FAMILY GUY*:* TEXTUAL DEVICES AND MASCULINE VICES

by

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(Under the Direction of Christine Harold)

ABSTRACT

As the first animated situation comedy to be "uncancelled" due to its record breaking DVD sales, Family Guy is one in several contemporary animated sitcoms attracting a predominantly male audience. This project explores the attraction of this crude, politically incorrect satire of American suburbia to nineteen to thirty-four year old males. By exposing strategies of intertextuality and self-reflexivity, this project reveals that audiences are rewarded for media saturation. Further, in continuing a tradition of television portrayals of working-class men as foolish, childish, and unmanly, Peter Griffin's character invites the audience to mock working-class stereotypes while simultaneously solidifying their subordinate status. This project attempts to add to the current discussion of animated situation comedy as well and working-class media representations.

INDEX WORDS: Situation comedy, Limited animation, Pastiche, Intertextuality, Self-reflexivity, "Masculinity in Crisis," Phallus, Metrosexuality, NASCAR Dads

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother and brother. Despite the fact that you fostered in me a sharp ability to procrastinate, your unwavering faith in my intelligence helped bring forth a new coolness. Thank you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Introduction

On June 30th, 1999, the New York Times reported that Episcopal Priest Richardson Schell, former headmaster of the private Kent School in Rhode Island, began a one-man campaign against the animated comedy Family Guy, about a dysfunctional Rhode Island family (Consoli, "Headmaster Zaps Fox Guy", De Moraes). During an interview, Schell claimed that his fight against Fox's Family Guy initially had to do with the fact that the show's creator, former Kent School student Seth MacFarlane, named his cartoon family "Griffin" after the family of Schell's assistant. After MacFarlane refused to change the name, Schell moved forward with his attack, claiming that Family Guy had an "obnoxious, objectionable content" (Mifflin 1). Schell's determination resulted in the creation of a front group he called ProudSponsors, U.S.A. As the sole member of his "group," Schell sent letters to seventeen companies, including Sprint, Dr. Pepper, Isuzu, Philips Consumer Electronics, The Gap, Old Navy, Chevrolet, McDonald's, and KFC, requesting they pull their advertisements from the animated comedy he labeled as "racist, sexist, anti-Semitic," and generally demeaning (Belcher 6; Carter 6E). Ultimately, his boycott convinced up to four sponsors to remove their advertisements from the lineup.

Schell, however, was not alone in his aversion for the show. Coca-Cola dropped their sponsorship after their own review of the cartoon's content. Similarly, Mary Carnavale, spokeswoman for Philip Morris, stated that the tobacco company removed their "youth smoking prevention" campaign from the show because "it is not consistent with our values as a company" (Carter, 6E). Perhaps executives at Philip Morris were responding to a Family Guy episode

featuring a doll called “Baby Smokes-a-lot,” equipped with her own cigarette and recorded phrases such as “Tastes like happy” (“Mr. Griffin Goes to Washington”).

Family Guy, which began airing on Fox network in 1999, has received numerous negative reviews, due in large part to its flippant content. Many complain that the show’s humor is cheap, crude, and too perverse for network television (Cuprisin). One critic claimed that “Family Guy is really just a desperate plea for attention” (Feran 6H). Tom Shales, staff writer for the Washington Post, was even harsher, contending that “Family Guy is just another tiny drop of toxic waste in the festering Love Canal of the Air” (CO1). Further, the show’s content has managed to upset many religious groups. For instance, Kay McFadden, television critic for the Seattle Times reported that the Ancient Order of Hibernians was “after creator Seth MacFarlane for depicting an Irish-American cartoon family as dysfunctional and alcoholic” (“Fox’s Family Guy” E1). Additionally, Jewish groups spoke against the inclusion of a “GI Jew” action figure in one episode, and other advocacy groups have condemned the show for trivializing child abuse.

