

Demeaning Males Across Media:
Three Recurring Themes

A Senior Project Presented to
The Faculty of the Communication Studies Department
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Arts

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Demeaning Males Across Media

Is the dominant sex in our society male or female? The answer may seem obvious and many people may choose males. But does this question still seem obvious after viewing sitcoms such as *Family Guy* where men are displayed as incompetent, childish, and lazy? We must also take other forms of media into consideration such as beer commercials or the movie Super Bad. Are men portrayed as dominant and smart in these forms of entertainment? C. Wesley Buerkle points out that these forms of media which appear to be portraying men as unintelligent are actually used to resist women's control over men (80). This resistance is displayed when men, "enjoy greater social freedoms with few restrictions" (80). Richard Rogers states that the media strives to restore, "hegemonic masculinity" (74). This promotion of "hegemonic masculinity" is associated with returning men to their "primitive masculinity," or "natural state" (287) in order to resist, "the crises in masculinity" (285).

But are these tactics really successful in promoting manliness? These attempts at embracing traditional masculinity are not always obvious and can still be perceived by viewers as men simply being incompetent and lazy. There are also other forms of media where women demean men and glorify their efforts to manipulate them. It seems unlikely that these forms of media would also be interpreted as a positive promotion of men. I will be analyzing certain forms of media that strive to resist feminization while reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. I will demonstrate how these forms of media present a negative image of men. This negative image is featured in three recurring themes that can be found in different forms of mass media.

The Crises in Masculinity vs. The Three Recurring Themes

The media analyzed in this paper serve to represent the types of media that show a resistance towards men in subordinate roles (those who are usually identified as being effeminate or emasculated) (70). This media that will be examined are also exemplary of the certain forms of mass communication that glorify men who engage in hegemonic or traditional masculinity (70). It should be noted that these types of media that portray men negatively represent only one aspect of the way men are presented in society. There are many different types of mass media that display men and women in various roles. The purpose of this paper is to create an awareness of these particular forms of mass media and what they may be communicating to society.

Simon Darnell and Brian Wilson describe the crises in masculinity as, “the notion that men are confused about the roles and identities to which they should aspire at a time when cultural definitions of manhood are ambiguous and in transition” (444). It has been proposed that one factor contributing to this confusion is the effeminization or emasculation of men (Rogers). According to Don Nilsen and Alan Nilsen, masculinity is linked to the amount of control one possesses (70). They contend that, “when control is taken away from a man he is said to be *emasculated*” (70). Nilsen and Nilsen further explain the significance of the word *emasculate* as well as the word *effeminate*. They declare that, “both [words] are considered to have negative connotations, but *emasculate* gets its negative meaning from the taking away of masculine qualities, while *effeminate* gets its negative feeling from the existence or the adding on of supposedly feminine qualities...” (69). Some of these feminizing qualities that contribute to the crises in masculinity include: “femininity, family, metrosexuality (fashion), urbanization, white collar work, middle- and upper class aesthetics...and women’s control over men...” (Rogers 296).

Thus some forms of media strive to defy “men’s subordination to women’s values and tastes” (296). Katherine Sender further expands this point when claiming that the crises in masculinity,

Requires that heterosexual men must now attend to their relationships, image, and domestic habitus; and the remaking of the straight guy as not only an improved romantic partner—the metrosexual—but a more flexible, employable worker. (131)

These qualities that Sender described above are usually considered feminine. Therefore, some forms of media have been striving to defy men’s adherence to these feminine qualities (Buerkle). For example, Buerkle argues that the resistance to effeminacy and metrosexuality has been displayed in meat advertisements. Metrosexuality is one of the facets that contribute to the crises in masculinity where men are concerned with their looks, fashion, and health (295). He reasons that “meat” symbolizes the return to the primitive male who hunts for food and is “driven” by his biological desires (79). By consuming meat men are defying feminine and metrosexual principles by not choosing healthy, low calorie food (81). But we have to question whether this “resistance” is truly effective and realistic. Burger King displays the message that men should not have to abide by metrosexual principles but it still displays men as reckless fools. As Rogers points out, this is conveyed when men are shown striving for a return to “the wild” where men can behave in an “uncivilized” and “untamed” manner (287). But this tactic also ridicules men by over exaggerating unruly behaviors and actions.

