

HOMOPHOBIA, HUMOR AND MALE RAPE: FAMILY GUY'S ROLE  
IN THE MODERN CONSTRUCTION OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

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### Introduction

“All right, here’s a little tune inspired by one of the great legends of the Old West.

(Country Western music begins)

Well, there once were two cowboys all alone out on the trail

And they discovered they could sleep with another male

Now they’re having gay sex

Cowboy gay sex

Sodomy-ee

Come on, everybody!

Sodomy-ee

Sodomy-ee

Sodomy.”

-Peter Griffin\*

Above is a quote from one of *Family Guy*’s main characters Peter Griffin. As the above quote illustrates through the mockery of the 2005 film *Brokeback Mountain*, *Family Guy* does not shy away from the use of controversial, homophobic humor. The show’s use of humor, despite its derogatory nature, problematically shields its ideological influence over its viewers. The allure of popular culture is that it is viewed as mere entertainment, a much-needed break from reality. Theoretical analyses of media have indicated that when an individual engages in watching television in this way, the notion of education is far from his or her mind, initiating a vulnerable state that is susceptible to exploitation by the media. Watching images on television elicits pleasure from the audience (Rose, 2001), which is often successful in subduing the audience’s critical evaluation of what images are being portrayed. The view of television as passive thus becomes dangerous due to the ability for ideologies to be reinforced throughout the mass media while the visual consumer remains oblivious to

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\* Borstein, A. (Writer), & Moncrief, Z. (Director). (2007). It takes a village idiot, and I married one [Television series episode]. In S. MacFarlane (Producer), *Family Guy*. Los Angeles, CA: Fox Studios.

such media influence. However, the use of the word “often” to describe passive viewers is important because it correctly implies that although most viewers do not evaluate what they see, a minority of viewers actively interpret what they see represented on television. Active media consumers emerge due to the complexity inherent in individual identity, and as a response to the way that television programming exposes societal inequalities, both of which prompt them to social actions and to resist the dominant ideologies perpetuated by the media (Fiske, 1987).

Gender has surfaced as a prominent ideology in need of constant reinforcement. The focus on gender roles in the media developed as a response to shifting gender roles for both men and women. Although the role of women is changing, it is the changing role of men that is fueling such media backlash. Men have been traditionally dominant, and their role was clearly defined as the head-of-household, breadwinner and sole source of authority. In modern times this role is becoming increasingly ambiguous as homosexuality is entering the mainstream, and women are partaking in occupations and traits that were previously deemed masculine. The most notable response to this gender role ambiguity is the utilization of homophobia. Homophobia is employed by men as a way to display their hegemonic masculinity, the ideal masculinity, based on the core belief that to be masculine is, at its most basic level, the opposite of the feminine. Homosexual men, seeing as they deviate from this hegemonic standard, are considered feminine, which permits homophobia to be deployed as a gender-policing tool. The use of homophobia is a

masculine attempt to regain the role that hegemonic males have historically held by degrading and devaluing all that is associated with the feminine.

The recent salience of homophobia as a facet of hegemonic masculinity has not gone unnoticed by the mass media. The media exists largely to maintain the status quo and thus portrays gender both as it is, and more importantly, as how it should be (Mumford, 1987). Humor is a tactic often used by the media in an effort to shield the ideologies it is reinforcing, and the animated sitcom *Family Guy* represents a prime example of this use of humor as an ideological shield. *Family Guy* is no stranger to controversy and is notorious for pushing the boundaries of what can be shown on television. Creator Seth MacFarlane has consistently used humor to effectively deflect critiques of *Family Guy*'s content. One aspect of the show that should not yield to the excuse of humor is the problematic depiction of male-on-male rape. It is therefore the intent of this thesis to explore the humorous use of male-on-male rape in *Family Guy* as it serves to reinforce hegemonic masculinity through the utilization of homophobia.

## Methodology

When looking at any visual media, it is necessary to do so critically. Critical analysis of the media is becoming progressively more essential as society is becoming increasingly reliant on such media to convey culture. Images presented through the media are not passive, but rather have the ability to convince viewers to conform or resist, while also functioning to produce pleasure in the viewer (Rose, 2001). The pleasure the viewer receives from engaging with the visual media posits the images produced as a logical emerging area of study. Every image produced within the visual media has a specific purpose, and the social sciences are analyzing what ideologies are being perpetuated through this medium, as well as which are being ignored. Conceptions such as race, class and gender are frequently theorized as socially constructed, and images are just one method of this construction (Rose, 2001).

Just as important as attending to what is being viewed is to understand the significance of how the viewer interprets media images (Fiske, 1987; Rose, 2001). The identity compositions of individual viewers are multifaceted and complex, which permits a personalized interpretation of the images by which those who immerse themselves in the visual media are presented (Fiske, 1987). A visual consumer is thus able to both understand the material in the way that it was intended and in the way in which it effects their socially specific position. For example, a feminist viewer can understand a sexist joke in the patriarchal sense that it was intended and also as a social critic. Such a feminist critique of the mass media is methodologically rooted in standpoint theory. Standpoint theory recognizes that the privileged in society do not

understand reality in the same way that the marginalized do because they have no need to and that the marginalized must understand reality in a way that allows them to successfully navigate their world. Nancy Hartsock (1983) affirms that it is due to women's unique positioning in society that feminist claims receive their validation. Hence, women, as socially situated subjects, utilize standpoint theory in order to analyze reality in a manner that addresses issues both at an individual and societal level, as well as addressing how the two are interrelated.

By evaluating what images are produced and what is interpreted from them, social change becomes feasible. Fiske (1987) explains that images in the media are produced specifically to retain the status quo, however, through the process of realizing one's own powerlessness in the visual media, the status quo can be challenged, a prerequisite for change. Consequently, when viewers incorporate what they see on television into their own lives, social change becomes a real possibility. In other words, images in the mass media, because they are developed to appeal to a wide audience, inadvertently expose societal inequalities. The exposing of these inequalities prompts marginalized groups to engage in a subversion of the dominant ideology. Subversion of the dominant text presented within a television program creates a dialogue among the marginalized that articulates their opposition toward the dominant system. An example extended by Fiske (1987) is research conducted by Robert Hodge and David Tripp (1986), in which they discovered that Aboriginal children in Australia identified most with the lead character of *Diff'rent Strokes*, who was an adopted American Black child (as cited in Fiske, 1987, p. 70). By identifying with a

Black child in a white family, the children were able to make sense of their own powerlessness. The children's subversive reading therefore allowed them to express their own experience in a way that had the power to foster a desire to enact social change.

An area of media studies that has the potential to foster such subversive power, but has been largely ignored, is the prevalence and problematic representation of male-on-male rape. In both television and film, male-on-male rape is used in a humorous manner that invites the viewer to interpret the assault as a joke rather than as a serious issue that needs addressed. Sexual assault is overwhelmingly discussed as a women's issue, and consequently significantly less attention is devoted to male rape. Given current conceptions of masculinity that assume that a real man is able to defend himself, if a man is raped, it is viewed as an attack on his masculinity. Television audiences are aware of this notion of masculinity, and therefore when male-on-male rape is portrayed on television as humorous, it reinforces the traditional conceptions of masculinity and also endorses the ever-growing homophobia that contemporary hegemonic masculinity requires.

*Family Guy* in particular offers its viewers numerous instances of male rape presented in a humorous manner. *Family Guy* is especially pertinent to this topic of study because the show specifically targets a young male audience. In addition to targeting a young male audience, *Family Guy* is also an animated sitcom, which can be interpreted by the viewer as less informative than a television show with human actors and actresses. Alison Crawford (2009) asserts that by creating a television



program that combines “realism, the sitcom, animation, and a satirical attitude,” (para. 6) shows such as *Family Guy* are no longer considered only for children and are thus able to reach a wider audience. This tactic has been hugely successful as evidenced by the six million viewers who tune into *Family Guy* each week (Hoffman, 2012). The fact that the show reaches such a sizeable audience on a regular basis validates the need to analyze its content. In view of the fact that *Family Guy* has been airing on network television since 1999 and has been overwhelmingly successful among its young male audience, the messages it generates should not be discounted.

This work utilized a content analysis of *Family Guy* to examine the utilization of male-on-male rape as a facet of homophobia in the program. A content analysis is a methodology used to analyze “cultural texts in accordance with ‘the ideals of the quantification and natural science methodology’” (Rose, 2001, p. 54). Content analysis is used to analyze cultural texts because it is methodologically reliable and is capable of consistently analyzing the immense volume of data found in the media (Rose, 2001). Gillian Rose (2001) indicates that in addition to quantitative value, content analyses also possess a qualitative value in the way that results apply to a larger cultural context. Six seasons of *Family Guy* were selected in order to expose the pattern of homophobia and use of male rape in the series. Seasons one through three were chosen for the analysis because all three aired before *Family Guy*’s first cancellation on Fox. The other three seasons, seasons five, seven and eight, were chosen because all three contained episodes dealing with specific incidences of male-on-male rape.

A total of 104 episodes were coded to both analyze specific occurrences of male rape and to assess the underlying theme of homophobia. An episode was coded as homophobic if it contained any of the following: the use of the words “gay” or “queer” in a derogatory manner, a stereotypical representation of a homosexual male, a heterosexual male qualifying his statement that could have been construed as homosexual, a character referring to homosexuality as wrong or immoral, or blatant, demeaning jokes about homosexuals. Male rape was coded as follows: a male character was shown as being assaulted; molestation or sexual abuse was the sole content of a joke; rape was implied; or a joke made light of male rape in prison. After the content analysis was performed, the results were analyzed through a feminist lens to create an accurate representation of the frequency of male rape as well as homophobic undertones contained in the series.

In addition to performing a content analysis of the series, an extensive literature review was conducted in order to inform the reader of the significance and real world implications of the findings. Since male-on-male rape is a topic that is not often discussed, it is easily misunderstood. It was therefore central to include a literature review that informed the reader of the seriousness of male-on-male rape in modern society. The literature review also summarizes for the reader what *Family Guy* is as a television program, examines who created and produces the show and also describes the relevant characters. With this information included, the reader is able to understand the topic of male-on-male rape and homophobia as it applies specifically to *Family Guy*.

**“They only have two things in Quahog, steers and queers. I don’t see no horns on ya. What does that make you boy?”\* : Hegemonic Masculinity as the Antithesis of the Feminine**

To understand male rape and homophobia, one must first understand what masculinity means in today’s society. Scholars have defined masculinity first and foremost as being in opposition to femininity (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010; Kimmel, 2007; Martin, 2001). This is evidenced in the way in which men are supposed to be emotionless, strong and decisive, while women are supposed to be emotional, weak and passive. Michael Kimmel (2010) explains in his work *Masculinity as Homophobia* that in addition to masculinity being the opposite of femininity, it is also constantly changing, not static as is commonly thought. Thinking of masculinity in this way grants men agency that they would not otherwise have if masculinity was destined by biology. Despite assertions that masculinity is not based solely on biology, biology remains a dominant theory in supporting the superiority of men and the inferiority of women. Gerda Lerner (1986) argues that this notion has become naturalized in our culture and thus there is no need to question its legitimacy. These biological explanations have their roots in the Stone Age, where scholars have concluded that men were physically strong enough to hunt and thus become warriors, which was highly valued, while women were biologically fated for motherhood and nurturance, which was less valued. These conclusions paint a picture of a primal

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\* Chevapravatdumrong, C. (Writer), & Tang, C. (Director). (2006). Saving private brian [Television series episode]. In S. MacFarlane (Producer), *Family Guy*. Los Angeles, CA: Fox Studios.

division of labor that justifies and naturalizes the modern division of labor that continues to value male labor over female labor.

In addition to the sexual division of labor, women were also subordinated through the institution of marriage, which situated women as the property of their husbands. Consequently, women came to be viewed as commodities rather than as human beings (Lerner, 1986). This commodification of women was continued through the tradition of coverture and its remnants remain; for instance when the wife takes the husband's name in marriage. Coverture was conceptualized under Anglo-American common law and dictated a married women's identity was one with her husband's (Cott, 2011). Women were therefore more closely tied to property than personhood, as they could not own property or make their own living (Cott, 2011). There currently exists such a strong need for gender role justification because of the growing ambiguity surrounding the role of gender in modern society. Men have held patriarchal power throughout much of known history, and have no desire to give up their privilege. Due to the changing nature of society men are finding themselves forced to exert their masculinity in more innovative ways, in order to continue to lay claim to hegemonic masculinity.

Despite apparent differences in dominant masculine ideologies over time, it is pertinent to note that a dominant ideology is compulsory in order for a society to function. Masculinity is achieved through a hierarchy, and therefore, despite changes in notions of what masculinity entails, a specific form of masculinity will always dominate all others. Michael Kimmel (2007) describes two past American

masculinities to depict this ever-changing nature and how modern hegemonic masculinity emerged. The first masculinity described by Kimmel (2007) is the “Genteel Patriarch”, which was represented by a wealthy rural landowner as well as a family man, a man such as George Washington; and the second is the “Heroic Artisan”, which was represented by an urban craftsman by trade, who was economically autonomous and taught his sons through apprenticeship, as exemplified by Paul Revere. These masculinities occurred harmoniously until today’s masculinity, “marketplace manhood”, became widespread in the 1830’s. These so-called marketplace men set the new standard – white, middle class and heterosexual – to which all men would henceforth be compared. “Marketplace manhood” placed emphasis on a man’s success in the marketplace and valued work above all else, including family. This form of masculinity became what is now referred to as hegemonic masculinity.

In addition to the white, middle class, heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity there also exists a strong characterization of Black masculinity. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2005), the essence of Black masculinity comes from the body – an idea that stems directly from slavery. Collins (2005) states that there are three main components of Black masculinity, “physical strength, sexuality, and violence” (p. 153). None of these attributes place emphasis on the mind, but rather on the respect gained from the prowess of the physical body. Athletics is an area that exemplifies the sole focus on the Black male body. Black males are exploited for their athletic ability, while the public pays little to no attention to their other non-sports related

accomplishments, such as entrepreneurship. This masculinity is viewed as less threatening because Black athletes are using their bodies for the monetary benefit of whites, which allows their bodies to be admired instead of feared.

Without looking at the body and the mind of Black males, Black masculinity is often viewed as violent, deviant and animalistic. Black male bodies are therefore perceived as in constant need of discipline, a target for the rest of society. This ascribed animalistic nature of the Black male body lends itself to the assumption that Black men are causing more harm than good, and are thus in constant need of discipline, a duty largely carried out by the police. Although this notion is overwhelmingly applied to the poor and working-class, affluent Black males also fall prey to these degrading and harmful conceptions of Black masculinity. Collins (2005) asserts that in order to cover up this disproportionate discipline of Black males by the criminal justice system, society has had to find a way to glamorize the Black working-class. The solution? Gangsta rap. “Thugs” presented through gangsta rap appear to glorify the conditions that surround being a poor or working-class Black male in America. These men present themselves as violent and hyper-sexualized – both of which are glorified – and are thus able to detract from the larger societal issues that disadvantage Black citizens overall.