While the attacks against the show may be particularly severe, contemporary animated situation comedies are known for attracting negative criticism. In fact, many parents have spoken out against their children watching The Simpsons, the longest-running animated comedy on television today, having been in syndication for over a decade. In her article “‘We Hardly Watch that Rude, Crude Show’: Class and Taste in The Simpsons,” journalist and media scholar Diane Alters analyzed audience reception of the wildly popular television show. Her research concludes that viewers depict The Simpsons as a “low-culture product, containing inappropriate language and subject matter” (171). In a similar vein, Family Guy contains envelope-pushing material. For instance, Peter Griffin describes Republicans as “white guys who are afraid of

change," Quagmire, the next door neighbor, has a collection of blow-up sex dolls, and Brian, the family dog, becomes addicted to cocaine. As these examples illustrate, Family Guy is, as a Fox vice president claims, "a satire of political correctness" (Mifflin, 1E).

Despite the fact that Family Guy has earned very negative reviews, its success suggests that audiences and other critics praise its content. In fact, the relatively new and extremely popular trend of subversive animated comedies has been intriguing to several media critics. Scholars have published a large amount of work on The Simpsons (Alters 2003; Cantor 1999; Glynn 1996; Irwin, Conrad, and Skoble 2001; Kobland 2001; Lewis 2002; Ott 2003; Pinsky 2001; Rhodes 2001). For instance, in his article "'I'm Bart Simpson, Who the Hell are You?' A Study in Postmodern Identity (Re)Construction," media scholar Brian Ott argues that The Simpsons' characters Bart, Homer, and Lisa function as distinctive yet nonexclusive models of identity, and offer viewers a variety of resources for enacting particular identity modes. Specifically, he argues that Bart privileges attitude over appearance, appealing to "cyberpunks" who spend a lot of time in online communities where their appearance is "quickly evacuated" (64).

Scholars have also looked at the animated series Daria (Newman 2003), South Park (Ott 2003; Ash 2000), Ren and Stimpy (Farely 2003) and The Powerpuff Girls (van Fuqua 2003). However, while several works succeed in providing sound rhetorical contextual readings of The Simpsons (Ott 2003; Irwin, Conard, and Skoble 2001; Pinsky 2001) and South Park (Ott 2003), analyses of other animated comedies have much work to do in terms of identifying persuasive contextual elements and discussing the programs' functions in postmodern society. For example, in her essay "From Fred and Wilma to Ren and Stimpy: What Makes a Cartoon 'Prime-time'?" Rebecca Farley observes that "conventional explanations of the success of those few cartoons

which did make it in prime-time are unsatisfactory, telling us little about the texts themselves or the way they function within the industrial apparatus" (147). In other words, most scholarship on animation does not put enough focus on content, instead honing in on the audiovisual aspects of the genre. While Farley is correct in that some theorists have overlooked important textual elements is not to say that contemporary criticism of animated sitcoms is poor; rather, she speaks to the importance of addressing both the audiovisual aspects as well as textual analyses.

Still, too much emphasis on audiovisuality leaves important questions unanswered: Why do texts with heavy use of intertextual references and self-reflexivity gain such highly ambivalent reviews? How does the performance of masculinity, apparent in several contemporary animated comedies such as King of the Hill, South Park, The Simpsons, and Family Guy, speak to conventional ideas regarding masculinity? How does the content function as a cultural critique? In order to understand contemporary animated comedies, these questions are important to address.

Specifically, Seth MacFarlane's Family Guy is representative of this new genre, and its unique life in syndication invites a rhetorical criticism for the following reasons: (1) Family Guy combines unique stylistic devices which function to create a pastiche text capable of consistently violating the audience's expectations; (2) Through the heavy use of intertextual and self-reflexive strategies, Family Guy nods to the increasing difficulty in distinguishing media from reality, while also suggesting a reinterpretation of the term self-reflexivity; and (3) Family Guy, targeted at 18-39 year-old males, includes extremely sexist commentaries which serve to mock working-class male stereotypes while simultaneously subordinating working-class status. The following chapters will address these issues. However, before discussing the framework and

theoretical approach necessary for an analysis of Family Guy, its story and characters must be introduced.