In this paper, I am going to use ideological criticism to examine how the media utilizes three recurring themes that ridicule and demean men. Because these themes are present, they undermine the media’s attempt to uphold traditional masculinity. James Gentry and Robert

Harrison note that by promoting hegemonic masculinity the media creates harmful effects on men. They explain that these forms of media negatively effect men because it

Narrows their options, forces them into confined roles, dampens their emotions, inhibits their relationships with other men, precludes intimacy with children, limits their social consciousness, distorts their self-perception, and dooms them of not living up to the masculine ideal. (75)

These forms of media communicate that, “*all* men have a desire to return to ‘real manhood,’” (295 Rogers). However, this is an assumption which can be considered highly unrealistic (Gentry and Harrison). The media’s focus on a traditional masculine role is, “often inconsistent with current expectations [of men],” (Gentry and Harrison 77). The negative themes that I find recurring in the media are: 1) The irrational desire for pleasure; 2) Childlike behaviors and an inability to act in accordance with social norms; and 3) Being easily manipulated and controlled when trying to please women. These themes will be examined by evaluating the following media: movies, ads, songs, and sitcoms.

Ideological Criticism

Sonja K. Foss defines ideological criticism as when, “the critic looks beyond the surface structure of an artifact to discover the beliefs, values, and assumptions it suggests” (209). She states that an ideology becomes hegemonic when, “a dominant ideology controls what participants see as natural or obvious by establishing the norm” (210). Currently, our ideology in Western culture has always viewed men as dominant (Wood 33). Julia T. Wood explains that this is because Western culture is predominantly patriarchal which means that American, “ideology, structures, and practices were created by men” (33). Buerkle suggests that in

America, traditional masculinity is characterized by the dominance of men rejecting “subordination” and “dependence” which is often associated with being a woman (83). Thus, women have had to fight for their rights in order to counter male hegemonic dominance. As R.W. Connell points out, “it is women who are disadvantaged by the main patterns of gender inequality... This logic is so strong that gender issues have been widely regarded as ‘women’s business’” (3). Yet, it seems that the media constantly provides us with images and messages that counter this view of men being dominant. This is seen when men are shown engaging in inhumane and absurd actions and activities. Although these are attempts to show men reasserting their male privilege (Rogers); in reality, these forms of media only present men as undesirable members of society.

But what are the sources that trigger this concern associated with an increasingly effeminate and emasculated man? According to Hanna Rosin, women are no longer subordinate to men in the workforce and this seems to reflect an instability amongst men not only at work but also at home (Rogers 287). Thus, men feel as though they are left powerless when trying to conform to a world that has become increasingly favorable to feminine qualities (287). Rosin notes that, “earlier this year, women became the majority of the workforce for the first time in U. S. history” (60). She continues, “most managers are now women too” (60). Rosin’s article ties in with the concept of feminization when claiming, “The attributes that are most valuable today—social intelligence, open communication, the ability to sit still and focus—are, at a minimum, not predominately male” (65). This point is emphasized when she describes a current program offered at Columbia Business School that, “teaches sensitive leadership and social intelligence, including better reading of facial expressions and body language” (65). These qualities are often affiliated with “feminine speech” where language is used to, “foster

connections, support, closeness, and understanding” (Wood 128). Research has also shown that women are more adept at interpreting nonverbal behaviors (Wood 152). Therefore, feminine qualities are considered an attribute in the business world by being sensitive towards others (Rosin).

As Buerkle notes, metrosexuality and femininity are “blurring” our perception of masculine and feminine characteristics (78). Thus, the media gives men a chance to resort to primitive masculinity which serves as a release from their civilized obligations (Rogers 286). This also simplifies matters by creating, “ideals of what is desirable in women and men” (Wood 257). However, Gentry and Harrison state that these traditional ideals are becoming more unrealistic as, “masculine roles in our society are changing rapidly” (74). And according to Rosin, it also seems that women’s roles in society are changing as well.