Despite rap’s effort to shield the public from structural inequalities, everyday encounters between Black men and the white population illustrate that conceptions of Black masculinity remain destructive. Collins (2005) explains that the persistent societal focus on Black male bodies as threatening can be seen when white women

clutch their purses when they see a Black man on the street and when Black men are disproportionately stopped by the police. The very sight of a Black male can invoke this fear, regardless of his intentions, based solely on the threat engrained in his body. White women in particular have been taught to fear Black men due to widespread, false accusations of rape that were reported as a result of the abolition of slavery. Black masculinity was thus defined during slavery, but has persisted and flourished through monolithic, stereotypical images depicted in the media.

Mass media representations of Black masculinity present Black men as being unable to be exploited by whites, which serves ideologically to conceal the reality that white males control the production of such images. These images often appear on television in a binary, either positive – the Black male is reminiscent of whiteness, or negative – embodying the aforementioned negative stereotypes surrounding Black masculinity (Bell-Jordan, 2008). The use of this binary to characterize Black masculinity not only reinforces negative stereotypes, but also disallows for diverse representation. Katrina Bell-Jordan (2008) explains that Black men who symbolize both ends of the spectrum are juxtaposed on the same television show in order to stifle variation. Robin Boylorn (2008) contends that although such narrow depictions are harmful, they have the power to invoke what bell hooks coined, the oppositional gaze. Use of this oppositional gaze encourages the marginalized to resist the racism they encounter through the media. In spite of the fact that resistance is possible, Black masculinity is still regulated and thus cannot not live up to the standards of hegemonic masculinity, no matter its representation, and consequently Black males find

themselves constantly being policed by those who fulfill more of the conventional hegemonic criteria.

Although many forms of masculinity are performed, hegemonic masculinity remains the masculine standard to which all other men are compared, regardless of their ability to achieve its standards, including whiteness. This specific masculinity is the idealistic masculinity that few men can hope to achieve (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). According to Kimmel (2007), men who are white, middle class, heterosexual, and successful represent this masculinity in full. Hegemonic masculinity does not need to be, and most often is not, acquired through force, but rather through social institutions, persuasion and culture (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). According to Robert Jensen (2007) this masculine dominance is acquired through three acts: one, force and humiliation, two, words and argument, and three, raw insults. All three, if used correctly, provide opportunities for a male to prove himself more hegemonic than his counterparts. In addition to having three main avenues of acquisition, masculinity also has three key components: the avoidance of things too closely connected to women and femininity, the struggle for supremacy in interpersonal relationships and social situations, and the repression of the emotions connected to women and femininity (Jensen, 2007). It is this hegemony that creates constant competition among men, where only one male can come out on top. This hierarchy of masculinities, although subject to change, continues to be a structure in which males are at once dominant and dominated.



Due to the fact that hegemonic masculinity is a standard that only few men can achieve, it stands to reason that other, less hegemonic, men are situated in various other positions throughout the masculine hierarchy. Bethany Coston and Michael Kimmel (2012) expand upon this concept using three prominent subordinated masculinities: disabled men, homosexual men and working class men. These men have positions of privilege in certain circumstances while experiencing inferiority in others. Although these men are aware that they lack an essence of what society dictates to be masculine, they do not passively permit themselves to be emasculated – signified by any real or perceived loss of privilege (Coston & Kimmel, 2012). Because many men place their self-worth and self-esteem on hegemony, despite its unrealistic and often unobtainable standards, those who are viewed as deficient devise various ways to compensate. Such compensations are exemplified by men who exaggerate the culturally prescribed masculine traits that they do possess, express hypermasculinity or exert power over those men, and often women, to whom they feel superior (Coston & Kimmel, 2012). In spite of a perceived fault in their masculinity, non-hegemonic men tend not to challenge cultural notions of masculinity in favor of overcompensating for any facet of masculinity that they do possess. This coping mechanism reinforces the value of traditionally masculine traits and reifies the ideological power of hegemonic masculinity.

In *Guyland* (2008) Kimmel describes four rules put forth by psychologist, Robert Brannon that guide hegemonic masculinity: one, “no sissy stuff”, two, “be a big wheel”, three, “be a sturdy oak”, and four, “give ‘em hell”. “No sissy stuff”

implies that men are never to be perceived as weak, effeminate or gay. This masculine rule reinforces the notion that hegemonic masculinity is primarily, and most importantly, in opposition to anything and everything feminine. "Being a big wheel" refers to the notion that men are to be in any and all ways successful in all that they do. This rule dictates that a male's worth is derived solely from his wealth, power and status. If a man does not possess the success that this societal rule demands, he is unable to achieve a hegemonic status. "Being a sturdy oak" denotes that a man is to be reliable in that he is able to respond quickly and appropriately to any situation, including a crisis. A man is supposed to be the anchor to which other people, including himself, can depend. The fourth and final rule, "give 'em hell", encompasses male aggression and the expectation of men to live life on the edge as risk takers. It is up to each individual male to go all out in all that he does, and he is not to care what anyone else thinks as long as he remains dominant.

These traits remain pervasive despite the fact that they are socially constructed, not biologically determined, because men internalize the normative conceptions of masculinity from the surrounding culture (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993). This implies that men do not act in a hegemonic manner instinctively, but rather in ways consistent with their beliefs. Given that beliefs strongly influence behavior, and beliefs change over time, masculinity emerges as flexible, while simultaneously enforcing a static masculinity during a particular time period. Therefore, masculinity, due to its social construction, is not resistant to change per se, but cannot succumb to rapid change.

Scholars have proven that these strict societal rules inform hegemonic masculinity and have negative effects on men (Herek, 1986; Pleck et al., 1993). For example, due to rules that regulate hegemonic masculinity, men constantly struggle with close relationships and thus experience low levels of intimacy (Pleck et al., 1993). The problems associated with intimacy occur in large part because men are forced to walk a fine line between homosexuality and heterosexuality, which is defined in large part by the criterion of “being a sturdy oak” (Kimmel, 2008). The inability to use others as resources, along with the constant stress of proving one’s masculinity to oneself and others, has produced a masculinity that is increasingly more maladaptive. Such negative aspects of hegemonic masculinity culminate in problems stemming from physical health to personal happiness to psychological adjustment (Herek, 1986). Gregory Herek (1986) asserts that masculinity’s maladaptive nature has the potential to harm the entire human race through an increased likelihood of interstate warfare. If this maladaptive masculinity were to be applied to politics, it would discourage political compromise, which would lead to greater disagreement and eventual interstate warfare in order to prove dominance. This fear of interstate warfare exists because of the volatile, underlying masculine nature of political interaction. With no room for compromise within the current political narrative, interstate war is both inevitable and feared for its potential for destruction on a grand scale.

Another negative, yet pervasive characteristic of masculinity that stems from the struggle to balance heterosexuality and homosexuality is homophobia. Heterosexual males are currently experiencing changes in gender roles faster than

males in any other era, and they therefore experience a great deal of anxiety from this progressively more ambiguous gender role. Women are beginning to expand their gender role in ways that embrace characteristics that were traditionally seen as masculine, such as being assertive, strong and independent, as well as entering into professions that have been traditionally male-dominated, including medicine and the law. Men are supposed to be at the very least in opposition to women, but as women continue to adopt roles that were traditionally defined as masculine, men are becoming confused as to what their new role in contemporary society should be. Consequently, despite the fact that men are thought to be anything but fragile, masculinity as a concept is fragile and constantly threatened. The need to continuously have one's masculinity validated has led to the increasingly salient nature of homophobia in forming the modern masculine identity (Herek, 1986). Homophobia's newfound functionality in both the identity formation and validation of modern conceptions of masculinity emerged at the onset of the gay liberation movement. In light of the fact that homosexual males are vigorously fighting against heterosexual males for the right to a masculine status, heterosexual men have begun to utilize homophobia as a form of backlash that reinforces their hegemonic dominance.

Heterosexual men look down upon homosexual men because they blatantly violate the male gender role, causing the normative masculine gender role to appear even more ambiguous. Due to changing times, men feel a relentless inadequacy in terms of meeting gender demands (Herek, 1986). Men are now being forced to share their socially prescribed gender role with women, while continually resisting adoption

of traditionally feminine traits and professions. This imbalance is not creating gender equality, but rather gender confusion, which in turn is causing men to exert their dominance through homophobia. It follows then that the more insecure a male is with his masculine identity, the more homophobic he becomes. Homophobia has hence become a recurrent avenue through which men prove to other men that they are in fact, masculine.

The inability for the majority of men to live up to strict and unyielding hegemonic standards creates unrelenting anxiety. By putting down a male that is socially less hegemonic through homophobia, heterosexual males are able to boost their own self-esteem as well as reaffirm their male identity (Herek, 1986). Three main avenues allow for homophobia to “affirm their sense of self in relation to others and increase self-esteem” (Herek, 1986, p. 572). One, engaging in homophobia is a way of preventing anxiety that results from the concern for a man’s own heterosexual masculinity; two, homophobia is used in order to boost one’s own self-esteem in conjunction with impressing important others; and three, it allows men to express a larger ideology, such as religion, that endorses strict gender roles. When men deploy homophobia in any capacity in order to wield their own masculinity, it is a performance put on for others so as to lay claim to hegemonic masculinity due to ever-increasing gender role ambiguity. Men are positively reinforced for utilizing homophobia, and thus the use homophobia in this manner increases. This increased use of homophobia encourages men to deny all that is feminine, which includes a denial of homosexual men who are generally assumed to be effeminate. Pervasive use

of homophobia has even expanded into the homosexual community in which homosexual men who are not effeminate deploy homophobia against those who are, as part of their defense against homophobia (Coston & Kimmel, 2012).

Despite the fact that hegemonic masculinity is largely unobtainable by the majority of men in any culture, the conceptualization remains normative. Men are taught to be self-sufficient and strong in every sense of the word, while ignoring the increasingly fragile nature of masculinity itself. Masculinity is in constant need of being proven not only to others, but also to the individual male himself. In order to compensate for rapidly shifting ideas about gender roles, masculinity has become more hostile and maladaptive. Men view power as zero-sum and are thus lashing out to retain the dominance that they have historically known. This modern hegemonic masculinity is the precise form of gender performance that is becoming increasingly more problematic because it has been picked up and perpetuated by the popular media as the only acceptable form of masculinity in today's societal structure.

**“I would have to be a homosexual to ignore a signal like that.”\* : The  
Heteronormativity of Male Sexuality**

It would be impossible to understand the complexities of male rape, and the role it plays in the mass media, without first discussing constructions of sexuality. Sexuality, as with most factors of an individual's identity, is culturally and socially constructed, and its meaning fluctuates throughout time (Hartsock, 1983; MacKinnon, 1989). However, sexuality should not be defined as “an essence or set of properties defining an individual, nor as a set of drives and needs (especially genital) of an individual” (Hartsock, 1983, p. 156). In addition to being socially and culturally constructed, sexuality also situates itself historically. Sexuality is not rooted in or determined by biology, and thus as human nature changes so do sexual relations (Hartsock, 1983; Plummer, 2005). The pervasive belief that sexuality is rooted in an unchanging human nature determined by biology does not allow the societal structures surrounding sexuality to be questioned or challenged. By claiming that sexuality is determined by biology, it follows that sexuality is naturally adverse to change: a thought that allows notions of sexuality to become naturalized in the current cultural context.

Michel Foucault (1990) asserts that current conceptions of both male and female sexuality stem directly from the Victorian Era. During this period sexuality was reconstructed as pertaining solely to reproduction and became largely confined to the home. Talk of sex outside an academic, medical or religious context was silenced,

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\* Henry, M. (Writer), & Tang, C. (Director). (2008). Love, blactually [Television series episode]. In S. MacFarlane (Producer), *Family Guy*. Los Angeles, CA: Fox Studios.

which created an illusion of secrecy despite current conversations surrounding the topic. This blatant contradiction changed the way in which sexuality was deployed and also allowed sexuality to become political. The politicization of sexuality was accomplished through two avenues: a control of sexuality led to control of the body, as well as the regulation of the population. It is in these ways that sexuality provided a way for those in positions of power to address both “the life of the body and the life of the species” (Foucault, 1990, p. 146). This new analysis of sexuality was therefore able to covertly and effectively control the social life of the masses. For the first time in history the sexual practices of a nation’s citizens were directly linked to the wealth and success of that nation. If citizens were irresponsible with their sexual lives, it would no longer be a detriment solely to that individual, but would weaken the nation as a whole. This evolution in thought caused the implementation of an increasing amount of regulation around sexuality.

The increasing attention paid to sexuality reinforced substantially gendered notions concerning the sexuality of men and women. Foucault (1990) described the emerging and sustaining depiction of sexuality as common to both genders, but belonging in its truest form to men. This notion implied that women are therefore lacking an adequate sexuality because they are not men. Women’s sexuality, therefore, is centered exclusively on their ability to reproduce. The direct focus on one specific aspect of a woman’s sexuality allows men to control female sexuality based on the fear that a woman’s entire body is irrationally ruled by all functions of reproduction.



Accompanying this focus on reproduction as the epicenter of female sexuality is the perception that a woman's sexuality is always dependent upon a man's. Men are a biological necessity for reproduction and thus, since sexuality is confined to the purpose of reproduction, a woman cannot achieve a fulfilling and satisfying sexual experience without the participation of a man (Dworkin, 1974). It is through this use of gender, a concept related to, but separate from sexuality, that a singular version of sexuality was implemented, sustained and regulated. Judith Butler (1999) expands this claim by stating that the gender experienced by an individual is simply a performance and that this performance creates a false sense of gender stability. It is through this artificial stability that women's sexuality remains regulated within the reproductive domain. Containing female sexuality to the reproductive domain persists, Butler (1999) argues, because it is in the best interest of heterosexual men who hold all societal power. If these gender performances were to be challenged, sexuality would lose its ability to regulate. As a result, those who hold positions of power reinforce a singular, normative performance of gender, and thus a specific conception of sexuality that allows them to continue to regulate their subordinates.

Power is imbedded in the nature of sexuality, and it is through this power that male sexuality came to be dominant as well as normative. Ideological dominance does not occur through force, but rather through the very invisibility of such power. If power was to be wholly visible, those who were dominated would not tolerate it, therefore, power must present itself as a mere limit of individual freedom (Foucault, 1990). Subordinated subjects readily agree to a limit on freedom in the name of social

order, while they are simultaneously and covertly being ideologically controlled without such limits. These power structures present themselves clearly through the conceptualization of sexuality. Sexuality can be described as gendered masculine because it is constructed “to express the experience of the ruling gender” (Hartsock, 1983, p. 164). In a heterosexual sexual relationship the male’s pleasure is prioritized (Hartsock, 1983), and the woman’s pleasure becomes at best an afterthought and at worst ignored. It is due to the fact that heterosexuality is the sexual norm that a suitable climate arises for male sexuality to dominate, just as men dominate women in other aspects of public and private life.

Attending exclusively to the ruling gender can be construed as problematic as well because it ignores the fluidity of sexuality. It is due to the sole focus on the ruling gender’s sexuality that Halberstam (1998) argues that little to no scholarly attention has been paid to female masculinity. Halberstam (1998) states that the lack of discussion around these variations in masculinity has served ideologically to “wed masculinity to maleness and to power and domination” (p. 2). Female masculinity thus emerges as powerful not by subverting or opposing masculine power, but rather by ignoring it (Halberstam, 1998). Being mindful of such variations in masculinity has the potential to reorient contemporary understandings of sexuality.

