character had been collected. Krijnen and Meijer (2003) argued that men leaned more towards rule-governed and women leaned more towards sensibility-guided. After evaluating the nine characters of Nip/Tuck, Krijnen and Meijer made this assumption because most men tended to be the heads of family or solitary figures, while women tend to see themselves as part of a group. Sean, Escobar, and Quentin were rule-
governed. They fit the profile of men who are the heads of their little worlds and use their own set of principles to decide what the next move will be. Liz and Kimber were also rule-governed characters. Though they are women, they are independent and their survival is in their own hands. Though Kimber has admirers and Liz has her co-workers, at the end of the day they can only count on themselves. Everyone in Sean’s immediate family, Julia, Matt, and Christian were sensibility-guided. This is due to all three of them being dependent on Sean for the answers. In each of their episodes, Sean was their stability and the person that helped make the decisions with them. Ava is also sensibility-guided and sees herself as part of the group, though still an outcast. She is the only transsexual character analyzed and her character possessed both qualities of the two moral standpoints, but she identified more with female characteristics and the sensibility-guided standpoint. The characters were all moral in their own way and their surgeries were about appearance, but to each character it symbolized something deeper that they hoped the surgery would somehow fix or hopefully mask.

Something that became apparent during the course of this research was that every character on the show is attached to Sean. He is the lifeline of the show and every life experience and decision made by the characters is affected by his life decisions. The struggles with a sense of morality for all of the characters can all be extensions of his own character. He is definitely an honest and just man. The summary of the show is simply a plastic surgeon with strong moral convictions and his day-to-day life. The show would probably not be as attractive with that type of marketing, but it cannot be denied that this show revolves around Sean and his decisions for the family and his practice. He
is at the center of everything that happens and his mood and decisions affect the path of
the show.

There were no characters that were truly good or bad. With a backdrop like
Miami and the world of plastic surgery, the writers were free to explore a variety of
avenues for their characters. Even the evil characters, such as Escobar and Quentin had
aspects about them that were good and that provided life lessons for Sean. At the end of
the day, every patient and character that walked through the doors of McNamara/Troy
provided a life lesson for Sean that was then transferred to the audience.

Conclusion

Do the four typology of character signs outlined by Butler (2002) provide enough
evidence to analyze the moral standpoint of the characters? Yes, appearance, objective
correlative, dialogue, and action creates the character. Appearance is *Nip/Tuck* and there
is no doubt that they are all good-looking people. The objective correlatives that they
surround themselves with are superficial and meant to exemplify the lifestyle they believe
to be important. The dialogue on the show exemplifies what the characters find
important. Two intelligent doctors arguing about liposuction and implants is a reflection
of society. They could use their medical degrees for several purposes, but what they find
important is money, fame, and the pursuit of beauty. The actions of the characters reflect
the same thing. The four typology of character signs greatly help in gathering evidence
for the analysis of moral standpoints.

Are the characters coming from a rule-governed moral standpoint, a sensibility-
guided moral standpoint, or both? The characters were evenly divided between the two
moral standpoints and none of the nine characters analyzed showcased both standpoints equally. The rule-governed characters all believed the world rested on their shoulders. This included Sean, Liz, Kimber, Escobar and Quentin. These five characters were solitary figures that all believed their little world depended on the decisions they made. The sensibility-guided crowd included Julia, Matt, Christian, and Ava. These four characters depend on the people around them to help shape their world. When they are in trouble, they believe their problems to be a group effort.