Theme #1: The Desire for Pleasure

Part of this effort to return men to their natural tendencies is when they are shown defying their obligations and striving for their pleasures. Buerkle explains that this idea originated from anti-effeminacy when, “men act on natural inclination...rather than out of concern for social prescription” (16). This leads me to uncover the first theme that is prevalent in media: that men’s desires for pleasures causes them to be irrational. I find this particular theme present in the following media: Burger King Commercials, the program *Modern Family*, and the movie Superbad

The Desire for Burger King

The “Burger King for Breakfast” commercial shows a group of men marching and singing about the breakfast now available at Burger King. The commercial portrays men as

having Burger King's breakfast as their main priority and object of pleasure. This is displayed when men stop their obligations to join the "march" for Burger King's breakfast. These obligations that seem to be disregarded include work, health, and safety. Defying the obligation to work is shown when a mailman and a bus driver stop their jobs to join the march. Also, paramedics are shown sitting on the sidelines eating Burger King's breakfast while disregarding the man who is lying on a stretcher near an ambulance. The man in the stretcher who seems hurt also joins the march ignoring his injured state.

The lack of regard for health is displayed when a man who seems like he is about to exercise stops what he is doing to join the march. This suggests that the man is more concerned with obtaining Burger King's breakfast rather than improving his health by exercising. In terms of safety, towards the end of the commercial, men jump out of windows to join the group increasing their likelihood of getting injured. The group is also distracted by an attractive young woman causing them to walk directly into a garden causing some of the men to trip and fall on the ground. This suggests that Burger King's breakfast is man's escape from responsibility and that they should only pay attention to their pleasures. Men are displayed as though they are cattle who only respond to certain stimuli (pleasures). It also suggests that men will risk anything to gain access to a Burger King breakfast. Even if these risks involve threatening their health, safety, and job security.

Rogers notes that these are signs of resisting effeminacy by resorting to, "primitive masculine performances involving risk, pain..." (295). Yet, in reality, the risks men are willing to take in the commercial portray them as irrational and reckless. This irrationality is also prominent when the men easily join the group without questioning the group's motives. This portrays men as being prone to group mentality when seeking pleasure even if it risks

jeopardizing their perceived common sense and logic. The commercial also implies that men are escaping the “feminine civilized space” when they are shown exiting buildings and houses to join the march (Rogers 288). But to the viewer, this simply depicts men as incompetent and irresponsible. I will admit that this commercial is funny because of its outright absurdity but it still portrays males as ridiculous and anxious to fulfill their pleasures.

Modern Family and Conflicting Motives

The next representative media that will be critiqued is from the program, *Modern Family*. This particular episode is called “Earthquake.” This program revolves around the life of three upper middle class families. But for the sake of my analysis, I will be focusing on only one of the families. The family consists of a dad (Phil), mom (Claire), two daughters and a son. In the episode, Phil answers the door after hearing a knock to find a plumber at the doorstep. Phil becomes confused when Claire greets the plumber and has him follow her to the bathroom to fix the tub. Because Phil was not informed that there would be a plumber coming to fix the tub he declares, “Didn’t I tell you I’d fix the tub?” Claire responds, “Yes, but that was when I was pregnant with Luke.” Meaning that Claire expected Phil to never fix the tub.

When Claire shows the plumber the tub and describes what is wrong with it, Phil interrupts with what he believes the problem is. The plumber corrects him and this triggers Phil to defend his supposed credibility by saying, “Ya well I’m not a professional plumber but I have spent a huge amount of time in that tub...” Claire dismisses him before finishing his statement by closing the door. As the episode progresses, an earthquake happens causing the bathroom door to jam trapping Claire and the plumber in the bathroom. Also, a cabinet that Phil was supposed to anchor to the wall almost falls on his son, Luke. Thus, to keep Claire from finding out about not anchoring the cabinet, Phil decides to pretend to fail at trying to get the plumber

and Claire out of the bathroom. By failing to get them out, Phil buys himself time to anchor the cabinet. Throughout the episode, Phil lies to his kids and wife about why it's taking him so long to get Claire and the plumber out of the bathroom.