In addition to the power of sexuality based on gender difference, there also exists a distinction between sexualities possessed by white males as opposed to Black males. Unlike the fluidity experienced by white males, Black male sexuality remains relatively unchanged since slavery. Black male sexuality has been historically dictated

by colonial powers that used Black sexuality to justify Black subordination and domination (Collins, 2005). Patricia Hill Collins (2005) explains that since Black sexuality was conceived as deviant and in opposition to white sexuality, white sexuality situated itself as the norm and is still considered the norm today. It was this deviance assigned to Black sexuality that became its essential essence, especially to Westerners, of “deviant, out of control, sinful, and as an essential figure of difference” (Collins, 2005, p. 98). This deviance stemmed in large part from the assumed closeness of people of color to the natural world. Since Black people were seen as closer to animals, which were viewed as more sexual than humans, a seemingly dangerous sexuality was attributed to Black men and women that whites felt they had an obligation to control. Through slave ownership white men were able to contain the sexuality of Black men - with special attention paid to men born in Africa because they were viewed as the greatest threat through their perceived close association with nature. Black male sexuality has endured as problematic because after the slaves were freed, white men and women feared that Black sexuality was no longer controlled, a belief that fashioned the perception of Black males as rapists of white women.

This belief of Black sexuality as deviant was one of the rationalizations behind the implementation of miscegenation laws that prevented interracial marriage. It was not until the Supreme Court decision in the case of *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967 that laws prohibiting interracial marriage were overturned nationwide. Robert Pratt (1998) explains that miscegenation laws originated in the United States in order for white

slave owners to rationalize the institution of slavery by means of equating blackness with inferiority. Miscegenation laws prohibited interracial marriage, but did not forbid interracial sexual relations because using Black slave women to replenish the slave population was less expensive than buying imported slaves from auction (Pratt, 1998). Children born to slave women inherited their mother's slave status and therefore posed no threat to the white slave owners. It was the need for inexpensive labor that led several early lawmakers to compose specific prohibitions that barred white women from engaging in interracial relations, while sanctions against white men were notably absent (Pascoe, 1991). Furthermore, the institution of marriage threatened the institution of slavery because it was widely believed that if interracial marriage became common, Blacks would become lighter and lighter skinned, thus destabilizing the construction of their inferiority based artificially on skin color (Pratt, 1998).

Although *Loving v. Virginia* legalized interracial marriage, African Americans continue to have the lowest rate of interracial marriage among minority groups, and Black men marry outside of their race at a higher rate than Black women (Foeman & Nance, 1999). When Black women marry outside of their race, specifically to a white man, they are considered "race traitors" because historically "good" Black women resisted white male advances. However, when Black men marry white women, their status is raised rather than lowered due to the fact that white males have historically controlled Black women (Collins, 2005). Since Black men have gained the ability to marry whomever they choose, white males can no longer dictate who is an appropriate partner for Black men, thus diminishing white male hegemonic power.

By linking Black male sexuality to rape, an enduring essence of danger continues to surround notions of Black male sexuality. In contemporary times, this dominant conception of Black male sexuality has culminated in Black men expressing hyper-sexuality and their sexuality being represented in the mass media as pimps (Collins, 2006). The pervasive pimp image of Black male sexuality described by Collins (2006) entails “black men as hustlers who use their sexual prowess to exploit women, both black and white” (p. 311). The media also consistently portrays Black males as violent, irresponsible, inept, and as prisoners (Page, 1997). Negative depictions of Black men are thus contested because they reproduce harmful images of Black men that are largely produced without the input of Black men (Page, 1997). These mass-produced images of Black men as pimps as well as violent reinforce prevailing conceptions of Black sexuality that were originally created and endorsed through the institution of slavery. Black male sexuality is therefore continuously subordinated to white male sexuality and has yet to break free from its subordinate status. These images and conceptions persist because of their capacity to retain white masculinity as the hegemonic standard. By portraying Black masculinity and sexuality in a negative manner, white males are able to define what it means to be a man that correlates with their privileged standards and values.

Feminist scholars, including Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, recognize these power structures within male sexuality and have gone further as to argue that male sexuality goes beyond mere ideological domination to an aggressive, physical domination of women. MacKinnon (1989) describes male sexuality as

centering “on aggressive intrusion on those with less power” (p. 127). She affirms that these power relations can be evaluated through analyzing what is eroticized for men as opposed to women. Masculinity enacts dominance as a means of erotic arousal, and femininity is defined by the erotic nature of its submission. This analysis exposes sexuality itself as enabling the continuation of overarching gender inequality.

Resistance to sex defines a woman’s sexual submissiveness, while a man’s sexual dominance is defined by his relentless need for sex.

It is due to these differences, scholars have argued, that rape not only occurs, but also that it is inevitable (Hartsock, 1983; MacKinnon, 1989). MacKinnon (1989) resists this definition of rape however, because it takes the sexuality away from the perpetrator and allows male dominance in all other aspects of sexuality to remain intact. She argues that by making women and men equally aggressive sexually – a logical conclusion drawn from the previous rape reduction argument – women would become entirely sexually passive. Scholars who oppose MacKinnon would view a society with women who no longer oppose male sexual aggression as “rape-free”, but she insists that this society would not be “rape-free”, but rather “rape-prone”. A “rape-prone” society would emerge under such circumstances because instead of rape being nonexistent, women would have been conditioned to not speak out against it.

A similar language of aggression appears in Dworkin’s work *Women Hating* (1974) in which she analyzes the sexually aggressive nature of pornography. Her analysis of male aggression can be clearly interpreted through her depiction of female sexuality as it exists under patriarchy. Women are viewed as cunning in the way that

they desire sex as much as men, but deny it in order to appear virtuous. By viewing women in this manner, Dworkin (1974) concludes that men rape women because they believe that all women want sex, but are simply reluctant to say yes in an effort to remain moral.

It is due to this normative dynamic of female passivity and male aggression that Dworkin and MacKinnon have deduced that rape, the ultimate form of sexual aggression, remains a common practice. It follows then, that rape is an act that represents a culmination of male sexual entitlement that can be deployed against women, or in rare instances men, to assert dominance through control of another's body (Hartsock, 1983; Plummer, 2005). This entitlement is dictated to all men through the culturally enforced notion of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity enforces a sense of male sexual entitlement because men are supposed to take what they want when they want it, a concept that does not exclude sex. Therefore, if a potential sexual partner refuses a male's advances, whether or not those advances are aggressive, that male retains his hegemonic right to use his partner's body for sex despite his or her rejection. Hegemonic masculinity thus emerges as the vehicle through which a sense of sexual entitlement is invoked, categorizing male sexuality as aggressive.

Men are constantly encouraged to seek out sex wherever they can find it from sources ranging from their peers to the media. If a man is presented an opportunity to engage in sexual activity and declines, his masculinity is immediately called into question. His masculinity would be called into question because notions about

sexuality have been naturalized through its assumed connection to biology. Therefore, if a man goes against this norm, he is going against his biology and is viewed as abnormal and in need of examination. This norm also perpetuates the notion that in between sexual experiences, men are engaged in the consumption of pornography (Plummer, 2005) in order to feed their never-satisfied sexual appetites. Men's consumption of pornography is problematic for MacKinnon (1989) because it depicts men obtaining whatever they want sexually, and is becoming the universal male "truth about sex" (p. 138). Pornography is produced to appease men, and thus depicts how men see the world and how they are dominant in that world, a depiction that increasingly includes the victimization of women. Women's victimization in pornography is consequently becoming key to the construction of women as primarily sexual objects. Pornography asserts that male arousal is dependent on "victimizing, hurting, [and] exploiting" (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 140).

In addition to pornography's problematic influence on conceptions of sexuality, assuming that men are indulging in pornography when they are not engaging in sex illuminates the deep-seeded cultural notion that masculine sexuality is not only aggressive, but also powerful, uncontrollable and centered exclusively on the penis (Plummer, 2005). Focusing on male sexuality as in constant need of sexual fulfillment emphasizes the penis and positions it as the center of male sexuality. It is through the penis that the male comes into his power, and the penis allows the man to maintain this power by dominating others. Ironically, in spite of this power, the symbolic nature of the penis is conditional as opposed to absolute. When a penis is



erect it is a symbol of masculine power and achievement, however, when a penis is flaccid it is a sign of male weakness and vulnerability (Plummer, 2005). Again, the binary nature of masculine power achieved through conceptions of sexuality leads to a negative outcome. Given that men are dependent on their penises for their sexual fulfillment, if a man is unable or becomes unable to perform sexually, he is chastised. It thus stands to reason that impotence is the worst fate that can befall a man (Plummer, 2005).

It is due to the phallogentric nature of male sexuality that impotence has recently materialized as a medical concern, as opposed to a mental concern, as men look for a cure that will allow them to keep their masculine self-esteem intact (Tiefer, 1994). Their masculine self-esteem is kept intact in part through attributing the dysfunction to the body, as opposed to the mind, which men are believed to be able to rationally control (Potts, 2000). Emphasizing impotence as a medical condition is problematic because it fully excludes the male's partner and allows the couple to avoid solving deeper issues that are likely affecting the male's performance (Bordo, 1998). Transitioning impotence into the medical world has reinforced the idea that male sexuality is based entirely on the functioning of the penis. Consequently, when impotence is talked about in any context, it is an implication of a deficiency in the man, not just one of his body parts – “he is impotent” (Bordo, 1998). The exclusive focus on the functionality of the penis is seen in practice when a man requests treatment from his doctor and receives treatment based on the functioning of his penis, such as hardness and duration, with no attention paid to his sexual technique, partner

or relationship; focus on the penis in this way also reinforces the false perception that men must be able to penetrate women vaginally in order to be sexual (Bordo, 1998; Tiefer, 1994). In the media and in medical literature, large medical companies that produce drugs such as Viagra put forth a stringent definition of what constitutes good sex:

Good sex happens when a man inserts his rock-hard penis into a woman's appropriately lubricated vagina and moves it around in there for a suitable amount of time. Under ideal circumstances this should continue until both the man and the woman experience orgasm at exactly the same time. (Bass, 2001, p. 337)

This definition is reiterated over and over by the mass media as it continues to focus on the specific sexual dysfunctions of premature ejaculation and erectile disorder that do nothing to challenge existing cultural conceptions of human sexuality (Potts, 2000). An erect penis is a symbolic sign of power, but also paradoxical because the penis often does not function in the predictable ways that society dictates as acceptable. Ken Plummer (2005) contends that this irony causes men to constantly worry about their penis while still feeling socially obligated to engage in sexual activity to ensure that they are perceived as masculine.

The four pillars that dictate hegemonic masculinity, as outlined by Deborah David and Robert Brannon (1976), are also applicable to male sexuality (as cited in Plummer, 2005, p. 181-182). In the context of sexuality, "no sissy stuff" implies the stigma against all that is considered to be feminine. Therefore, male sexuality is prohibited from exhibiting any emotion or passivity. This pillar also alludes to the function of homophobia in defining male sexuality. Through the lens of hegemonic

masculinity, homosexual sex, whether oral or anal, is viewed as uncivilized and unnatural because it defies the erotic possibilities unmistakably defined by the hegemonic, heterosexual order (Butler, 1999). Due to the assumption that homosexual men are effeminate, they suffer the same sexual fate as women. Although they are biologically male and possess a penis, homosexual men are thought to lack an essence of their sexuality in the same way women are. Heterosexual men are supposed to hold a complete and true sexuality to which every other sexuality is compared (Foucault, 1990); because homosexual men deviate from the hegemonic male standard, they are understood to suffer from an incomplete sexuality. Deficiency contributes to the presumption that homosexual men are thought to “lust after pain and degradation” (Dworkin, 1974, p. 89), which hegemonic men feel they are entitled to dominate. The second pillar, “big wheel”, signifies a man’s status as well as success. Male sexuality consequently dictates that a man must strive to be looked up to for his sexual competence. The “sturdy oak” pillar indicates that a male is to be self-reliant and confident. This pillar of male sexuality is also the component that accounts for its aggressive nature. The last pillar, “give ‘em hell”, specifies that men are to be both violent and daring. The disturbing assertion behind this facet of male sexuality is that men are to enjoy sex that is also violent and rough. The implementation of such rough sex can range from harassment to rape. These aspects of male sexuality paint a dark picture of hegemonic male masculinity that is resistant to change.

Despite the fact that sexuality is socially, culturally and historically situated, a Victorian style of sexuality has endured. This sexuality is dominated and defined by

men, while women's and homosexual men's sexualities are thought to be deficient. Notions of hegemonic masculinity that script male behavior in all other aspects of social life also script male sexual behavior. Therefore, male sexuality is often conveyed as powerful, assertive and uncontrollable. A culturally prescribed need for continuous sexual activity drives men to rape and also to enact homophobia.

**“They are going to be disappointed when they find out I’m not gay.”\***

### **Homophobia as a Facet of Male-on-Male Rape**

Hegemonic masculinity explicitly encompasses an idealized masculinity that is based on not only the domination of females, but also on the domination of other males as well. However, one particular facet of hegemonic masculinity surpasses all the rest in terms of shaping a man’s masculine identity: homophobia. According to James O’Neil (1981) homophobia can be defined as “an expression of the man’s fear of his femininity and his fears about his own sexual or interpersonal attraction to other men” (p. 207). Masculinity entails being emotionless, strong and decisive, while femininity is characterized as emotional, weak and passive. These strict gender identities inform homophobia due to the way in which homosexual men are viewed in the same manner as women (Davies & Hudson, 2011); homosexual men are viewed as possessing more feminine traits than masculine and are thus viewed as subordinate. This feminized view of homosexual men causes heterosexual men to do everything in their power – through their actions and mannerisms – to prove their masculinity so that they will not be mislabeled as homosexual.

The use of homophobia as a tactic to enforce hegemonic masculinity is becoming increasingly documented and discussed. According to Pol McCann, David Plummer and Victor Minichiello (2010), homophobia is crucial to defining appropriate heterosexual identity and is exemplified when men, regardless of their sexuality, attract homophobic remarks because they deviate from their traditional and rigidly

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\* Bernstein, J., & Shipley, M. (Writers), & Povenmire, D. (Director). (2001). One if by clam, two if by sea [Television series episode]. In S. MacFarlane (Producer), *Family Guy*. Los Angeles, CA: Fox Studios.

defined gender role. In this way, homophobia becomes a highly effective tool for policing masculinity. Through homophobia, heterosexual men enforce social conformity and effectively punish those who deviate from the traditional male role (O'Neil, 1981). The use of homophobic epithets is therefore not only used specifically to devalue men who identify as homosexual, but also to devalue men who engage in behaviors that defy what has traditionally defined the masculine identity. Hence, the utmost insult one man can impart on another is to call that man gay (Kimmel, 2008). Kimmel (2008) states that homophobia is defined by "the fear that people might misperceive you as gay" (p. 50). It is in this way that homophobia has become a cultural shorthand for unmanliness. If a male acts in a manner that strays from what is traditionally considered masculine, he is promptly made aware of it through the deployment of homophobic jokes or comments against him.