Family Guy

As the youngest executive producer in history at twenty-five years of age, Seth MacFarlane landed a $2.5 million contract with Fox network for his animated sitcom Family Guy (Goodale 18). In fact, it took only the first eight minutes of his demo tape to convince executives that his show deserved the coveted post-Super Bowl time slot in 1999. In an effort to compete with Matt Groening's legendary The Simpsons for the time slot, Fox chose Family Guy to capture the target audience of 19-49 year old males (Belcher, "UPN," 3).

Family Guy follows the lives of the Griffins: Peter and wife Lois, children Meg, Chris, baby Stewie, and the family dog, Brian. Peter, who works at a toy factory, is the typical working-class beer guzzling buffoon. He is the primary cause of most of his family's problems, often getting them in trouble with money, the law, and neighbors. His actions have landed him in jail, in a full body cast, and have even left him the victim of an acid spill. Lois, an attractive and fiery red-head, is a stay-at-home mom who struggles in coping with Peter's intolerable sexist behavior. She often overlooks Peter's wretched manners and childish antics out of love. Meg, a dorky teenager dying for popularity, charm, and good looks, cannot seem to shed her awkward and youthful appearance, and often finds herself horribly embarrassed by her family, particularly her father. She even tricked them into being the special guests on a talk show in hopes they would realize how difficult they make her life ("Fifteen Minutes of Shame"). Chris, also a teenager, is oblivious to almost everything, yet suffers through the pangs of puberty. In one episode, he flirts with bisexuality as a result of an aggressive kiss planted on him by a girl he

mistook for a boy ("To Live and Die in Dixie"). Stewie is a diabolical baby genius intent on killing his mother and taking over the world. He speaks with a snobby British accent, perfect fluidity, and a highly developed vocabulary. Brian, the family dog, is seen as a regular family member. In fact, he walks erect, operating as a human stuck in a dog's body, while at the same compelled by dog instinct. For instance, he urinates on fire hydrants, but stands erect rather than lifting his leg. His alcoholism gets him into trouble once in a while, but he plays an important role in the family in that he often serves as the voice of reason.

Both Stewie and Brian are cited by popular press as being the characters with the most "breakout potential." Rolling Stone states that, "based on a first look, our favorite member of the show's Griffin clan will be Stewie, a diabolic, Peter Lorre-look-alike infant who plots to take over the world" (Wild 69). Brian is "the moral centre of the family, a philosopher trapped in a canine body. His observations – and advice to Peter – easily make for the driest humour in prime time" ("Terrific 'Toon Tackles Everything"). Indeed, Stewie and Brian are the most unique creations of the show, and nearly every episode blossoms with their characters' wit, criticism, and countercultural comments. Their characters alone deserve much attention. However, it is crucial to discuss the overall structure of the show, specific strategies used to attract audiences, and the lead characters. Thus, I focus on Peter Griffin. As the focal point of every episode, his character is fundamental to the success of the show.

In opposition to its several negative reviews, Fox is praised for picking up a show that is, according to Fox's Mike Darnell, "stunningly clever," and many agree (Krantz, 92). Tom Grabon, writer for Buffalo News of New York, attests that he "laughed more in this combined half hour [of Family Guy] than I have for the entire season of The Simpsons, which is still a great show" (8N). One might assume that a show marked with high praise would last more than

three seasons on Fox; however, after three seasons, Family Guy was taken off the air. Seth MacFarlane explains:

> We were a victim of scheduling. . . The networks thought we were strong enough to go out on our own without a lead-in, which was flattering, but misguided flattery. There was just too much competition on that night, so we asked to be pulled off until they could find a better spot for us. (Graham 4D)

Originally slated between The Simpsons and X-Files on Sunday evenings, Fox moved the program to Thursday nights, hoping that it would compete with NBC's successful "Must See TV," anchored by the popular shows Friends and Will and Grace. When it could not stand up to the competition, due in large part to its inconsistent scheduling, Family Guy was moved to Tuesday nights, and finally cancelled altogether.