Because this episode takes place in a house, it suggests that Phil is trapped in the feminized household which consists of responsibility and being the compliant husband (Rogers 288). This contributes to Phil's emasculation by downsizing his male privilege. Phil fails to do the tasks that his wife asks him to do which shows a resistance toward effeminization and emasculation (288). According to Rogers being a, "handy-man" is part of fulfilling the role of man of the house" (289). Thus, doing these projects would promote Phil's manhood, so why does he show resistance when asked to complete them? It is because these "manly tasks" are no longer "manly" when his wife asks him to complete them (289). Traditional masculinity is associated with not being subordinate to others (Buerkle 83). If Phil were to do the tasks asked of him, he would be seen as subordinate to his wife. But when his wife hires another man to complete the tasks, Phil's manhood becomes threatened. Elizabeth Hatfield states that this type of media presents a, "grapple with the need to fulfill traditional 'feminine' tasks around the home while preserving masculinity" (527).

In the show, the audience is encouraged to view the plumber as more competent than Phil. The plumber is seen as more rational because he is hired to take on the tasks associated with traditional manhood (Rogers). This introduces the white-collar versus blue-collar dichotomy where, "white collar [jobs] challenge existing definitions of masculinity" (Rogers 289). When Phil tries to challenge the plumber his justifications are illogical, portraying Phil as silly and foolish. This promotes the blue-collar worker by displaying a, "rejection of bourgeois respectability" (295). It also displays the emasculate man as inadequate (Nilsen and Nilsen).

Phil is displayed as trying to satisfy the conflicting motives that are triggered by the feminized world. Phil wants to satisfy his own pleasures of not having to do “work” but he also wants to feel like a man by being in control and pleasing his wife. But his wife manages to counter his control and resistance to do work by hiring a plumber without his consent. Phil’s manliness becomes threatened, therefore, he becomes irrational by lying to his family members in order to reassert his manhood.

The episode is trying to convey that activities associated with manliness are becoming threatened by feminization. The household tasks associated with being a masculine handyman become emasculated when Claire asks Phil to complete the tasks. Succumbing to Claire’s requests would be seen as reasonable, compliant, and sensible (Rogers 292). As Rogers notes this contrasts to, “primitive males... based on bodily strength...and a lack of moral control” (286). Primitive masculinity is often used in the media to counter feminization (281). To a certain extent, Phil resorts to primitive masculinity when he displays immorality by lying to his family. But Phil still serves his wife’s requests in order to gain the pleasure of feeling manly by maintaining his control. By anchoring the cabinet, Phil gets the satisfaction of feeling manly, defying the plumber, pleasing his wife, and preventing the possibility of having to complete another task in the future. But in order to gain these pleasures, Phil is still portrayed as irrational when he lies to his family and does not take the initiative to get his wife and the plumber out of the bathroom.

Towards the end of the episode, the plumber gets Claire and himself out of the bathroom. Phil also successfully lies to his wife and declares how great it is that the cabinet is anchored properly to the wall. Claire praises Phil for being such a great responsible husband. The show conveys that men must resort to the primitive masculine trait of lying or being immoral in order

to satisfy the demands associated with the feminized household (Rogers 286). It shows that men are in conflict when trying to achieve their pleasures and maintain their “social privilege” associated with masculinity (Buerkle 83). This conflict is heightened when men are also trying to conform to the demands of a feminized society (Buerkle). By lying and being irrational, men can counter their conflicting turmoil with the feminized world and achieve their pleasures of feeling in control, enjoying leisure time, and pleasing their wives.

Superbad: Women and Consumerism

This tendency to become irrational when pursuing one’s pleasures is also displayed in the movie Superbad. The movie displays two pleasures associated with maintaining traditional masculinity: the approval of women and the defiance of consumerism (Rogers). The movie follows three male social outcasts in their pursuits to obtain alcohol for a party. The movie suggests that obtaining alcohol will grant the boys with the approval of women. This is displayed when Seth (the main character) reasons that because the girl he likes asked him to buy alcohol for her party, she is communicating that she approves of his male prowess. Even when Seth’s friend (Evan) questions this apparent illogicality by asking, “did you ever maybe think she’s using you to get her alcohol?” Seth dismisses him by saying, “she has an older brother and she could have asked him but she asked me...” Evan seems unconvinced by Seth’s reasoning but as the movie progresses Evan also becomes victimized by this irrational thinking when he agrees to the request made by a girl to buy her alcohol. In this movie, women become the main objects of desire and pleasure yet they are also the controlling force that pressures the boys to obtain alcohol. Thus in order to obtain alcohol and the pleasure of gaining approval, the male characters become irrational by participating in the risk of using a fake ID to obtain alcoholic beverages.