Such use of homophobic jokes and other homophobic epithets has recently developed into a powerful gender-policing tool influential in the creation of modern masculinity. Men have a compulsory need to prove that they are more masculine than other men who have characteristics that qualify them as a "failed" male (McCann et al., 2010). Humor is one tool that creates this social distance between hegemonic males and those who have no hope of achieving its high standards. Jokes are also administered in order to cement relationships between young men and to help them manage the anxiety as well as the discomfort that accompanies the development of a strong masculine identity (Pascoe, 2007). The ability for jokes to cement relationships between young men is accomplished through humor's light-hearted nature. By not

appearing serious, humor is able to covertly convey ideas that are difficult or inappropriate to express otherwise, and hegemonic men utilize humor's power to assert their "self-ascribed superiority over the other" (McCann et al., 2010, p. 507). Homophobic humor functions in two distinct ways that complement each other: first, it shows who is to be taken seriously, and second, it signifies who can be devalued by being the butt of a joke (McCann et al., 2010).

The relentless presence of homophobia through humor is one of the reasons why male-on-male rape is viewed as a subset of homosexual behavior (Anderson, 2004; Burt & DeMello, 2002; Jones, 1992). Because male-on-male rape deviates from what is coded as sexually acceptable for heterosexual men, the act is deemed homosexual no matter the victim's sexuality. Deeming the act of male-on-male rape as homosexual in nature is a consequence of pervasive rape myths held by society at large, which include the following:

being raped by a male attacker is the equivalent of the loss of masculinity; men who are sexually assaulted by another man must be gay; men are incapable of performing sexually unless they are aroused; men are unable to have sex against their will; men are always ready to accept any sexual opportunity; a man should be able to defend himself against a sexual attack. (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2008)

Given that one of the unwavering qualities of masculinity is the ability to defend oneself, when a male is unable to defend himself in an attack, such as a sexual assault, he is labeled weak, which homophobia defines as gay. The focus on the supposed weakness of the victimized male in an effort to label him as homosexual, and the notion that being overpowered automatically equates to a loss in masculinity is the main motive for men who rape other men. Just as is true when women are sexually

assaulted, when a man is sexually assaulted, it is an act of violence and power, not sex (Anderson, 2007). It is this power and sense of domination that leads male perpetrators to use rape as proof that they are more hegemonic than the man they are able to assault.

Pervasive throughout hegemonic masculinity is the notion that to be a real man one must look at the world, see what one wants, and take it (Jensen, 2007). Therefore, when a male rapes another male, he is taking what he wants and giving the victim no opportunity to do the same. Taking what one wants through violence enables men to prove their manhood, as well as put other men in their place (Kimmel, 2008). It is impossible for a man to be both dominant and victim in the instance of rape, and thus after a sexual assault the male victim is viewed as distanced from his former hegemonic masculinity (Doherty & Anderson, 2004). Men are aware of how to increase their own masculinity while decreasing another man's masculinity, and hegemonic males use this to their advantage through sexual assault. Men who become the victims of sexual assault are assessed by the perpetrator to be inferior, and consequently in need of punishment. Male-on-male rape is therefore not viewed by the perpetrator as homosexual sex, but rather an attack on the masculinity of the subordinate male.

Social stigmas surrounding male rape victims exacerbate the underreporting of the crime. Men are most likely to report their sexual assault if they sustain injuries that require medical attention, which show they were justifiably overpowered (Davies, 2002; Pino & Meier, 1999). If men are injured severely enough to be hospitalized or in



need of other medical attention, they can prove to their medical team as well as to the police that they valiantly tried to defend themselves. These visible signs of defense allow the victim to avoid the questioning of their sexuality because they remained within defined gender boundaries. When male sexual assault survivors report their assault and do not have visible injuries to prove their masculinity, both the police and medical personal assume the male to be homosexual and treat him differently as a result of their prejudicial thinking (Davies, 2002).

One instance in which the power dynamic inherent in male-on-male rape is magnified is in prison. Prisons are often the sole institution thought of when considering male-on-male rape, although this is not necessarily the case (Pino & Meier, 1999; Sable, Danis, Mauzy, & Gallagher, 2006). The general public assumes that male rape occurs exclusively in prison because that is the only setting being addressed in popular culture and because of the strict taboo that still surrounds male-on-male rape that occurs outside of prison walls. Male sexual assault in prison is therefore the only circumstance in which men are at all prepared for the possibility of rape. This is problematic because when men do experience sexual assault outside of prison, they face society's homophobia since male-on-male rape still is not taken seriously. However, prisons were the catalyst in discovering that more male-on-male rapes occurred than people had previously thought. Through the exposure of prison rape, other males felt more comfortable reporting their assaults (Scarce, 1997). When the public was forced to acknowledge the reality that men could be, and are, raped in prison, it invoked the confidence for other men to admit to assaults that had occurred

outside of prison. Without prison's role as a catalyst, male-on-male rape would have remained a myth and, as such, inconceivable to the majority of the public.

Prison is an all-male environment in which males dominate each other through multiple methods, including sexual assault. Within prison power dynamics the younger, weaker, less hegemonic male is forced into the role that women fill in the outside world (Scarce, 1997). Those who commit sexual assaults in prison are identified as "jockers" and are able to make other males, "punks", submissive, thus replicating the masculine sex role outside of prison (Hensley, 2002). The power dynamic that prevails in prison is not separate from, but rather an adaptation of power relations outside of prison. In prison, dominant male prisoners merely submit weaker males to a feminized role, which women are submitted to outside of prison.

The men in prison that rape other men do not gain their dominance from prison alone, but they also hold the most power outside of prison walls. It follows then that victims of sexual assault in prison are often a racial minority, have a smaller build, and appear less masculine or gay (Hensley, 2002; Mariner & Human Rights Watch, 2001; Scarce, 1997). Although male-on-male rape is logically a homosexual act because it is a sexual encounter between two males, men that rape in prison do not view their actions as emotional, but rather a physical release that permits them to dominate without compromising their sexuality (Hensley, 2002; Scarce, 1997).

Consistent with research conducted on male-on-male rape outside of prison, male prison rape is based largely on the victim not being able to defend himself. If a man is perceived as weak when he enters prison by hegemonic, dominant males, he is

more likely to be sexually assaulted than if he attempts to defend himself, no matter how futile the attempt (Mariner & Human Rights Watch, 2001). Men who do not try to defend themselves are labeled gay no matter what their sexual orientation is and are thus targeted by males who feel compelled to punish them for their subordinate display of masculinity. Men who are labeled in this way are subject to repeated assaults, as well as the possibility of being sold to other prisoners by a pimp. Men who are sold like prostitutes in the prison system are subjugated to the same power structures that women experience as prostitutes outside of prison: those who are dominant reinforce their power through pimping out those men that they have already personally dominated. By being in complete control of the weaker male's constant victimization, dominant male prisoners are able to confirm their masculinity to both their victim and the other male prisoners who also abuse the subjugated male.

The rape myth that men who are sexually assaulted by other men are gay also fuels the intense homophobia for all male victims of rape. The sexuality of a male victim becomes irrelevant as soon as the assault occurs, and homophobic societies mandate that he will always be tainted with the label of homosexual. The sheer fact that male rape is a homosexual act, despite lack of consent, combined with negative cultural conceptions of homosexuality allows homophobia to not only endure, but also to thrive. Viewing male-on-male rape as purely sexual and not violent does not challenge the deep-seeded homophobia associated with male sexual assault, but rather endorses it. Homophobia therefore emerges as the main reason men sexually assault other men. The homophobic power that one man holds over another man through

sexual assault is also gained from the victimized male being unable to report the assault to the police or disclose it to family members. Estimates of male sexual assaults that are reported range from five percent to twenty percent of all reported sexual assaults (Burt & DeMello, 2002), and preliminary data suggests that men are 1.5 times less likely to report the rape if the perpetrator is male (Chapleau et al., 2008).

Multiple researchers have found that the central reason men do not report their sexual assault is due to intense homophobia (Chapleau et al., 2008; Davies, 2002; Davies & McCartney, 2003; Doherty & Anderson, 2004; Sivakumaran, 2005).

Homophobic reactions are directed at the victim from both the police, to whom the assault is reported, and the family and friends to whom the victim discloses it, whether the victim reports the assault to the police or not. Men who are silenced by homophobia experience many negative effects, such as depression, suicidal thoughts, social isolation, and sexual dysfunction (Chapleau et al., 2008), because they are unable to work through their trauma openly without being re-victimized by those to whom they disclose. Men are supposedly able to defend themselves against any threat, and when they are violated, especially sexually, people are generally unable to understand how or why the assault occurred.

Due to rampant homophobia, police are under the inaccurate assumption that male rape is less traumatic because the male is gay, and therefore the assault is more in line with their “typical” sexual behavior (Doherty & Anderson, 2004). Heterosexual males are believed to gain sexual pleasure from vaginal intercourse, and homosexual men, in opposition, are believed to not only be more sexually active, but also to

achieve the highest sexual pleasure through anal intercourse. In light of the fact that male-on-male rape often utilizes forced anal intercourse, it is viewed as more in line with homosexual sexual behavior than the sexual behavior of heterosexual men. Therefore, since homosexual men are believed to have engaged in anal intercourse prior to the assault, it is commonly believed that they derived more pleasure from the assault than their heterosexual counterparts who, it is assumed, have not previously engaged in anal intercourse.

This incorrect assumption does not just affect gay men however, because the majority of male victims of male-on-male rape are assumed to be gay, despite the fact that the majority of males who experience rape are not homosexual (Chapleau et al., 2008; Doherty & Anderson, 2004). From interviews with male rape survivors, Michael Scarce (1997) found that victims complained most often about the police's "disbelief, mockery, homophobia, or a combination of three" (p. 216). It is not that police are purposefully trying to be malicious toward male victims of sexual assault, but the lack of reporting leads police to believe that male rape is not a serious problem and therefore do not need to handle it as such, thus creating a vicious cycle (Davies, 2002). If the police do not take victims' claims seriously, there is little else that victims can do because they often feel uncomfortable calling rape crisis centers, which they feel exist to serve women and are ill-equipped or unable to serve male clients (Davies, 2002).

In addition to being questioned by family, friends and the police, men also question themselves after they have been assaulted due in large part to their physical

reactions to the assault. Both men and women believe the myth that men cannot perform sexually unless they are sexually aroused, so when men do respond physically to the assault, they themselves become confused. Men can have a physical response to rape in two different ways: one, being in a state of pain, panic or fear can cause an erection and ejaculation, and two, some men may force themselves to ejaculate in hopes that the assault will cease (Scarce, 1997). Even though these two avenues to ejaculation are distinct, they both challenge what the victim thinks about his sexuality and can cause psychological anguish long after the assault.

The first response that refers to ejaculation that is involuntary may confuse the victim because society often conflates consensual sex and rape. When the victim believes that men cannot perform sexually unless they are sexually aroused, he may question his own sexuality when he ejaculates during the course of a sexual assault. Ejaculation is typically associated with sexual pleasure and orgasm in American culture, and therefore when men ejaculate out of fear and not pleasure, they have difficulty differentiating the two.

In terms of trying to ejaculate, men may force themselves to ejaculate in order to signal the end of the assault. These men believe that they can convince the perpetrator that the sexual experience is over through their own ejaculation, but may not understand that the assault is about power, not sex, even in the midst of the assault. By ejaculating themselves, male victims are trying to speed up the perpetrator's ejaculation as well, which they feel will signify the end of the assault. Unfortunately, this is often not the case because the assault is motivated more by violence than by

sex. In these instances as well, the male's ejaculation can be used as a homophobic tool to keep victims silent.

It is also possible that perpetrators force their victim to ejaculate in order to discredit him when he goes to the police (Scarce, 1997; Sivakumaran, 2005). Since it is widely accepted that men cannot perform sexually unless they are sexually aroused, the police may call that victim's sexuality into question more bluntly than if he had not had an erection and consequently ejaculated. Perpetrators are aware of this myth and use the homophobia inherent in ejaculation from a male-on-male sexual encounter to their advantage to keep their victims silent.

In addition to making their victim ejaculate, the actions of the perpetrator during the assault may also cause the victim to question his sexuality. If the perpetrator makes homophobic comments during the assault it may cause the victim to wonder whether his actions caused the perpetrator to attack him (Sivakumaran, 2005). Furthermore, if the victim believes that he somehow acted in a homosexual manner that caused the assault, he might call his own sexuality into question; if someone else mistook me for a homosexual, could I actually be homosexual? These thoughts, combined with the trauma of the sexual assault, have the potential to cause the victim great psychological agony. The way in which male-on-male rape incites the victim to question his own sexuality represents another way that homophobia extends to all male-on-male sexual assaults no matter the victim's sexuality. A heterosexual male can therefore be raped as an anti-gay crime if the perpetrator perceives the victim to be gay or in any way unmanly (Davies, 2004). In this manner the perpetrator not only

physically violates the victim, but also through homophobia, psychologically assaults the victim.

The majority of males become victims of male-on-male rape due to the need to enforce hegemonic masculinity and rampant homophobia. This crime is not concerned with sex, but rather violence and domination. In order for a man to prove his own masculinity, he must take away the masculinity of another, a goal easily achieved through sexual assault. After the assault, men are confronted by homophobia not only from outside sources such as family, friends and the police, but also from themselves as they wrestle with the notion that they had, by definition, a homosexual sexual encounter. Such homophobia keeps men silent and perpetrators on the streets. Since men are ashamed of their assault due to their perceived deviation from hegemonic masculinity, they do not report the crime to the police, which in turn causes police to falsely believe that male rape is not a large-scale problem.

If homosexuality were not looked down upon in contemporary society, the issue of male-on-male rape could be addressed in the same serious manner that female rape is currently being addressed (Mariner & Human Rights Watch, 2001). Until homosexuality is accepted as a viable and worthwhile identity however, male-on-male rape will continue to possess stigma and shame because of the pervasive sentiment of homophobia. Due to the stigmatization surrounding male-on-male rape, the media has increasingly made a joke of the matter, and this humor only serves to reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Just as men use jokes interpersonally to prove their masculinity, the media utilizes the same tactic to reach male audiences through the



television screen. This phenomenon is exemplified in Fox's animated series *Family Guy* in which the male protagonist, Peter, is repeatedly sexually assaulted due to his non-hegemonic status.

**“Wow, I never knew you could make fun of someone for being homosexual.”\***

### ***Family Guy’s Ideological Impact***

The media is a powerful enforcer of masculinity by defining for its audience what it means to be a masculine male in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The media’s ability to influence its audience has been analyzed in detail by John Fiske (1987) who asserts that the audience is not a passive viewer, but rather an active participant when engaged in watching television. Laura Mumford (1998) advances a similar model that when an individual watches television, he or she has an experience that is politically as well as ideologically shaped by the outside world. Television, she argues, serves ideologically to both teach and maintain the “social status quo” (p. 117). Gender is central to maintaining this social status quo, and therefore gender policing in television functions as an illustration of what gender is and also what it should be (Mumford, 1998). Fiske (1987) endorses the notion of an active audience, but does not suggest that all audience members process what they view in television in a uniform manner.