After its cancellation on Fox, the show reclaimed its initial popularity when it joined Cartoon Network's "Adult Swim," shown every weeknight from 11pm to 2am. A Cartoon Network executive stated that picking up the show "was one of the few programming no-brainers we've ever had" (Gordon 11). Showing other animated shows with adult humor, Family Guy found a home in "Adult Swim," appealing to viewers who enjoyed its quick jabs at anyone from the Amish, to New Yorkers, delivered by its subversive characters. It became so popular, in fact, that Cartoon Network out-rated NBC's Jay Leno and ABC's David Letterman for the largest male audience, the previously most popular shows airing at the time (Weinraub E1). For instance, on Tuesday, June 17, 2003, Family Guy had 1.056 million viewers, pulling in the network's highest delivery among 18-34 year-olds ("Ratings," 119). Family Guy's success on the Cartoon Network also triggered a boom in its DVD sales. Although the show was in syndication for only three seasons, in the first month after its release, 400,000 copies were sold,

and after its first week on the shelves, Family Guy came in sixth place for top DVD sales, falling behind the movies Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (widescreen), The Transporter, Spirited Away, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (full screen), and Drumline ("DVD"). Due to this success, Family Guy has become the first show to be "uncancelled" due to DVD sales. Marking a significant moment in technological history, the DVD market has directly affected the television market. Family Guy will thus return to Fox Network in 2005 (Tucker). Additionally, MacFarlane is creating a straight-to-DVD feature film, expected to come out in the same year (www.family guyfiles.com).

Nevertheless, Family Guy's reputation is tainted with harsh criticism, particularly when compared to The Simpsons. In comparing the two, television critic McFadden concludes:

> A gulf separates the wit and character development of TV's longest-running animated hit from the contrived jokes and paper-thin personalities of MacFarlane's cartoon. When it comes to an actual story, the gulf is an ocean and Family Guy is an island of shrill one-liners pretending to be a plot. ("'Family Guy' loses" E5)

Another scathing attack came from television critic Tom Shales, calling Fox executives "pea brained" for signing a show that "chiefly insults viewers who want funny and smart TV" (McFadden E1). Shales hopes that "the room in which Family Guy is drawn be sacked, emptied, disinfected and burned to a cinder. Anything to keep them from making any more episodes of this smug and amateurish tripe" (Shales C01).

Like McFadden and Shales, most critics fail to point to particular aspects of the show they might find "smug" and "amateurish." However, the amount of negative criticism given to the show may allude to the fact that the show is rewarding to those who both enjoy and are saturated in low-brow media, precisely because the more familiar they are with specific shows,

the more reward they receive. For instance, if the viewer is not overly-familiar with multiple, "low art" media forms, such as "Shake-n-Bake" commercials and Pee Wee's Playhouse, they miss much of the show's humor because it often references and parodies other low-brow shows. Thus, the divergent opinions surrounding the show may speak to the fact that Family Guy is most pleasurable to those raised on television. Indeed, David Zuckerman, producer of Family Guy, states that the creation of the show is highly influenced by the fact that "we [Zuckerman and MacFarlane] were both basically sat in front of the TVs and neglected by our parents" (Seipp 6).

In essence, Family Guy is an excellent representation of contemporary animated sitcoms. My project sets out to prove that Family Guy, while portraying styles of situation comedy and limited animation, is symptomatic of postmodernism with its pastiche framework. Borrowing modernist styles and strategies, the text appears as a collage. Further, its use of intertextuality and self-reflexivity attracts a particular generation of media consumers. Finally, within this framework, Family Guy speaks to a current crisis regarding notions of masculinity and class.