But this one risk leads to a multitude of risks resulting in the characters to engage in a journey to obtain alcohol and pursue their pleasures.

Buerkle notes that alcohol is often used as a “dare” in order for men to “prove their manhood” (89). Because their efforts to get alcohol turn into a full-fledged adventure, Lesley Speed reasons that this serves to, “reinforce masculine myths of adventure” (830). However, this adventure is still contained within an urbanized setting suggesting that the boys are still being manipulated by “consumerism” which is often associated with “feminizing forces” (Rogers 288). Later in the movie, Fogell (the boy who had the fake ID and was given the task to obtain alcohol) befriends two cops. The cops and Fogell are shown displaying reckless behavior by drunk driving and going through red lights between intersections. They then park in a parking lot and end up crashing the cop car into a light pole. Near the end of the scene they also cover the cop car with alcohol and set it on fire. When setting the car on fire one of the cops yells, “we won!”

The destruction of the parking lot and the cop car shows defiance towards effeminacy (Rogers). The parking lot is a representation of consumerism and the cop car symbolizes the structure needed to maintain the feminist “civilizing” and “moralizing” principles (Rogers). The cops along with Fogell are shown defying these principles by destroying and creating damage to both the parking lot and the cop car. As Rogers notes these “violent performances” serve to “restore hegemonic masculinity” (288). The fact that one of the cops exclaims, “we won!” after starting the car on fire shows that the cops as well as Fogell succeeded in defying feminization.

Although this movie strives to defy feminization, it still leaves men portrayed as irrational by defying “civilized masculinity” (288). Rogers explains that civilized masculinity, “is based on self mastery and intellectual capacity” (286). The boys strive to obtain alcohol to pursue the pleasure of obtaining the women they desire. This shows their willingness to engage

in risks by buying alcohol even though they are not at the proper drinking age. Darnell and Wilson declare that these risks are part of an attempt to engage in “hypermasculinity” which is often characterized by violence, reckless behavior, and “an unwillingness to admit vulnerability” (446). Fogell, Evan, and Seth all strive to promote their masculinity by trying to obtain alcohol, however, they also disregard their obligations of being safe which results in them getting into dangerous situations. They are also portrayed as irrational in assuming they will be rewarded with sex by obtaining alcohol.

The policemen promote their masculinity by defying their humane obligations of protecting the community. Rather, they are portrayed as the “criminals” by destroying government property. The cops could easily lose their jobs by engaging in these reckless acts, nonetheless, this does not limit their willingness to engage in hypermasculinity and defy the “taming of masculinity,” consumerism, and civilized masculinity (Rogers 292). In the end of the movie, the boys do succeed in obtaining a relationship with the girls they like showing that the irrationality and risks led them in obtaining their pleasure and objects of desire.

Theme # 2: Defying Social Norms

When the media displays men as being irrational this can also portray men as distancing themselves from societies social norms. Thus, this leads me in describing the second theme of the media exhibiting men as childlike and unable to act in accordance to social norms. The following types of media strongly promote this image of men: Bud Light commercials and the program *Family Guy*.

Real Men of “Genius”

The Bud Light commercial, “Real Men of Genius” glorifies the failure of men to comply with social norms. The specific commercial pokes fun at the men who do not know how to dance well. The commercial starts with the narrator saying, “Today we salute you Mister really, really bad dancer...” The commercial then shows a man on a dance floor doing outrageous dance moves. The man is also shown alienated on the dance floor displaying his inability to conform to a socially acceptable way of dancing. The narrator ridicules the man by saying, “your either dancing or you have fleas.” Yet, despite the man’s ill attempts at dancing, the commercial never shows him being discouraged or insecure by his dance moves. In fact, he is shown constantly dancing and never hesitating to stop. The man is displayed as confident and happy and there is not one time that the commercial displays the man as doubtful of his dance moves.

According to Doug Risner, dancing is mainly considered a feminine activity in Western culture (141). Thus this commercial is humorous because it pokes fun at a man unable to keep up with the standards of “good” dancing. But despite his inadequacy in keeping up with feminized principles, he is still shown enjoying himself with a carefree attitude. The fact that the man accepts his socially unacceptable actions promotes the idea that men are better off being proud of their failures to fulfill feminine standards.