Television programming is designed to be understood by a large audience through the use of normative codes, and it is because of this design, Fiske (1987) explains, that television analysis becomes not just a reading of the texts, but also rather an analysis of the text and its interpretation by its socially situated viewers. Due to the multifaceted nature of a viewer’s identity, such as race, class and gender, each viewer interprets content shown on television differently. Mumford (1998) notes that due to the varied composition of a viewer’s identity, not all components of that identity are

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\* Carter, A. (Writer), & Langford, J. (Director). (2008). Tales of a third grade nothing [Television series episode]. In S. MacFarlane (Producer), *Family Guy*. Los Angeles, CA: Fox Studios.

engaged by every television show. In short, the media is an authoritative source of knowledge about what it means to be a man or woman, as well as what it means to be a good citizen, in today's culture.

One avenue through which the media achieves its authoritative status is in the pleasure experienced by the audience during their spectatorship. The act of viewing another person on screen, no matter the interpretation, has the power to induce pleasure, defined by Mumford (1998) as "a complex kind of satisfaction that occurs both at the conscious and unconscious levels" (p. 119) in the viewer. This pleasure is derived in part from the voyeurism experienced by the viewer (Mulvey, 1975). Laura Mulvey (1975) asserts that the pleasure derived from looking aligns with patriarchy and the male gaze. Although she is critiquing the cinema in particular, the domestic nature of television viewing - watching others from the comfort of one's own home - also invokes the same voyeuristic appeal. The comfort found in the domestic nature of watching television lulls audience members into a false sense of security in which they believe that they are unaffected by what they watch. Fiske (1987) suggests that the pleasure that results from watching television comes from the power the viewer feels in being able to control what is viewed and how what is seen is interpreted. With viewers generally unaware of television's impact, images can be shown to viewers with little to no fear of critical analysis.

The covert nature of enforcing ideologies through images on television enables audience members to "reflect, reinforce and mediate existing power-relations and ideas about how gender is and should be lived" (Mumford, 1998, p. 117). Viewing,

according to Fiske (1987), is thus able to reinforce masculinity not only through content, but also through the way in which television viewing takes place in the private sphere. Mumford (1998), however, asserts the opposite, that television viewing is effectively feminine because it is performed in the private sphere, which has historically been coded as a female space. Television programming, explains Mumford (1998), initially produced exclusively for women – notably soap operas – has widely influenced later genres of television programs and has even been utilized to demonstrate how the entirety of television operates. The feminine nature of domestic television viewing has shaped and defined the evolving nature of television as a medium.

Conversely, the masculine nature of television viewing emerges from the ways in which gender power dynamics operate outside of the home (Fiske, 1987). Men use television programming in the home as an opportunity to assert the dominance they experience outside of the home. Men often demean what are considered women's shows, such as soap operas, in favor of shows deemed manly, such as the news and sports, enacting a process of naturalization that portrays masculine shows as "better". As the realness of a show increases, so does its masculine approval. In gaining masculine approval, documentaries and realistic dramas become naturalized as superior, which endorses their priority within the household. A defining characteristic of so-called masculine programming is the way that it requires undivided attention, which stands in stark opposition to the design of women's programming that is conducive to multitasking.

Variation in television programming targeted at men is minimal at best. Men portrayed on television do not vary in their character, but are rather slight modifications of the same ideals promoted by hegemonic masculinity. Just as Michael Kimmel (2007) argued that masculinity was not static, Darrin Hodgetts and Mohi Rua (2010) argue that masculinity is constantly changing, which is an effect of men's ever-increasing media consumption. Men who are watching and discussing media with their friends are absorbing and reinforcing to one another what it means to be a man in today's society. In this way media provides a focal point for men to participate socially with other males to create a sense of community as well as a sense of their own masculine self-identity (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010). What is being promoted through the media is directly influencing how men are engaging with their own masculinities, which has real consequences for men who fall short of hegemonic standards.

These media-constructed gender rules are enforced and substantiated by male peers during times of social bonding. Social bonding achieved through the viewing and subsequent discussion of television, as discussed by Fiske (1987), is a way to establish "an active relationship between viewer and program" (p. 77). He states that this discussion of television programming is not mindless chatter, but rather a method the viewer employs to connect the content of the program to the reality of his own life and unique social situation. Audience members are thus able to align their ideology with that presented in the media or rebel against it. Discussion of television can therefore serve either to reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies, such as gender, race and class, which are presented through its programming.

From a psychological perspective, emphasis on the media as an entity that is capable of shaping masculinity has contributed to the process of operant learning (Addis et al., 2010). Operant learning is achieved based on the use of either rewards or punishments to increase or decrease a behavior, respectively. Social learning theorist Albert Bandura (2001) explains his social cognitive theory of mass communication as a transactional interaction between the self and society as well as with personal, environmental and behavioral determinants. This theory does not engage in the nature versus nurture debate, but rather acknowledges that both interact in order to present people as “producers as well as products of social systems” (Bandura, 2001, p. 266). The mass media is increasingly a part of everyday life, and, as a result, becomes a symbolic environment that transmits values, ways of thinking and behavior (Bandura, 2001). Through the process of operant learning men learn how to be men in a patriarchal, heteronormative society. For example, if a young boy is seen trying on his mother’s high heels, he is quickly punished to indicate to the child that this is not proper masculine behavior. However, if a young boy excels at sports, he is rewarded and thus taught that this is proper masculine behavior. It is through the progression of rewards and punishments that men learn what it means to be a real man because the rewarded behaviors become “more prominent in boys’ and men’s repertoires of behavior” (Addis et al., 2010, p. 84).

In terms of media, operant learning is achieved by watching what other men go through, how they act and how they are rewarded or punished for certain behaviors. Men learn what is and is not acceptable according to the media – such as television –

and then model the valued behavior in their own lives. This modeling is dependent on factors such as how realistic the television stimulus is (Scharrer, 2005), how compatible ideas are with prevailing social norms and value systems (Bandura, 2001) and how reconcilable ideas presented by the media are with the self (Bandura, 2001). The prominence of hegemonic masculinity in the media becomes a site of contestation because men are taught from an early age that there is only one way to be a man, and that to be a man, above all else, is to be the opposite of a woman, an opposition that leads to a display of homophobia.

The discussion thus far has pertained to the negative influence of television on the construction of masculinity, but do positive influences exist in the realm of television? When posed this question, no example comes to mind. The inability to promptly answer this question is attributed to the media's underlying motive of maintaining the status quo. To elaborate, the media is largely used to reflect and enforce societal values, and in response to the moral panic concerning gender, television is being used to revalue and reiterate traditional gender roles. These roles place men as the head-of-household, breadwinner and authority figure, and women as subordinate, dependent and restricted to the home. As women are entering the workforce, exerting independence and emerging as leaders, and homosexuality is entering the mainstream, men are finding themselves in a novel social situation. No longer are masculine roles clearly defined, but masculinity is competing with marginalized identities over which it once had complete ideological dominance. Joseph Pleck (1981) noted that men in modern societies are subjected to numerous

pressures resulting from contradictory demands placed on them by their evolving sex role (as cited in Gentry & Harrison, 2010, p. 75). These contradictions arise from confusion on what exactly it means to be a man (Gentry & Harrison, 2010), and the media, television in particular, is addressing this ambiguity by idealizing traditional gender roles.

Many media sources create opportunities for men to bond, discuss and model, but one television show in particular, targeted at a young male audience, is detrimental to the formation of the masculine identity, *Family Guy*. *Family Guy* is an animated comedic sitcom created by Seth MacFarlane. According to Biography.com, MacFarlane comes from a well-educated family; his father was a teacher, and his mother, an academic administrator. After his graduation with a degree in video and animation in 1995, he moved to Los Angeles and quickly obtained a contract with Fox, which offered him a pilot of *Family Guy*, based on his college thesis project, *Life of Larry*. In addition to being the executive producer of *Family Guy*, MacFarlane has also come to voice three of the show's main characters: Peter, the father, Stewie, the youngest child, and Brian, the family dog. The show is most well known for its controversy, physical humor, satire of the American family, as well as for its blatant political satire.

*Family Guy* is the only show in history that became more successful after its cancellation (Albiniak, 2004). In 1998 Fox offered MacFarlane 40,000 dollars to make a short prototype of the show (Hoffman, 2012), which they aired after the Super Bowl in 1999. The original airing of the show was a success for Fox, but later fizzled after



occupying multiple time slots. It was not until 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox opted to release the show on DVD that *Family Guy* was revived. The DVD sold 1.6 million copies and was the year's top-selling television DVD, which also made it the first show to benefit from sale of a DVD (Richmond, 2007). In addition to the release of the DVD - after Fox's cancellation of the show - it ran successfully on both Cartoon Network and TBS (Albiniak, 2004). Fans of the show, mainly men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four who discovered the show when it was released on DVD, signed an online petition in order to place the show back on the air (Goodale, 2005). The fans' efforts and economic power – paying \$49.98 for *Family Guy* DVDs – did not go unnoticed by Fox, evidenced by the network's revival of the show with the production of a total of thirty-five new episodes that premiered on May 1, 2005 (Seitz & Service, 2005). *Family Guy* was restored in the sole interest of profit, despite the controversial content being presented to its cult-like young followers. The *Family Guy* franchise has since grown to include not only DVDs, but also video games, merchandise for sale on tbs.com and fox.com, online quizzes, and interactive applications. Fans of *Family Guy* can now interact with the show in any capacity they choose, including online fan forums in which diehard fans defend the show to anyone who criticizes it. The success of the show has made MacFarlane the highest paid writer-producer in television history, making thirty-three million dollars a year (Hoffman, 2012). The show is currently valued at over a billion dollars and is watched by six million people each week (Hoffman, 2012).

*Family Guy* has been a topic of public discussion since its original airing on Fox in January 1999. The show is notorious for jokes that have proven offensive to people from all walks of life. When interviewed, MacFarlane does not find harm in his humor because he views it as merely making fun of stereotypes and not actual groups of people (Hoffman, 2012). MacFarlane has furthermore responded to his critics by claiming that he does not see himself as a moral leader because what he is creating is a cartoon (“Animate for Life,” 2007). This is also the reason MacFarlane says that the jokes and offensive situations portrayed in the show are just the characters acting stupid and not an actual attack on that particular person or group. He views his job as making people laugh and does everything in his power to pack as many jokes as possible into each half-hour segment (“Animate for Life,” 2007). MacFarlane’s casual attitude toward his humor is not, however, supported by Fiske (1987). Fiske (1987) asserts that jokes on television are employed not only to reach a wide audience, but also to enforce the superiority of masculinity. This masculinity is enforced at the expense of women, but due to the complex nature of individual interpretation, such jokes are not immune to criticism. The same viewer can both understand jokes presented through television programming in the way it was intended, as well as critically. Consequently, jokes can be read as either enforcement of the patriarchal order or subversion of it as a comment on the changing nature of gender roles and patriarchy’s inability to deal with such changes (Fiske, 1987).

Despite MacFarlane’s nonchalant attitude toward his show’s humor, it has caused individuals as well as the Parents Television Council— an agency intended to

protect children from violence, sex and profanity on television - to reach out to advertisers to cease support for the show. In 1999 the headmaster at MacFarlane's former prep school, Richardson Schell, began a campaign to end *Family Guy* sponsorship (Press, 1999). Schell stated that the campaign was not a personal crusade against MacFarlane, but an attack on the offensive nature of the show. Companies such as Philip Morris, Kentucky Fried Chicken, the Gap and Sprint pulled ads that ran during the show after reviewing the show's content and concluding that the values in the show went against those held by the corporations (Press, 1999). The fight against *Family Guy* continued with the Parents Television Council's attack on Microsoft's advertising of the show. This campaign was successful in Microsoft not participating in "*Family Guy* Presents: Seth and Alex's Almost Live Comedy Show" – a special half-hour long variety show that aired in 2009, but the company continued to run commercials during *Family Guy* on Fox ("Parent group to Microsoft," 2009).

Schell also raised moral issues against the show because of its availability to children (Ross, Cuneo, Guilford, Pollack, & Snyder, 1999), although its target audience is teen and college-aged men (Franklin, 2006), since its animation makes *Family Guy* attractive to children. Many parents find the content troubling and wish to limit their children's exposure to the show. Even David Goodman, an executive producer and head writer for the show, does not allow his young son to watch the show because he and his wife "don't feel comfortable with it" (Richmond, 2007). Goodman's admittance that he does not let his own child watch the show illustrates

*Family Guy*'s harmful nature. Children take in all forms of information and do not have the capacity to decipher what is humorous and what is truthful.

While children may not fully understand the show's innuendos or references, television maintains the ability to shape values, and can thus be harmful to children who are arguably quite vulnerable. A study by Robert Hodge and David Tripp (1986) discovered that children, much like adults, are not passive viewers of television, but rather actively connect what they watch to their own social experience (as cited in Fiske, 1987, p. 68). Television influences children in multiple aspects of their lives – from games to speech – and therefore aids them in making sense of their own lived reality. However, children generally do not watch television with undivided attention, but while engaging in other activities; they return to full attention only when the program recaptures their interest (Fiske, 1987). A child's attention can be retained with either shocking material or the use of a laugh track. The need to keep the audience's attention, especially the show's young male audience, is clearly illustrated in *Family Guy* with the extensive use of offensive and obscene material.

In order to analyze the show fully, the central family in the show must be examined. The actions and interactions enacted by Peter and Lois Griffin compose the majority of the show's plot, and are supplemented by their children, family dog and other secondary characters. Peter Griffin is the opposite of hegemonic masculinity in both actions and appearance. He is instead the ever-pubescent male that is currently growing in media popularity. This new form of masculinity is mounting in popularity because it seems to create a safe space for men to reaffirm their role as men. This is

accomplished by seemingly removing the pressure from men who are adjusting to their new gender roles by removing all adult responsibility. Characters that present themselves to be the bumbling idiot cannot be held accountable for their actions because people assume that they do not know any better. Peter fits this characterization, but despite his childlike demeanor he is the decision maker of the family, although his decisions always seem to get the family into trouble, causing his wife Lois to constantly criticize him.

Peter is the traditional male head-of-household and breadwinner, but he does not hold a high-ranking corporate position, as hegemonic masculinity would suggest. Rather, he is a blue-collar worker in a local toy factory. His employment at the toy factory is not the traditionally masculine blue-collar work that involves hard, manual labor. It does, however, exemplify his ever-pubescent character because his only skill is to make children's toys. Peter displays qualities stereotypically associated with blue-collar work such as low intelligence and drinking regularly with his three best friends, Quagmire, Joe, and Cleveland, at the local bar. Despite his blue-collar job and hegemonic shortcomings, Peter and his family live in a nice suburban home in the fictional town of Quahog, Rhode Island. The fact that the Griffins live in such a nice suburban home is surprising because Peter is the only working member of the family - Lois is most often depicted in the role of a stay-at-home mom, with sparse exceptions in particular episodes. For instance, in season two episode fifteen, "Dammit Janet!", Lois holds a flight attendant position until she discovers that Peter is using her benefits

to fly for free, and in season seven episode ten, “FOX-y Lady”, Lois has a brief career as a news reporter for Fox News.