Trajectory

Chapter One will expose the larger framework of my text. I intend to argue that Family Guy includes elements specific to the style of situation comedy. By establishing itself in part as a domestic comedy about a nuclear family, running in half hour segments, and following chronological time, Family Guy exudes traditional programming, which in part helps viewers decode the text. Further, by using limited animation in a unique way, the audience is offered nostalgic references. By combining these two traditional styles, Family Guy's postmodern and pastiche nature functions to offset its traditional animation with untraditional content. Frederic

Jameson, in Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, describes pastiche as "the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language" (17). What has emerged in late capitalism is a collage of styles, whether that collage is composed of intertextuality, satire, or travesty. Essentially, a plethora of styles are available to any artist, and by breaking genre norms and stylistic codes, an author can create a text which, perhaps, distorts time, breaks genre boundaries, and plays with the audience's expectations. Where certain modernist codes were only available to the literary artist or script writer, such as parody, those styles transgress boundaries by appearing, for instance, in commercials and music. Pastiche texts, then, necessarily abandon a unique parodic style: rather, borrowing multiple styles from multiple discursive patterns, pastiche artists blend modernist styles together into a postmodern text.

Jameson cautions us that the "omnipresence of pastiche is not incompatible with certain humor, however, nor is it innocent of all passion: it is at the least compatible with addiction – with a whole historically original consumers' appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudo-events and 'spectacles'"(18). The "addiction" Jameson discusses can be read as an addiction to stimulus. As Kalle Lasn explains in Culture Jam: How to Reverse America's Suicidal Consumer Binge – and Why We Must, the past three generations have demonstrated an addiction to stimulation through their constant use of television, walkmans, and VCRs (14). Currently, this addiction is also evident in incessant channel surfers, the popularity of dual television screens, and TiVo.

Likewise, this addiction to stimulation can speak to the popularity of pastiche texts. By taking usable parts from modern style to create a piece of mediated discourse, viewers can recognize and thus respond to a familiar framework. For instance, Jameson discusses the

presence of pastiche in architecture, explaining that it "randomly and without principle but with gusto cannibalizes all the architectural styles of the past and combines them in overstimulating ensembles" (19). Pastiche in architecture, and in mediated texts, becomes over-stimulating precisely because the multiple forms used can be recognized by an audience. Perhaps not all viewers will recognize all styles; however, the potential for responding to multiple points of stimulation is possible, and in many cases, probable.

Chapter Two also speaks to addiction to stimulation in that it will address the intertextual and self-reflexive strategies used by Family Guy. As prime property of modernism, intertextuality serves to reward media gurus – those who possess a stockpile of movie quotes, episode plots, Top-40 song lists, and other media cache. The ability to "get" all of the intertextual references is rewarding. The viewer feels smart, "up-to-date," and keen to the guise of popular culture. Ironically, while the viewer is encouraged to feel as if they are smart enough to avoid being consumed by the popular culture market, the recognition of the constant reproduction of images and styles *necessitates* their direct involvement in that market. Further, self-reflexive strategies are created by, in many cases, intertextual references which call attention to the text's own creation and status in the public realm. When the audience is exposed to this self-reflexivity, their position is shifted from the view of critic to the view of critiqued. While they are laughing at Peter's obsession with media, for example, they are often simultaneously made aware of their own obsessive media habits. Essentially, this text rewards viewers for being immersed in media while concurrently getting them to mock pathetic media consumption.

Chapter Three will discuss issues of masculinity and class. Using Peter Griffin as the primary character, I will argue that his actions (and reactions) marginalize a feminist discourse while reaffirming the traditional, sexist masculine voice. Family Guy, while offering momentary

feminist viewpoints through the character of Lois, shifts its perspective back to a masculinist discourse. Drawing on Peter's many sexist remarks and actions, I will argue that his character illustrates a reaffirmation of masculine norms, and chapter two will argue that Family Guy joins the ranks of other masculine-affirming programs in popular media, including The Simpsons, King of the Hill, and Married…With Children.