Near the end of the commercial the narrator states, “so crack open a nice cold Bud Light Mr. Happy Feet because you really put the oogie in the boogie...” The socially unacceptable man is unable to conform to societal norms but he is still rewarded with a Bud Light. As Darnell and Wilson claim this can be a way to “express (hyper) manhood in an environment free from guilt or social restraint” (451). The dancing man shown in the commercial seems to have created his own reality by not acknowledging his surroundings and only focusing on his socially

unacceptable dance moves. Because he does not pay attention to the reactions of those surrounding him, he does not feel guilty or restrained by social standards. He is unaware of social standards, therefore, he is free from feminization.

When viewing this commercial, the dancing man is depicted as childlike, naïve, and detached from his surroundings. The man is unaware of people judging him, he also does not feel the need to self-monitor himself, and adapt to his surroundings. The man is portrayed as naïve by assuming that his dance moves are socially acceptable. Because he bases his decisions and actions off of assumptions he is seen as detached from his surroundings. He is also never seen with a woman suggesting that relationships and women are not a priority. The man is perfectly happy defying norms along with being “woman-free” and not having to succumb to woman’s standards. The commercial ironically labels this socially unacceptable man as one of the “real men of genius” implying that his actions are glorified but also ridiculed. The man is not really a genius when it comes to wooing women yet he is still content and happy with defying feminine standards. Thus, despite being ridiculed and having a lack of acceptance by women, he is still rewarded with the token of manhood: a Bud Light.

Resisting Social Conventions

Family Guy also depicts men as socially immature and unethical. The specific episode I chose to analyze is called “Welcome Back Carter.” The episode first starts in the setting of an upper class neighborhood where Lois’s mother’s house is located. Lois (Peter’s wife) is then shown talking with her mother in the living room. When Peter enters the room he interrupts the conversation with asking Lois’s mother an irrelevant question concerning whether or not he could have brought an owl to her house. Near the end of the scene, Peter and Lois bicker when Peter exclaims that he’s bored and wants to go home.

Peter: Lois you said there would be other men my own age here and there aren't and I'm bored!

Lois: Peter why don't you just grab a book off the shelf and be quiet?

Peter: No! Books are jerks!

Lois: What about a picture book?

Peter: Only if it has a mirror on the end of it that says, 'how about you?'"

The scene displays Peter as, "caged in a living room" and "trapped in a feminine, upper-class environment," (Rogers 288). Wanting to leave his mother-in-law's house exhibits his want to escape from the, "civilizing and moralizing influences that are blamed for men's emasculation" (Rogers 292). Peter does not feel the need to listen to the conversation between his wife and his mother-in-law showing his masculine prowess by disregarding female conversation altogether. When Peter does participate in the conversation he dominates it by centering the topic on himself and his needs. This suggests that Peter is striving to assert his male privilege (Rogers). This is shown in Peter's attempts to return to primitive, hypermasculinity by being, "socially dysfunctional" in a female-dominated space (Darnell and Wilson 458). Peter is also shown wanting to be amongst other males his own age rather than his wife and mother-in-law. As Frank Pittman mentions in his article

Men may or may not need other men for stimulation, but all men need other men for acceptance. It is the acceptance of the other guys, the silent, unquestioning, unchallenged acceptance of shared masculinity that keeps us grounded, that keeps us sane (547).

To bear the turmoil of the feminized household, Peter feels that he needs the presence of other men to feel relaxed and secure.

The scene's dialogue presents Peter as defying social norms by interrupting conversations and bringing up irrelevant topics. Peter is also displayed as defying these norms by acting childlike. When Peter complains about wanting to go home he is exhibiting a childish behavior by implying that he is unable to sit still, be quiet, and engage in intelligent conversation. His wife becomes transformed into a motherly figure when trying to figure out a way for Peter to entertain himself. When given the opportunity to read, Peter dismisses reading as boring unless it is a picture book. Peter's intellect becomes simplified when he is unable to engage in intelligent conversation and can only be entertained by visual stimuli. Peter is also seen as blatantly degrading women by being upset about there being no men present at his mother-in-laws house. This shows that Peter is desensitized to the feelings of others by focusing on his own needs and disregarding the needs of others. The episode portrays Peter as resisting female dominance and feminization, however, he is displayed as socially unconventional in the process.