Peter’s role within the family is complex. He is married to an attractive, intelligent and competent woman who is the opposite of Peter in every way. Peter’s physical appearance illustrates that he is greatly overweight, short and wears glasses. Lois, on the other hand, is often referred to in terms of her attractive appearance; she is petite and slender with large breasts. Additionally, Lois grew up in an upper-class household, which she gave up to marry Peter— much to her father’s dismay. Although Peter retains the role of head-of-household, it is Lois who is the levelheaded one and corrects the mistakes that Peter makes. Because of her attractiveness, Peter is jealous of anyone that takes Lois’ attention away from him. This jealousy is an unhealthy aspect of their relationship that is glorified through the show, teaching young male viewers that it is normal to be jealous of their partner and to act on this jealousy.

Peter’s jealousy is overtly displayed in episode nineteen of season three, “Stuck Together, Torn Apart”. In this episode, Peter’s jealousy is sparked when Lois runs into her college boyfriend, Ross Fishman, and agrees to meet him for coffee. Before the meeting with Ross, Brian reminds her of Peter’s extreme jealousy: at the movie theatre, Lois stated that Hugh Grant was handsome, which prompted Peter to get out of his seat and punch the screen while calling Grant a “home-wrecker”; while attending a concert, the male artist dedicated a song to all the ladies in the audience, causing Peter to run on stage and punch the artist; Lois came behind Peter while he was looking in the bathroom mirror and called him handsome to which Peter

responded with, “You son of a bitch!” (Hentemann & DiMartino, 2002) then proceeded to punch his own reflection and break the mirror. As soon as Lois leaves the house to meet Ross, Peter’s friends Joe, Quagmire and Cleveland show up outside of his house in a police surveillance van to make a beer run. The mini-mart happens to be right across the street from where Lois is having coffee with Ross, compelling Peter to use the surveillance van to spy on her, concluding that she is cheating on him. This revelation prompts him to do all he can to cheat on her with his past girlfriends by utilizing his “little black book,” even going as far as to bring an old girlfriend to the house. It is at this point that Lois reaches her breaking point, and tells Peter that she can no longer put up with his jealousy. Peter’s jealousy is evident in various episodes throughout the series, which creates subtle hints to viewers that jealousy is an acceptable emotion to act upon. Peter’s jealousy is not only indicative of an unhealthy relationship, but also reinforces the notion that women are a man’s property, especially in a marital relationship.

The Griffins have three children, Chris, Meg, and Stewie, and a dog, Brian, who is just as much a part of the family as the children. Chris, the middle child and eldest son, acts in a similar manner to his father. He is portrayed as having an extremely low intelligence, blindly following what his father tells him without thinking. Meg is the eldest and only female child. She takes the brunt of the emotional abuse from the family and is often the butt of everyone’s jokes, including jokes about her appearance and social skills. Stewie is the youngest son, a toddler, who is quite simply diabolical. He has plans to take over the world and to kill Lois. Stewie is of

above average intelligence and is the opposite of Peter. Brian, the family dog, is one of Peter's best friends and often participates in Peter's excessive drinking and subsequent drunken shenanigans.

The fact that *Family Guy* has an offensive creator, a vulgar cast of characters and a young following creates problems in terms of conceptions of masculinity. The masculinities presented in the sitcom are exaggerated and represent a "masculinity crisis" or a confusion of the new masculine performance - no longer are men assured that they will be the breadwinners and that women will be docile housewives (Martin, 2001). Peter represents a working class man presented in a patronizing light.

According to Hodgetts and Rua (2010) there is a growing media trend to portray these men as "culturally backward and emotionally closed 'hardhats' who [are] unwilling to communicate their troubles or contribute to domesticity. These men are sexist, subjugate women, perpetuate violence, and pose a threat to children" (p. 160). Such blue-collar men represent a form of masculinity and gender role that is shifting due to the entrance of women into the public sphere and the emergence of different, more valued masculinities such as those in the middle class (Martin, 2001). No longer are blue-collar workers celebrated in society; rather they are thought of as outdated. Peter is thus represented in *Family Guy* as childlike, foolish and irresponsible.

Neill Korobov (2009) asserts that there are multiple media characters that represent a "loveable loser" (p. 100). This man is regularly humiliated, but engages in mocking his own behavior because he is a loser only compared to the outdated macho, working-class masculinity. Peter's "loveable loser" status does not prevent other men



with more valued forms of masculinity from regularly dominating Peter both physically and emotionally, thereby reinforcing a singular, acceptable masculinity to young male viewers. More specifically, the use of sexual assault against Peter is used as a gender-policing tool that reinforces cultural notions of hegemonic masculinity.

A feminist analysis of the depictions of Peter and Lois reveals the dangers of interpreting shows with a dynamic of an attractive, intelligent wife and an ugly, unintelligent husband as postfeminist. Scholars have argued that the increasing visibility of wives as critical of their husbands is proof of the success of women's liberation due to the apparent role reversal; however, Kimberly Walsh, Elfriede Fürsich, and Bonnie Jefferson (2008) disagree. Since the introduction of *The Honeymooners* in the 1950s, a trend has emerged that uses mismatched couples as a humorous mechanism of distracting viewers from the sexist undertones of the show as well as overarching societal systems of oppression. Males in these relationships regularly use blatant sexism, but receive no negative sanctions because they are not supposed to be taken seriously. Reducing sexism to a laughing matter keeps male dominance intact and poses no threat to patriarchy. Thus, although women are frequently shown making fun of their husbands, it is clear that the men remain in charge as a result of the wife's eventual forgiveness of and submission to the husband, in spite of the fact that she herself has done no wrong. This coding of women as submissive to their husbands showcases that "it remains the task of the female protagonist to acquiesce to the 'natural' force of patriarchy" (Walsh et al., 2008, p. 132). This pattern can be observed in *Family Guy* as Lois is constantly forced to fix

Peter's mistakes while simultaneously being degraded by him and not receiving any gratitude for all that she does for him and the rest of the family.

The pleasure gained from viewing, coupled with the modeling that accompanies viewing enforces hegemonic masculinity. Men learn what it means to be a man through watching male characters on television and then emulate what they interpret as a socially valued behavior in their own lives. Men not only watch, but also bond over programs that showcase masculinity, and this bonding creates a relationship between the self and the character that serves to reinforce traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity. Television shows use images and jokes that covertly uphold traditional gender roles that are generally undetected by viewers who believe themselves to be immune to television's influence. *Family Guy* utilizes both humor and satire as tactics to reinforce hegemonic masculinity among its young male viewers. As *Family Guy*'s viewers watch the show and discuss its content with their peers, they transform what they see into what it means to be masculine. It is in this manner that television emerges as a powerful enforcer of hegemonic masculinity, which often goes unchallenged and unnoticed.

**“He made me feel so dirty.”\* : The Humorous Use of Male-on-Male Rape to Reinforce Hegemonic Masculinity**

*Family Guy*'s exploitation of humor to reinforce traditional gender roles effectively shields its ideological power over its young male audience. When viewers tune in to watch the show, they are exposed to and influenced by dominant ideologies about gender through what they believe to be innocent humor. The frequent deployment of jokes pertaining to gender in *Family Guy* remains prominent throughout the series because creator Seth MacFarlane is not immune to the pressure resulting from current shifts in gender role expectations. Like other men, MacFarlane has employed the use of homophobia to express this anxiety, the difference being that he has the ability to publically express his anxiety through *Family Guy*'s script. MacFarlane's utilization of homophobia and male rape in a humorous manner can therefore be interpreted as an effort to reinforce traditional gender roles, specifically the masculine gender role, through television.

A content analysis of six seasons of *Family Guy* exposed the pervasive pattern of homophobia within the series. In the first three seasons, which aired before the show's cancellation on Fox in 2001 – a total of fifty episodes – fifty-eight percent of episodes utilized homophobia in a humorous manner. In the other three selected seasons, seasons five, seven and eight, which aired after *Family Guy* was placed back on the air in 2005 – a total of fifty-four episodes – 72.2 percent of episodes contained instances of homophobia as humorous. When the total of 104 episodes were

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\* Hentemann, M. (Writer), & Kim, M. (Director). (2006). Stewie loves lois [Television series episode]. In S. MacFarlane, *Family Guy*. Los Angeles, CA: Fox Studios.

combined, a total of 65.4 percent made use of homophobia as a method to amuse the audience. The 14.2 percent increase in the show's use of homophobic humor after Fox put *Family Guy* back on the air illustrates that MacFarlane catered to his audience's hunger for his abrasive comedy. Some may ignore this use of homophobic humor, but if stereotypically homophobic images and rhetoric are all that viewers are exposed to, they are likely to find them truthful, which negatively influences their perception of actual homosexual men. The show's extensive use of homophobic humor also encourages audience members to use this harmful form of humor in their own lives in order to demonstrate their masculinity, mirroring what male characters manifest on the show.

In addition to the frequent use of homophobic jokes, the show also utilizes a singular, negative representation of homosexual men that reinforces damaging stereotypes. *Family Guy*'s representation of a homosexual male is characterized by an effeminate voice – usually with a lisp, effeminate mannerisms and an overt sexuality. Recurring characters represented in this way include: Stewie – the Griffin's youngest son, Jasper – Brian's cousin, Mr. Weed – Peter's boss, and Bruce – a member of the community. However, one character in particular, John Herbert – an elderly man who lives in the Griffins' neighborhood, enacts an exceedingly negative stereotype of homosexual men, which is absent in other representations. Herbert's character was developed in a manner that portrayed older homosexual men as pedophiles.

Margaret Schneider (1993), in explaining the link between homosexuality and pedophilia, states that rhetoric in the mass media links the two because such a

connection creates a platform for those who oppose homosexuality. It is the exploitation of these false assumptions that anti-gay activists have utilized in arguments against homosexual men's involvement in children's organizations, such as Big Brother or the Boy Scouts. When a homosexual man is convicted of sexual misconduct with a young boy, the media generalizes the verdict as proof of pedophilia within the entire homosexual male population. This fear of older homosexual men who prey on young heterosexual boys has an extensive cultural history, and is firmly rooted in homophobia. Since homosexual men cannot biologically reproduce, it is thought that they need to seduce young boys in order to carry on the homosexual identity. The public fears homosexual seduction because after a boy is actually sexually abused, he is presumed to have been "turned gay" regardless of his sexual orientation. Sexual abuse is therefore firmly situated as the impetus for homosexuality. Such fears persist despite research indicating that heterosexual men perpetrate the majority of sexual assaults against young boys, and thus the representation of older men as pedophiles is perpetually recycled and kept alive through television.

Herbert was almost always shown as attracted to young boys as he tried to lure them into his home or to get physically closer to him. He often made sexually explicit jokes aimed at young boys, especially toward Chris Griffin. A prime example of his pedophilia is exhibited in episode eleven of season five, "The Tan Aquatic with Steve Zissou". In this episode, Chris tried to take his paper route back from Kyle, another young man, in the presence of Herbert. While the young boys continued to argue on Herbert's lawn, Kyle pushed Chris onto the pavement, and Herbert said, "Boys, boys,

we can settle this like reasonable and sexy teenagers. Whoever can swallow the most Tylenol PM wins” (Hentemann, 2007). The comment was obviously inappropriate, but went seemingly unnoticed by Chris and Kyle, as well as the group of boys that had gathered to watch the fight. Every character on the show is aware that Herbert is a pedophile, but no one cares to challenge him, and instead use him and his pedophilia as material for their jokes. The characterization of Herbert as a pedophile is problematic because viewers are not exposed to another, let alone positive, representation of an older homosexual male. Reproducing monolithic representations, such as Herbert as a pedophile, encourages the audience to adopt the show’s homophobic attitude.

In addition to the theme of homophobia apparent in *Family Guy*, jokes involving male rape are also utilized to promote traditional conceptions of masculinity. Of the 104 episodes viewed, twenty episodes utilized male rape jokes, constituting 19.2 percent of the total episodes watched. Although there were only twenty episodes that incorporated male rape jokes, a total of twenty-five jokes were actually told, meaning that three of the twenty episodes employed more than one joke. The twenty-five male rape jokes broken down further revealed that, a total of ten, or forty percent, pertained to men being raped in prison; another nine, thirty six percent, were related to an assortment of scenarios that denoted male-on-male rape; four, or sixteen percent, of rape jokes pertained to female-to-male rape; and two, eight percent, referred to male-on-male rape in a religious context.

Although the theme of homophobia and particular instances of male rape were analyzed separately, the two are used in tandem throughout the series. As illustrated by the percentages above, homophobic humor is used more often than jokes explicitly pertaining to male rape. Arguably, this configuration was formulated and enacted in order to authenticate the use of homophobia for the viewer. The male who is victimized by rape, overwhelmingly Peter, is always less masculine than his attacker, which supports and emphasizes hegemonic masculinity's strict standards. Making light of male rape intermittently throughout the series allows the assault to be consciously ignored by the audience, while it is simultaneously admitted into the viewer's subconscious. The ubiquitous use of homophobia throughout the series, sprinkled with specific references to male rape as humorous, influences viewers to interpret both as laughable instead of serious, and innocent absurdity rather than reinforcement of traditional gender roles. It is due to the dynamic between homophobia and male rape in the series that viewers receive conflicting messages regarding male rape. The following analysis of two instances of Peter's numerous sexual assaults, and the comparison of the two, illustrates the conflicting messages *Family Guy* communicates to its audience concerning male rape. Neither message inevitably encourages men to rape other men, but one suggests that male rape is an impossibility, and the other denotes that male rape is an appropriate and effective tool for gender policing.

Unlike other television sitcoms, *Family Guy*'s animation authorizes it to push the boundaries of what can be shown on television. Since cartoons are generally

interpreted as mindless, they are often able to avoid much of the scrutiny that other television programming receives. This notion is explicit in episode eleven of season eight of *Family Guy*, an episode entitled “Dial Meg for Murder,” in which Peter is sexually assaulted both publically by a bull at a rodeo, and later privately by his daughter. Although Peter is the head of the Griffin household despite his hegemonic shortcomings, he is not immune to the policing of his masculinity.

The episode begins with Peter reading the *TV Guide*, which comments on the current episode of *Family Guy* by saying, “Peter gets more than he bargained for when he joins the rodeo” (Carter & Goldberg, 2010), foreshadowing his imminent rape. The forewarning of his future misfortune notwithstanding, Peter exudes confidence that he will be a master at the rodeo, even going so far as to compare himself to Billy the Kid. The episode then cuts to a montage of Peter at the rodeo riding a bull with ease and even possessing enough skill to stand up while riding a horse, exhibiting the American ideal of rugged masculinity.