More specifically, this masculinity, often depicted in the form of the shlubby, beer-drinking buffoon, is specific to working-class men. In The Simpsons, this character is no doubt Homer; in King of the Hill, Hank Hill; in Family Guy, Peter Griffin. Their popularity may indicate a backlash against the "new-age" dad present in conventional sitcoms of the 1980s and early 1990s. For instance, The Cosby Show, Family Ties, and Growing Pains all depicted a father figure who embraced feminist values, played a very large part in raising children, and strongly supported his wife's unconventional occupations. Compare these characters to the patriarchs of The Simpsons, King of the Hill, and Family Guy. Homer Simpson toils away at a nuclear plant and spends most of his free time at the local pub. Hank Hill works as a propane gas salesman and spends his free time standing outside with his friends, drinking cheap beer. Peter Griffin, who works at a toy factory, likewise spends his free time in front of the television or at the local pub.

It is also likely that the popularity of this new macho character speaks to what Susan Faludi calls "the betrayal of the American man." Faludi argues that with the change in the capitalist structure from an economy based on industrialization to an economy based on service, the role of the working-class, blue collar American is diminishing. Rather, the importance of manual labor falls behind the importance of service work, which demands a different notion of

work and necessarily changes the way that particular occupations qualify masculinity. Faludi explains:

> The culture we live in today pretends that media can nurture society, but our new public spaces, our "electronic town squares" and "cyber-communities" and publicity mills and celebrity industries, are disembodied barrens, a dismal substitution for the real thing. Where we once lived in a society in which men in particular participated by being useful in public life, we now are surrounded by a culture that encourages people to play almost no functional public roles, only decorative or consumer ones. (34-35)

Men are less encouraged to practice a traditional social role, particularly men of the working-class. With the transition from producing "things" to the production and selling of stocks, or intangible goods, hard manual labor is declining in popularity and status, while selling and trading commodities is rapidly being phased in and encouraged.

It is possible, then, that shows depicting the shlubby beer-guzzling father, immersed in a very sexist and traditional masculinity, is a symptom of the betrayal of the working-class American man. I intend to prove, through an analysis of Peter Griffin, that Family Guy articulates the working-class male's frustration with the changing economy and his displacement in contemporary American capitalist society. Through this analysis, it becomes clear that Family Guy situates working-class men in an arena where masculine boosting activities are necessary; yet by asking the audience to mock these activities and the fact that they are futile stereotypes, working-class men are depicted as possessing an inherently subordinate status.

It is crucial at this point to reveal the assumptions I am working under for the entirety of this process. First, I do not hold that all audiences will gather the same meaning from each text. Rather, I operate under the assumption of polysemy, which suggests that the "ability of

audiences to shape their own readings, and hence their social life, is constrained by a variety of factors in any given rhetorical situation" (Condit 103). In other words, each audience member will bring his or her life experiences, knowledge of various media texts, familiarity with oppositional readings, group identity, et cetera, to decode other media texts. Thus, what they gather from the text is affected by their personality, race, gender, class, sexuality, etc., as well as their media exposure. Likewise, in lieu of repeating myself, when discussing masculinity, I am specifically referring to hegemonic masculinity. While the text offers a few spots which point to racial stereotypes, I am more interested in discussing white heterosexual masculinity, as it is most prominent throughout the text.

In essence, my thesis attempts to answer the following question: Why are texts full of sheer stimulation and constant intertextual references attractive? Further, why are animated comedies that depict the beer-drinking male buffoon popular in contemporary postmodern society? It is my goal to add to the body of rhetorical scholarship of animated comedies, particularly animated comedies targeting a male audience. Due to a lack of attention given to this rhetorical genre, I contend an analysis is important given the genre's popularity and cult following. By focusing on Family Guy, an analysis may shed light on postmodern texts, the strategy of intertextual and self-reflexive moves in animation, and performances of masculinity in the larger cultural and social fabric.

Chapter One

Family Guy as a Pastiche Text

It seems today that all we see is violence in movies and sex on TV.
But where are those good old fashioned values on which we used to rely?
Lucky there's a family guy.
Lucky there's a man who positively can do anything to make us laugh and cry.
He's a family guy.