Analyzing the episode where each character has a medical procedure, they exemplified their particular moral standpoint. The rule-governed group had their procedures done in an effort to keep their world in order. Sean fixed the scar on his face to keep his business together. Liz had the abortion to avoid the hassles of a special needs child. Kimber had the doll made to further her career in adult entertainment. Escobar changed his face to elude the FBI. Quentin cut his own face to avoid suspicion from the police. The rule-governed characters believed their surgeries were effective in maintaining order. The sensibility-guided group had their procedures done in part due to the belief that it brought meaning to their world. After her accident, Julia felt that having Sean repair her face would lead to reconciliation. Matt believed that performing a self-circumcision would gain him acceptance from his peers. Christian believed that having Sean reset his nose would allow Sean to regain his confidence in the operating room and return to work. Ava had her operation to rid herself of the last telltale sign of her past. The sensibility-guided group believed their surgeries would help them to become part of a world they did not create, but are forced to live.
Both research questions helped in guiding the study. Both questions supported my initial argument. The surgeries are merely a fraction of the issue for each character. The medical procedures all hide a bigger issue for each character. Is the show merely about plastic surgery? No, plastic surgery is only a part of the show, but it is a part of the bigger picture, which is appearance. *Nip/Tuck* is a medical drama that has chosen to examine the issues of its characters by concentrating on medical procedures that are not life threatening or necessary.

Medicine does not hold all the answers for life, but the doctors at McNamara/Troy believe life would be easier if we were all just a little better looking. Dr. Kildare would have fired Sean and Christian for sleeping with patients. Neither surgeon would ever have enlisted in the army like Hawkeye. The lives of the doctors at *St. Elsewhere’s* and *Chicago Hope* are too hectic and they do not make nearly enough money for the hours worked. Not once have either Sean or Christian declared that they have discovered a cure for a deadly disease that has swept through Miami. The closest they have come to creating a better place was when they switched to a safer saline implant. The surgeons of *Nip/Tuck* are considered gods because they lie about the promises of beauty, not medicine.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

For future studies I would recommend studying each individual patient who comes in for an operation. Whether their operation is effective or elective it provides a life lesson for the surgeons. This analysis originally intended to analyze the patients of each season and to compare them. After viewing the three seasons, it became apparent
that analyzing all the patients would just be too large. It was easier to pull the main characters and analyze them for their own surgery. A more in-depth analysis would be a breakdown of each patient over the course of the seasons. Data would be collected on each patient using the typology signs outlined by Butler (2002) and then a moral standpoint could be determined using the work of Krijnen and Meijer (2003). The project would be long, but examining characters that appeared on just one episode as opposed to characters that span the life of the show might generate different results about how patients view their own appearance. The main characters of Nip/Tuck live in the world they work in, some of the patients they have are simply visiting. A simple way of choosing characters from the seasons to analyze using the two research questions that I did, would be to analyze the patients who fit the profile of being unattractive. All nine characters in my analysis were beautiful people. Would the same outcomes be found if the analysis were on the patients who were unattractive with hopes that a single surgery could make them look like the main characters?

The cast of Nip/Tuck survives in a world filled with lies. Medicine does not solve everything and the surgeons know this. They sell the fantasy of beauty equating happiness. This show is significant because it puts its nose in the air at medicine and breaks all the rules associated with good doctors. Marcus Welby would never have hired either Sean McNamara or Christian Troy. The plastic surgeons are not as arrogant as doctors on other shows. They do not presume to know what is wrong with you and the only promise they give is that after they change your appearance, you will walk out of their practice more happy than before, though nothing has truly changed. The problems you had when you walked into the practice you will still have when you leave. That is
something other medical dramas will not own up to. The traditional medical drama has their doctors on pedestals because they can cure diseases and fix ailments within the span of an hour-long show. The surgeons of *Nip/Tuck* are worshipped because they can suck ten pounds out of your abs and can reshape your nose to make you more attractive. The patient may die on the operating table and they may not be happy with the results of your nose job, but they will be forever grateful that the surgeons gave them the hope of unimaginable beauty and happiness. If the trend of medicine and medical dramas follow suit with *Nip/Tuck*, maybe we will all learn that we do not care about the longevity of our lives or how to improve our health. We all just want to look great while we are here.
REFERENCES


VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Sabrina Monet Alipate

Home Address:
10258 Newfane Court
Las Vegas, NV 89183

Degrees:
Bachelor of Arts, Film Studies, 2003
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Thesis Title: Effective or Elective: A Character Analysis of *Nip/Tuck*

Thesis Examination Committee:
Chairperson, Dr. Gary Larson, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Dr. Paul Traudt, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Dr. Anthony Ferri, Ph.D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Professor Francisco Menendez, M.F.A.