In addition to viewing himself as overly confident, Peter lassoed and hogtied Meg. When he attempted to brand her with his initials, he discovered that she had already been branded. Mayor West, the mayor of Quahog, then appeared out of the blue, took Meg away, and said, “This is my steer” (Carter & Goldberg, 2010). Mayor West was shown as more dominant, with partial disregard for previously being depicted as homosexual – due to his use of the word steer, which signifies a male, alluding to the fact that Peter is unable to exert dominance, even over his own daughter. This attempt to brand Meg aligns with a construction of modern masculinity



that requires men to exert ownership over women. The institution of marriage first fashioned women as the property of their husbands (Lerner, 1986), and this ideology has endured as a method to maintain male dominance through remnants of coverture, such as the wife taking the husband's name in marriage. According to Nancy Cott (2011), under coverture, when a woman was married to a man in Anglo-American common law, their identity merged with their husband's. Marriage legally denied the women's existence outside of her husband, which constructed the wife as a possession and fully dependent her husband. *Family Guy* utilizes scenarios such as this in order to discretely sustain support for conventional gender roles.

When Peter finally entered the rodeo, he was performing a traditionally masculine task – riding a bull – when the more masculine bull threw Peter off his back and raped him in front of the entire rodeo audience. In critically examining this instance of sexual violence against Peter, the characteristic comparison between Peter and the bull reveals the significance of the assault's inclusion. Peter is a short and stout character with a childlike attitude and low education, who was introduced over the loudspeakers of the rodeo as “Peter the Kid” (Carter & Goldberg, 2010), thus calling attention to his pubescent nature since Peter is incapable of embodying the rugged masculinity possessed by Billy the Kid, a frontier outlaw. The bull, on the other hand, is a very muscular animal, with a dominant stance and a deep voice, which are all attributes of hegemonic masculinity. The only facet of the bull's character that signifies that he is less hegemonic than Peter is his Blackness.

Although the bull's Blackness is not hegemonic, it is representative of the idea that Black masculinity is in constant need of discipline (Collins, 2008), seeing as the bull is ridden. Collins (2008) describes the general characterization of Black masculinity as violent, deviant and animalistic, which provides sufficient justification for constant discipline. The need to discipline Black men is evidenced by police treatment of Black subjects and the disproportionate number of Black men in the criminal justice system. Jackson Katz explains in his documentary, "Tough Guise: Violence, Media, and the Crisis in Masculinity," that Black masculinity is placed solely on the body because of the lack of access to resources that those with a higher racial, and thus social, standing take for granted (Sut, 1999). Black males have fewer opportunities to gain respect, and therefore gain what respect they can through street credibility and acting tough (Sut, 1999). Since Black masculinity is deciphered through the appearance of the body, if a Black male does not present himself as externally tough, he fails to fulfill the requirements for his masculinity and is sanctioned. The bull embodied this notion in that his stance was threatening as he towered over Peter. The bull would have been overlooked had he not used his body to physically overpower Peter, a quality only attributed to Black masculinity.

Patricia Hill Collins (2008) indicates that Black masculinity is not only based on the body, but also labeled as animalistic. This stereotypical representation of Black men as animalistic is visibly portrayed in this episode; the Black male is actually depicted as an animal, not merely alluded to as animalistic. Such a representation also places the focus on the bull's body as hypersexual; not only is the bull able to

overpower Peter, the bull is also able to successfully sexually assault Peter. Nothing prompted the bull to rape Peter, and it is therefore left to the viewer to interpret the incident as an act of the hypersexual nature of Black masculinity. The bull's threatening stance and visibly muscular body thus indicate *Family Guy*'s perpetuation of this stereotypical and racist representation of Black masculinity.

In order to confirm that Peter's masculinity is inferior to the masculinity possessed by the bull, Peter was subjected to a very public sexual assault. The sexual assault demonstrated the bull's dominance over Peter, and reaffirmed to the audience that the bull's masculinity was closer to the hegemonic ideal and thus superior to Peter's lesser form of masculinity. Despite the fact that the bull was not himself hegemonic, he sexually assaulted Peter in order to establish for others that he was more closely aligned with the hegemonic ideal than Peter. The bull perpetrated the rape in order to physically emasculate Peter. Therefore, the show perpetuated the notion that men who embody qualities associated with hegemonic masculinity will always come out on top, and in this case, quite literally.

Peter's role reversed from the alpha male when he was initially riding the bull, to the subordinate when the more masculine bull used Peter's body for his own benefit. Peter's character can even be described as feminized during this scene – when he was on the ground attempting to fight off the bull. Instead of a masculine fistfight, the bull dragged Peter by his legs, while Peter feebly kicked the bull in an attempt to get away. When his kicking proved unsuccessful, Peter proceeded to slap the bull in

the face in a last ditch effort to prevent the assault, all the while clawing at the ground in a struggle to distance himself from the bull.

The bull is not only a representation of hegemonic masculinity, it is also a racist representation of sexual assault. Rape myths persist that fuel continual fear of Black men, especially among white women. White people assume that they are more likely to be assaulted by a Black man who will jump out of the bushes or attack them in a dark alley. Such erroneous beliefs maintain and reinforce the myth that Black males commonly perpetrate rape against white females. Although Peter is not a biological female, he is feminized during the rape, and it can therefore be concluded that his rape served to promote this myth. The myth that Black men frequently rape white women has endured as a stereotype since slavery, and has remained intact despite progress made in terms of civil rights. A Black bull raping Peter, who is white, also upholds the false conviction that Black men are more likely to be rapists than white men, due to Black masculinity being viewed as hypersexual. The deliberate depiction of the bull as Black served to reinforce the prevailing stereotype of African-Americans as hypersexual, and Black men in particular as sexually predatory.

Not only was the bull sexualized in the actual act of rape, but also when the bull was shown on his bed later in the episode reading a magazine entitled “Big Black Udders,” while calling Peter on the phone. This title alluded to another racist stereotype of African-American men as only attracted to Black women who are curvy with large breasts and buttocks. Racism is further exposed when the bull referred to himself as a “breeding bull” (Carter & Goldberg, 2010). This meant that the bull’s sole

purpose was to have sex and reproduce, a common stereotype attributed to Black men. Thought to be inextricably true among poor Black men, this stereotype assumes that the lifestyle of poor Black men involves having multiple children by multiple partners, a lifestyle that the bull freely took pride in and claimed. Such continued exploitation of Black male sexuality, especially toward a white victim, encouraged viewers to maintain their utilization of harmful, damaging stereotypes against Black males.

Hegemonic masculinity dictates that Peter should have fought more “like a man,” instead of resorting to slapping and kicking, which are coded as feminine fighting techniques. The calculated representation of Peter’s fighting as feminized made the sexual assault more palatable to viewers. If Peter were to have been depicted in a traditionally masculine manner, *Family Guy*’s young male audience would have been uncomfortable with the scene. However, what was depicted encouraged viewers to interpret this scene, and male rape in general, as a joke.

The dominance of the bull was also acknowledged when the rodeo’s audience, including Peter’s wife, son, daughter, and dog, reacted to the rape, but they neither intervened on Peter’s behalf nor spoke of the assault after the scene ended. Prior to the rodeo’s beginning, Lois said to her children, “pray that he [Peter] comes out of this uninjured” (Carter & Goldberg, 2010). Apparently, this hope solely meant physically, because she did not react negatively to the rape, nor did she acknowledge that Peter was hurt in any way. When Lois, Meg and Stewie witnessed the assault they opened their mouths and gasped, but that marked the end of their reaction to Peter’s violent, public sexual assault. Brian, the family dog’s reaction was even more callous because

he was trying to advance his career as a writer by speaking with the female magazine reporter next to him before, during and after the assault. He did not even blink an eye when he witnessed his best friend's brutal rape.

The portrayal of the audience's reaction mirrored society's real life ambivalence to male-on-male rape. Modern conceptions of masculinity assume that men should be strong and always in control of their bodies and sexualities. The fact that Peter's body was conquered, and his sexuality taken hostage by the more masculine bull, implied that Peter was not a real man, and thus his rape served as an effective, and necessary, policing of his masculinity. Peter's family also reinforced such gender policing when they witnessed, but did not administer aid, to Peter as he was first raped by the bull, and then subsequently lay shaking on the ground in the fetal position with his pants lying next to him on the arena floor. Lois, Meg and Chris did briefly grimace, but they did not move to intervene in the moment nor did they speak to Peter about the incident for the remainder of the episode. This portrayal of male rape supports the prevailing belief that men have the competency and strength to defend themselves (Chapleau et al., 2008), and that they deserve rape if they cannot stop their attacker. Homophobia emerges as central to this belief due to the manner in which a male victim is described as deserving of the assault in the same way female victims are believed to be asking for their assault. Masculinity is constructed in opposition to femininity, and when it fails to oppose the feminine, homophobia is deployed.

Another indicator of hegemonic masculinity addressed was the depth and tone of a man's voice. Hegemonic masculinity requires men have a deep voice, which is in sharp contrast to women who generally have higher pitched voices. Peter's voice was not necessarily as high as a woman's, but was noticeably higher than that of the bull. The higher pitch of Peter's voice served as another hegemonic standard that Peter failed to live up to. Peter and the bull also had dissimilar tones, which portrayed the bull as dominant and Peter as submissive. When speaking, the bull spoke without pausing and in an extremely stern and steady manner, however, when Peter spoke, it was without force, almost childlike.

In addition to the pitch and tone of the two voices, the words that were spoken were also significant. After the bull threw Peter to the ground, he asked Peter if he knew what kind of bull he was back at the ranch, and answers that he is "a breedin' bull." Peter then said, "Wha...Wha... What's that?" to which bull replied, "You gonna find out." This exemplified the use of tone to enforce an idealistic masculinity, but it also demonstrated the aggressiveness of the bull. The bull had been raised to have sex as his main duty, and he transcribed this role onto Peter. When Peter tried to crawl away from the bull in order to avoid the assault, the bull pulled him back by his legs and said, "Where you goin' fatty? We're gonna have a party" (Carter & Goldberg, 2010). These words again exemplified the bull's dominant nature, which provided the sanction not only for Peter's sexual assault, but also for the bull's emotional attack on Peter by calling him out as fat, another aspect of hegemonic masculinity that Peter failed to embody.

In addition to the words spoken before the rape, the bull also exerted dominance over Peter after the sexual assault occurred. Standing above Peter's shaking body while leaning against the arena railing, the bull said to Peter, "I have a house on the cape, maybe you come visit... maybe you call a few days in advance to give me time to get the house clean... maybe you bring a blazer so we can go to a wide range of restaurants," to which Peter responded in an uneasy manner, "maybe... ok... I, I'll bring a blazer" (Carter & Goldberg, 2010). This continued dominance does not give Peter's masculinity an opportunity to redeem itself, but rather illustrated the bull's policing of Peter's less than hegemonic masculinity.

The rape of Peter by the bull is a compelling example of how television is in a constant police state when it comes to gender. If Peter's character had adhered to more hegemonic standards for masculinity, it is less likely that he would have been raped as part of an animated sitcom targeted at a young male audience. Such representations of gender policing perpetuate and defend the unrealistic standards held by hegemonic masculinity. Not only is Peter raped in public by a bull that personifies a more powerful masculinity, but the incident was also never addressed or dealt with by Peter, his family or the rodeo audience. His assault was just a bump in the road, and a joke for the audience. The seriousness of male-on-male sexual assault was never attested to, leading the audience to think that it is appropriate to use sexual violence as an avenue through which people can be forced into a particular gender role or power and dominance can be exerted. Rape in this instance was used as a homophobic policing agent in order to confront Peter's unacceptable embodiment of masculinity.



In addition to being subjected to a public sexual assault by the bull at the rodeo, Peter is also privately assaulted by his daughter in the same episode. Meg is usually portrayed as a timid, self-conscious and awkward character who has yet to find out who she is or where she belongs. She is a follower who does what other characters tell her to do, in an effort to find acceptance and make whatever friends she can. Meg desperately tries to become part of the popular crowd at her high school, but she is always harshly rejected. Not only an outcast at school, she is also an outcast at home where she is often the butt of the family's jokes. Although her family often takes advantage of Meg due to of her weak nature, in this episode, Meg finds herself hardened and thus in control due to her time in jail.

As part of a class project, Meg began to write letters to a young man, Luke, who was serving jail time in the Quahog Adult Correctional Institute. Through writing letters back and forth, Meg fell in love with Luke and began to personally visit him in the prison. Luke told Meg that he was in jail because he robbed a convenience store in order to pay for his mother's medication, and that he was denied parole, which meant he would be in jail for another three years. Meg believed Luke whole-heartedly, prompting her to hide him in her room after he escaped from jail by slipping over the fence during a prison riot. When Luke first arrived at the Griffin home, he and Meg exchanged a kiss, and Luke said to Meg, "It's nice to be in front of someone for once" (Carter & Goldberg, 2010). This joke brazenly alludes to the prison rape he experienced while he was incarcerated. Utilizing prison rape for the content of a joke reinforces the cultural notion that men should expect to be raped in prison, and that

they deserve it if they are incarcerated. Not only was rape a prominent theme throughout this episode, but inclusion of a prison rape joke also made light of a subject that is already not seriously addressed.

When Brian and Stewie told Peter and Lois that Meg was seeing a convict, they were anything but pleased. Peter told Meg that she needed to be careful who she gets involved with, when he himself was still under the control of the bull that sexually assaulted at the beginning of the episode. When Peter was attempting to discipline Meg for her dating behavior, the bull called Peter at home and intimidated him into meeting him for “coitus” (Carter & Goldberg, 2010), and to pick wine up along the way. Peter did not try to refuse the bull’s advances, but rather made up an excuse about being needed at work before leaving the house to meet the bull. Peter’s actions illustrate a textbook example of an abusive relationship – being put down by the bull, being isolated from his family, being viewed as a possession by the bull, and being told what to do by the bull (loveisrespect.org) – that thoroughly contradict what he was telling Meg about her relationship.

Meg initially managed to hide Luke in her room after his escape, but when Brian came in to Meg’s room to apologize to her for telling Peter and Lois about her relationship with Luke, he found Luke hiding in the closet. Peter walked in to the room and discovered Luke, but he became confused. In order to make sense of the situation, he took out the *TV Guide* and reread what he read at the beginning of the episode: “Peter gets more than he bargained for when he joins the rodeo,” and responds to it by stating, “Boy did I” (Carter & Goldberg, 2010). This is the only

occasion in which Peter acknowledged his assault, and the manner in which he did so did not denote it as a serious or momentous occasion, but rather as a humorous one. Once Peter had reflected on his encounter at the rodeo, he continued to read about the episode in the *TV Guide*, through which he learned that Meg was dating a convict, finally realizing that Luke was that convict.

When Peter finished talking, Luke took the opportunity to take off running so as to avoid going back to jail. Unfortunately, he ran downhill, and this did not bode well for him since Joe, one of Peter's best friends and the neighborhood policeman, was wheelchair-bound, which made him significantly faster than Luke. Meg tried to defend Luke to Joe, but was arrested herself for harboring a fugitive. The last look at Meg before she was released from prison was of her in a cell with two large Black women. This imagery perpetuated yet another negative stereotype that African-Americans account for most people who find themselves in prison. There is only one other Black character in the show, one of Peter's best friends Cleveland, and it seems out of place that there were suddenly two Black women in Meg's prison cell. This scene thus provoked the viewer to believe that the majority of African-Americans in Quahog were locked away in prison, a myth held by the general American public.