Theme Song from Family Guy

Even Peter and Lois Griffin question the value of contemporary television, as they sing the theme song that opens nearly every episode of Family Guy. Thankfully, the Griffins have a father who can help damper the effects of television's controversial content. As the song protests, if it weren't for Peter's unquestionable talent for keeping his family oscillating between happiness and sadness, pride and chagrin, the Griffin family would indeed fall prey to television's corrupt nature. Or have they already?

Ironically, the opening song to Family Guy is satirical of the Griffin's reliance on their family television. In fact, Catherine Seipp of United Press International remarks that "the Family Guy family watches a lot of TV, even more so than The Simpsons with their glassy-eyed devotion to 'Itchy and Scratchy'" (Seipp). Similar to The Simpsons' opening scenes, many Family Guy episodes launch with the family squeezed onto the couch and huddled down on the floor, intently "tuned in" to their television, and promising viewers another television show about watching television. If a viewer considers the song and this dominant opening scene in conjunction, perhaps they suspect Peter to serve as a "parental buffer" for wicked television content. However, that suspicion would most likely evaporate once Peter opens his mouth. His crude behavior, imprudent decisions, and his lewd commentary most definitely set his audience

aback, quite possible thinking: “Can he really say that on TV?”

While the theme song hints at the potential for offering wholesome family values through traditional animation, the show’s content is quite to the contrary. In fact, labeled as a “satire of political correctness,” Family Guy contains highly offensive material only suitable for ‘mature’ audiences (Seipp 6). While some adults find the show hilarious, others find it highly immature, inane, and in one case, “smug, amateurish tripe” (Shales C01). Nevertheless, its undulating popularity warrants rhetorical attention. Family Guy is symptomatic of postmodernism, which is largely defined, when applied to a text, as containing elements of parody, double-coding, intertextuality, and the fusion of high and low art. Investigating Family Guy as a firm representation of postmodern cartoons adds to current discussions of television programming in the new millennium. Its counterparts, including Futurama, The Simpsons, King of the Hill, and South Park, include similar characteristics; however, Family Guy’s utilization of these tools invites a unique reading by its particular audience of consumers. To begin this discussion, it is important to mention Family Guy’s broad structure. First, it contains traditional characteristics of situation comedy. Despite its classification as a cartoon, it still follows formulas similar to sitcoms. Second, separate from its sitcom characteristics, the animation of Family Guy is important to understand. Its deployment of limited animation invites feelings of nostalgia while contrasting its traditional look with untraditional content. This untraditional content, the third aspect of its overall framework, sets the ground for discussing specific strategies used to attract a particular audience, discussed in Chapter Two. Identifying these structural elements sets the ground for investigating how and why Family Guy has been resurrected from rerun status on Cartoon Network and other cable network channels to a regular lineup on Fox.

Family Guy as Situation Comedy

The structure and sequence of Family Guy episodes are quite traditional in relation to situation comedies. It runs one-half hour, and the show's narrative typically contains an isolated problem the characters overcome by the episode's end. Most often, the main narrative includes Peter as its primary instigator, and that narrative is most often backed by a secondary narrative usually involving one of the other family members. For instance, in the episode "I Never Met the Dead Man," Peter copes with losing his television cable feed, while Stewie creates a weather-control device out of a “See-N-Say” toy in attempts to freeze broccoli so he will never have to eat it again.

Second, the show portrays a nuclear family, complete with three children and a dog living in a painfully normal suburban neighborhood. Peter works to put food on the table and Lois is a stay-at-home mother who teaches piano lessons to earn a little extra cash. Chris and Meg both attend high school; Chris constantly struggles with his developing male hormones, and Meg often returns from school in tears because she is not popular, thin, and pretty. Stewie stays at home with his mother rather than attending a day-care (save for one episode, "Dammit, Janet,"), and Brian is a very important part of the family. Further, Peter and Lois's parents make periodic appearances. The family owns one car, a red station wagon. The family also regularly attends their neighborhood Catholic Church.