Theme # 3: Manipulated Men

Resisting emasculation has involved men engaging in hypermasculine practices in the media. Peter Tragos notes that when this occurs, "women are often reduced to sexual ornaments" in order to counter the, "new conceptions of women as strong and independent" (542). Tragos continues to explain that when women are perceived as "strong and independent" this forces men to, "renegotiate their own identities" (542) The media often pairs women's "strong and independent" persona with, "traditional beauty and sexuality traits" (542). Tragos reasons that this is because, "there has not been a fundamental shift in masculine hegemony" (542). Therefore, resorting to traditional masculinity in the media is harmful for both women and men (Wood). These types of media are objectifying women (Tragos) and displaying men as easily

manipulated. It can be argued that these forms of media are a means to promote masculinity in two ways: By displaying sexualized women as mean and conniving and by displaying women as negative contributors to the crises in masculinity (Rogers 296). But in reality, this interpretation of women also presents men as easily manipulated.

In some forms of media, women are shown as powerful and beautiful but they are also displayed as deceitful and unkind. This promotes masculine hegemony by suggesting that in order for women to be strong and independent, they must be beautiful (Wood) and they must be devious in the process of getting what they want. This leads me in discussing the third theme: That men are portrayed as easily manipulated when trying to please women. I found this theme prevalent in the following media: The songs: “Maneater” by Nelly Furtado, “Bossy” by Kelis, along with the program *Modern Family*.

The Bossy Maneater

Both of the songs are sung by women and attempt to glamorize their efforts to manipulate men. The chorus of Maneater is extremely explicit in its attempts to celebrate women’s manipulation of men: “Maneater, make you work hard / Make you spend hard / Make you want all, of her love / She's a maneater / make you buy cars...” The song ends with the lyrics, “you wish you never ever met her at all!”

“Bossy” is also very similar in glorifying women’s attempts at controlling men. This was displayed in the following lyrics: “Cuz I'm a boss! / And that's right, I'm the one that's tattooed on his arm / Got the bar popping that you can't afford...” As the song continues a male soloist starts rapping, “It's 'bout time that she get with me / Can't stop staring, she's fine and she's pretty..” the rapper ends with the lines, “You say how much it cost me? / About a million dollars playa, she's bossy!”

Both of the songs can serve to defy feminization by characterizing women as aggressive and controlling. Women's strong, independent image becomes countered by their participation in immoral acts. These immoral acts involve manipulating and controlling men which displays, "women's negative role in the contemporary crisis in masculinity," (Rogers 296). A lot of this manipulation is characterized by women's desires to obtain material goods (Rogers). This is shown in the line that says, "make you spend hard," along with the rappers expression, "About a million dollars playa, she's bossy!" Both of these lines mention the amount that men spend on the woman being sung about.

The lines, "make you want all of her love," and, "...she's fine and she's pretty," suggest that, "women are controlling men through their manly desires" (296). This is shown when the men in the songs spend money in order to obtain sexual relations with the woman they desire (296). The line in Bossy, "And that's right, I'm the one that's tattooed on his arm..." suggests, "men's enslavement by women," (296). The tattoo seems to symbolize woman's way of claiming the man as her own possession (296). To a certain extent, men are portrayed as subordinate to women by succumbing to women's desires even if it costs them emotional or financial turmoil. Hence the lines, "you wish you never ever met her a all!" along with, "Got the bar popping that you can't afford..." Suggest that the men are being victimized by financial and emotional burdens as a result of trying to please women. This burden seems to be eternal as the women's requests and desires remain constant and endless throughout the songs. However, the only way women succeed in this manipulation is by being beautiful and sexualized.

Cage the Wife

The subservient manner in which men are being portrayed is also exhibited in the same *Modern Family* episode that I analyzed earlier in this paper. As I discussed before, the episode,

“Earthquake,” involves Phil’s wife getting stuck in a bathroom. Rather than getting Claire out of the bathroom in a timely manner, Phil pretends that he cannot get Claire out of the bathroom. This buys Phil time to anchor the cabinet to the wall that fell during the earthquake. Because Clair asked Phil to anchor the cabinet in the past, Phil feels pressured to fulfill the task of anchoring the cabinet out of fear that his wife will chastise him.