The next time Meg appeared in the episode, she forcefully opened the front door to her home, and in front of her stunned family declared, "You're all my bitches now." The once docile and awkward girl appeared for the first time as tattooed, wearing her hair in a bandanna and with a deeper voice than when she went into jail. Immediately when she enters the home, she asserted her newfound dominance by

asking, "Who is the biggest, toughest guy?" (Carter & Goldberg, 2010). When Peter answered that he was, she proceeded to beat him up despite the fact that he was twice her size. New prisoners, in an effort to ensure that other prisoners will not assault them, often utilize this tactic; Meg employed this tactic in order to gain dominance over her entire family. Following this physical assault, Meg also sexually assaulted Peter in the shower, another typical assumption about the circumstances surrounding prison rape.

Peter was shown showering when Meg suddenly entered the shower. Peter looked shocked as he asked Meg why she was in the shower with him. Meg replied, "shower time" in a flat tone, and this was when Peter noticed the phallic-shaped loofa in Meg's hand. He asked what the loofa was for, again falling back into in a shaky voice, to which Meg replied, "don't worry about it." The camera panned out, and the audience could not see Peter, but it could hear him scream, "Ah! You told me not to worry about it! I should have been worried the whole time!" (Carter & Goldberg, 2010) signaling Peter's second sexual assault in the span of one twenty-one minute episode.

Although Peter yelled at the top of his lungs while Meg assaulted him, not one of his family members came to his aid. He was taking a shower in his own home when he was assaulted, within earshot of his entire family, and yet not one person reacted, let alone came up the stairs to investigate what the commotion was. At least when Peter was assaulted at the rodeo his family had a look of shock on their faces. It can therefore be inferred, according to Peter's family, that not only did he deserve his

second assault, but also because he had already been victimized, this assault did not even garner their attention. Since Peter had already been assaulted earlier in the episode, he was emasculated. Such an emasculation culturally permits the male to be continually victimized because he is more feminine than masculine. Once again, Peter's masculinity was policed and dominated by someone who possessed more masculine qualities.

Although it was not another male that sexually assaulted Peter, Meg embodied a more masculine persona than Peter did after she returned from prison. This persona could be seen in full when Meg went back to school with her new, tougher appearance and was called a "dude" (Carter & Goldberg, 2010) by the popular crowd in the lunchroom. She did not retaliate with words, but rather hit them all over the head with a bag containing multiple cans of soda. After she knocked out the most popular girl in school, Connie Damico, with the bag of soda cans, she forcefully kissed her and then walked away. When she returned home, her entire family was visibly afraid of her, and they found themselves unwilling to disobey her. Peter even went as far as to punch Stewie in the face at Meg's command. It is not until Brian convinced Meg that she was not acting like her true self that she changed her demeanor. However, even after she went back to being docile and awkward, she did not apologize to Peter for the sexual assault, further reinforcing the notion that Peter deserved it.

Meg's rape of Peter provided another gripping example of television's unrelenting gender policing. Despite the fact that Meg was a female perpetrator, she was still closer to the hegemonic ideal than Peter was. Since Peter was presented as a

bumbling idiot, when Meg returned from her jail time was tough and in control, she embodied qualities that were reminiscent of hegemonic masculinity. It is in this way that Meg polices Peter's masculinity just as the bull had earlier in the episode. Still, instead of taking this time to address the issue of male rape seriously, creators choose to utilize the issue of male rape purely for its entertainment value.

Episode one of season five of *Family Guy*, "Stewie Loves Lois," also had a central theme of male rape, as the plot followed Peter through an experience of what he believed to be rape. The episode began with Peter visiting Dr. Hartman's office due to a shortage of flu shots. Dr. Hartman refused to give him the shot in favor of allocating the few shots that were available to the elderly, but Peter fell onto the needle, and Dr. Hartman was forced to inject him with the vaccine. As Dr. Hartman looked through Peter's chart, he realized that Peter was overdue for a prostate exam. Unaware of what the procedure entailed, Peter agreed. Dr. Hartman proceeded with the exam, telling Peter to "drop your pants, turn around, and lean forward," followed by the placement of his finger in Peter's rectum, which Peter interpreted as rape. Peter reacted to the exam by jumping back and crashing into the cabinet behind him, yelling "Get away from me!" before running out of the office and all the way home crying with his pants around his ankles.

When Peter returned home, he was visibly upset, and Lois said, "Peter, my God, you look terrible. What happened?" Peter replied, "I was raped." Lois' first reaction was to laughingly ask, "What?" (Hentemann, 2006). Peter explained what he believed to have happened between him and Dr. Hartman, causing Lois' tone to

change to informative, telling Peter that what he had experienced was in fact a prostate exam and not rape. Her tone was indicative of what larger society holds to be true about male rape – that it does not happen. She believed so strongly that men could not be raped, that her first reaction was to laugh even though she was unaware of the events that transpired. Lois' tone did not change from disbelief to concerned until after she realized that Peter was mistaken about experiencing rape. She tried to explain that Dr. Hartman had done what was required for a prostate exam, but did not address his rape concerns.

The remainder of the episode unfolded as an extended rape joke beginning with Peter's leaving Lois in the kitchen since she was unsupportive and turning on the television in the living room. Sitting with Brian on the couch, the first program that appeared was *Freddy Got Fingered*, followed by the glowing finger of *E.T. the Extraterrestrial*. When Peter changed the channel, a commercial for the Yellow Pages with the slogan "Let your fingers do the walking" appeared, and Peter turned off the television. By this point, Peter was again crying as he scuffled up the stairs to his room. Lois came up to try and comfort him, but said that she found it hard to do so because it was just a prostate exam.

The next scene showed Peter in the bathroom looking at himself in the mirror and jaggedly cutting his hair. As Peter cut his hair, he said to himself in the mirror, "Who's that? Who are you? Where's Peter? Where is he? You're a whore. Wear your whore make-up you whore" (Hentemann, 2006). As Peter called himself a whore, he was putting lipstick all over his face, paying no attention to his lips. This scene again

feminizes Peter, similar to his feminization when the bull rapes him, in the way that the rhetoric he uses is consistent with what the media portrays in terms of female rape survivors. He was not acting stoic and hiding his pain as a man “should,” but was rather acting out in a “feminine” manner due to his assault. This is problematic for the viewer because it reinforces the notion that only females are raped, not only because of Lois’ reaction, but also because Peter is portrayed as feminine during instances of his sexual assaults.

Later in the episode Peter was at the local bar, the Drunken Clam, with Joe, Cleveland and Quagmire, and he was still visibly upset from his prostate exam. The dialogue that ensued did not discuss male rape seriously, but rather continued to make light of the experience. When prompted, Peter told his friends, “I went to Dr. Hartman’s yesterday and he did things to my fanny,” and he again began to cry. Cleveland was the first to chime in, stating that he too has “felt the cold finger of injustice on [his] insidey parts.” Quagmire admitted that, “Dr. Hartman violated me as well. I only went in there for a physical-slash-guinea pig removal, but I turned out to be the guinea pig, for his sexual experimentation.” Joe responded by saying, “You guys are a bunch of queers,” before briefly turning away. However, Joe quickly returned to the table and stated, “And so am I. Oh God it was horrible! I scrubbed and scrubbed, but they don’t make water hot enough!” MacFarlane had one more joke up his sleeve and used Peter to deploy it when Peter realized that Dr. Hartman had victimized them all, “I will not turn a brown eye to this. I am going to sue that bastard and make him pay out the ass. No if, ands, or butts. I’m going to be really anal about



this. [pause] Sphincter” (Hentemann, 2006). This is an inappropriate comment for Peter to make, especially since he truly believed that he was sexually assaulted. Usually victims of sexual assault do not want to speak about their assault, and would not voluntarily make jokes pertaining to the subject of their assault. By utilizing this joke pertaining to male-on-male rape, *Family Guy* again invoked homophobia, thus reinforcing the traditionally masculine gender role.

The action Peter decided to take was to sue Dr. Hartman for damages. When Peter told his family of his plan, they tried to convince Peter not to because what he experienced was a prostate exam, to which Peter responded, “Are you saying I asked for this to happen?” The rhetoric Peter used here reflected larger societal myths regarding rape, which deduce that rape victims asked for and deserved their assault, commonly known as victim blaming. In court, Peter dramatically portrayed the incident as Dr. Hartman seducing him while telling him to “Relax, I’m a doctor.” As Peter was testifying on the stand, his version of the story was depicted in a way reminiscent of an old horror film – grainy, black and white images with eerie music playing in the background. When Dr. Hartman stood up to protest what Peter was saying, indicating that the judge too had had a standard prostate exam by him, Peter convinced the judge that Dr. Hartman had also victimized him. After this revelation the court hearing ended abruptly with the judge shouting, “Guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty!” (Hentemann, 2006) and revoking Dr. Hartman’s medical license.

After the trial, Peter, Joe, Quagmire, and Cleveland were again in the Drunken Clam. When Quagmire asked Peter what he did with his “pain and suffering money,”

Peter responded that he had been injected with collagen, a completely irresponsible and tasteless way to spend money received from a sexual assault lawsuit. In a cut scene, Peter showed Lois his new collagen-injected lips stating, "Hey Lois, wanna make out? Yeah, what do you think of new sexy lips, Peter? Yeah. This is your life from now on. Enjoy it, lucky wife" (Hentemann, 2006). Once again feminized, Peter used his money to make himself appear more sexual by enhancing his lips, another shameless mockery of his assault, and male-on-male rape in general. Sexual assault is a traumatic experience, and *Family Guy* treated it as if it had no effect on the victim. When the scene cut back to the Drunken Clam, Peter realized that he needed a prostate exam after all, as indicated by his constant need to urinate.

The episode concluded with Peter making up with Dr. Hartman, and convincing the judge to reinstate his medical license. However, MacFarlane did not let the episode end without one last rape joke. As Dr. Hartman and Peter are preparing to leave the courtroom, Peter said to Dr. Hartman, "And to think I actually thought you raped me." Dr. Hartman surprisingly responded, "Well I was going to but you ran out of the room." Peter looked confused and uneasy and said, "What?" to which Dr. Hartman said "Ah!" (Hentemann, 2006) and pointed at Peter who returned the gesture. The last thing the viewer heard was the sound of a live studio audience clapping. Once more, male rape was portrayed as nothing but a lighthearted joke, which, in this instance, served to reconnect the accused perpetrator and the accuser.

The entire episode treated male rape as an impossibility, and mocked the notion of such a possibility. Homophobia was deployed every time Peter was

feminized during and after he was sexual abused. Based on the belief that men cannot be raped, it was necessary to feminize Peter in order to make his rape tolerable to the audience. If Peter would have embodied an idealized masculinity, his rape would have been intolerable; however, he was not, and his lack of hegemony served to reinforce others to hold themselves to a higher hegemonic standard. This utilization of homophobia allowed the topic of male rape to go undetected and unchallenged in the show just as it does in larger society. Since young male viewers are exposed to this material much more often than they are exposed to informative material about male-on-male rape, these jokes must be critically evaluated.

Interestingly, when Peter believed that Dr. Hartman had raped him, although he had not, he took the matter seriously and sued the doctor. However, when Peter was actually raped by the bull, he did not mention his continued abuse to anyone nor did he take any legal action. Additionally, Peter was not shy when telling numerous people about his perceived assault stemming from his prostate exam, but remained painfully silent when the bull sexually assaulted him and then continued to harass him through the majority of the episode. Of these two conflicting messages transmitted to the audience, neither is an accurate portrayal of the reality of male rape. Both Peter's encounter with Dr. Hartman and with the bull present Peter as feminized, which served to reinforce cultural notions of homophobia, as well as the myth that men cannot be raped. Throughout these two episodes specifically, Peter conformed to the construction of male homosexuality within *Family Guy*, which is already familiar to

the show's viewers: his voice became higher, he put on make-up and talked about his feelings, and he was generally less masculine than his attacker.

Peter's character is part of a growing sitcom trend that presents the male as less intelligent, ugly and befuddled (Walsh et al., 2008). With this characterization in place, homophobia is all the cultural allowance needed to mock Peter's repeated assaults. The feminization of Peter is humorous due to its break from tenets of hegemonic masculinity. His rape is further tolerated because his character was not developed as hegemonic in the first place. If Peter's character had been developed to embody hegemonic masculinity to a greater extent, his sexual assault would have raised more red flags for both viewers and critics, and would have had the potential to open up a dialogue concerning the serious, real-world issue of male-on-male rape. However, humor prevents such conversations from taking place and shields viewers from the show's ideological dominance. It is therefore through humor that the utilization of male-on-male rape in *Family Guy* serves to reinforce hegemonic masculinity by exploiting homophobia.

## Conclusion

The literature and an analysis of the show itself have illuminated the problematic nature of negative messages broadcast to *Family Guy*'s fans. The pervasive, yet subtle, theme of homophobia throughout the series primes its audience, especially young men, to accept the portrayals of male-on-male rape and to understand it as a laughing matter. Such an interpretation presents real problems to men who have been victims of male-on-male rape because their claims are not taken seriously, and the men themselves are then chastised as emasculated. The persistence of homophobia as a facet of hegemonic masculinity in the media encourages – as well as teaches – young men to use similar tactics in their own lives to display masculine dominance. The media is increasingly becoming a simulated reality and if the same, harmful representations continue to be recycled, social acceptance of change will remain hindered.

Attention is needed to television programs such as *Family Guy* because of the way in which they exist in an area situated between reality and fiction. As Alison Crawford (2009) has noted, the animated nature of *Family Guy* opens up the genre of cartoons to a wider audience. In addition to garnering a wider audience, the animation draws in children who are unable to distinguish between children's cartoons and adult cartoons. Children are more vulnerable to the show's ideologies about gender, and are thus conditioned to push back against the current gender role shifts. This blurring of reality and fiction creates a space for *Family Guy* to exert its influence without the audience's awareness. The Griffins appear to be an all-American family, which is

reinforced at the beginning of each episode with a theme song that describes the Griffins as wholesome and normal. Presenting the Griffins as a plausible construction of family contributes to the show's ideological influence, as the content is real enough to be believable, but not real enough to raise red flags as offensive material.

Seth MacFarlane has skillfully hidden behind his animation for the majority of his career, but his recent appearance as the host of the Academy Awards left MacFarlane himself open to criticism. He incorporated his homophobic humor into his hosting of the 2013 Academy Awards, which showed the world that his humor had successfully broken out of the realm of animated comedy. True to form, MacFarlane deployed joke after joke, offensive, and often homophobic, to viewers worldwide. The audience demographic that tunes in to watch the annual award show differs vastly from the young male demographic that constitutes *Family Guy*'s target audience, and it was this demographic shift coupled with the sheer number of people who tuned in to watch the Oscars that garnered the media backlash against MacFarlane. He could not hide his words behind an animated character – with the exception of Ted, an animated teddy bear from his 2012 film *Ted* – but rather exposed his true colors. Through such a public forum, MacFarlane's trademark abrasive humor was disseminated widely, serving to continue to endear him to his fans, while ostracizing him from those who can see through his humorous charade.

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