Valerie A. Riemers declares that this “fearful respect of the wife,” by the husband serves to represent the “contemporary shift of power” to the wife in the family household (114). As Darnell and Wilson notes this, “laments the loss of the confident, assertive, powerful, hypermasculine man in contemporary North American society” (446). Keeping Claire stuck in the bathroom seems to symbolize caging the control women assert on men. This control that women seem to possess coincides with the “crises in masculinity,” (Rogers 296). Karen Ashcraft and Lisa Flores argue that this type of media, “mourns the imminent collapse of corporate man, over-civilized and emasculated by allied obligations of work and women” (2).

The episode serves as an awareness of women’s negative role in the crises in masculinity. However, it also portrays men as cowardly and pathetic when being controlled by women. Phil is not seen as an independent, responsible, individual but rather as a submissive and fearful subordinate. Thus Phil feels the need to keep his wife in the bathroom to prevent her from criticizing him for his lack of responsibility. The program displays women as the controlling force in men’s lives.

The Media’s Failure

All of the media analyzed in this paper promoted a resurgence of traditional or primitive masculinity. The first two themes discussed achieved this by using hypermasculinity and

primitive masculinity to promote the differences between feminine and male gender roles (Buerkle 85). Promoting differences between gender roles serves to defy the blurring of these roles as a result of feminization. As Darnell and Wilson note, “these hypermasculine pursuits are presumed to aid men in their attempts to recuperate a clearly defined sense of what it means to be a man” (445). These gender differences that served to promote masculinity were displayed in the following ways: engaging in high-risk activities, defying social standards as determined by feminine principles or sensibilities, and pursuing one’s pleasures despite possible consequences (Darnell and Wilson). The third theme is associated with deeming women as controlling and manipulative in order to create an awareness of their negative role in the crises in masculinity. This was often displayed when men were shown trying to please women when completing household tasks and buying material items. This theme reveals men as feeling emotional distress from being “trapped” in the standards of feminization. As Buerkle states, men feel “robbed from their social privilege” as a result of the crises in masculinity.

However, this resistance of feminization and the rise of independent and strong women seems to depict men as “uncomplicated” and foolish when trying to prove their manhood (Buerkle 90). This is often shown when men are displayed as driven by their pleasures as well as being inept in their social interactions (Rogers 292). Men are also exhibited as mindless and cowardly when succumbing to every request made by the woman they wish to have sex with. Although the media strives to promote men, it also fosters a negative interpretation of men and women. To a certain extent the media currently fails in promoting a socially healthy and flexible society.

Tragos states that, “...masculinity is changed. American culture is undergoing a cultural shift in gender roles and expectations” (551). Darnell and Wilson support this notion by pointing

out that male hegemony has become “destabilized” as a result of this change and blurring of gender roles (445). Thus the media has been putting in an effort to maintain the traditional ideology of male domination (Buerkle 78). However, these attempts at promoting manhood seem to be disadvantageous by demeaning men and, “supporting a culture that is rife with systemic social problems” (446 Darnell and Wilson)

Conclusion

Michael Messner reasons that it is time to acknowledge that gender roles are subject to change (724). Messner explains that gender roles, “are constantly reconstructing themselves on shifting power relations” (724). In other words, gender roles are no longer fixed and rigid and are in a constant flux (723). Judith Butler argues that gender is a performance and is not biologically innate. Rather, we perform our gender in order to coincide with cultural expectations (Butler). Elizabeth Hatfield states that, “to maintain power, this gendered self adapts its performance as cultures shift over time...” (527). This is apparent with the rise of the metrosexual man along with the rise of the strong and independent woman (Tragos 542). The “traditional” definitions of gender roles seem to no longer be as prevalent and permanent as compared to the past (Reimers 117).

Adhering to the media’s cultural narratives of gender roles is detrimental in that it distorts our perceptions of genders by utilizing stereotypes (Darnell and Wilson 446). Perhaps it is time for there to be an emphasis on reconsidering the media portrayals of men as well as women. Rather than promoting genders as two fixed polar opposites, it would probably be more constructive to focus on gender as dynamic and flexible (Wood). By doing this, an “equal but

different” mentality between males and females might become a more desirable and suitable option (Wood).

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