Third, interactions with neighbors often accent particular plotlines. For instance, one episode features the Griffin family's first encounter with their next door neighbors, Joe and Bonnie Swanson ("A Hero Sits Next Door”). Joe, a wheelchair-bound police officer, one-ups Peter with his optimistic attitude despite his handicap. When Joe becomes the star at Peter's company baseball game and the life of the party at a backyard barbeque, Peter's jealousy drives

him to get involved in a bank robbery in order to become a hero. Joe is joined by the Griffins' other neighbors, Cleveland and Loretta, often help Peter and Lois get out of trouble. For instance, in "Peter Griffin: Husband, Father...Brother?" Peter has to rely on his neighbor, Cleveland, to help him understand his African American heritage, although this heritage involves only one African American relative who lived in the 1800s. Finally, neighbor Glenn Quagmire, a crude and sexist nymphomaniac, highlights some plots with his sexual aggressiveness and over-the-top rude behavior. Peter, Joe, Cleveland, and Quagmire spend a lot of time at their favorite local pub in Quahog, The Drunken Clam. Despite the fact that incidents with neighbors often operate within crazy and far-fetched plotlines, their presence solidifies a situation comedy framework.

By following a traditional pattern, Family Guy attracts viewers in that they are already skilled in reading situation comedy codes. Familiar formulas offer the viewer solace in that they do not have to put forth as much effort in understanding a text as they would watching, for example, Seinfeld, which has incorporated a shuffling of time in particular episodes. The audience understands that Family Guy will follow in a chronological order, sliced by commercial breaks. Further, a theme song is played at the beginning and end of each episode, and credits will most likely appear during the song. While not all sitcoms contain these elements, most do, and likewise offer the viewer a comfortable formula. Further, the use of limited animation adds to the traditional structure in that contemporary cartoons employ the same method.

Limited Animation

A convenient way to classify and analyze animation is by looking at the characteristics of both limited and full animation. Animation scholar Maureen Furniss, in Art in Motion:

Animation Aesthetics, identifies four criteria used to determine whether a text employs limited or full animation: the movement of images, the metamorphosis of images, the number of images, and the dominance of visual and aural components (135). While each characteristic is important in determining the style of animation, the latter two characteristics will be more important to our discussion.

First, movement of images refers to constancy of movement per cycle. In essence, an animation artist will draw foreground images on a cel, or a clear, flexible sheet of material. These images are then placed on top of a background painting or layered one on top of another. Typically, an animator may use up to five different layered cells at a time, adding more depth and dimension to the animation. The artist may then reuse cels by cycling them – often reusing backgrounds. In true full animation, a cycle is never reused, and constant movement is used in a minimum of cycles. On the other hand, in limited animation, cycles are often reused and largely devoid of movement.

The reuse of cels is evident in Family Guy. For instance, the beginning of nearly every episode shows the same shot of the Griffin's house from the outside, complete with the Providence, R.I. skyline in the distance. This scene rarely changes, unless an episode's narrative is dependent on the passing of seasons or changes in the outside environment. To illustrate, in "Da Boom," the Griffins deal with the apocalypse at the turn of the millennium. Spoofing the millennium scare of nationwide computer system failure disseminated by popular press and mass media during the final months of 1999, the Griffins witness a plane crash in their front yard and explosions along the Providence skyline. To compensate for a change in physical structure, the typical shot of the Griffin home was replaced with a shot of the home with a smashed 747 in its front yard, smoke over the city skyline, and fallen trees. While the audience sees a completely

altered scene, in all likelihood, the animators simply placed another cel on top of the original background, rather than drawing an entire new cel. Similarly, the Griffins are often shown sitting on their couch as a family, watching television. It is safe to assume that the same exact cel is reused a number of times to replicate this scene; after all, the Griffins do spend an inordinate amount of time in front of the tube. Limited animation, then, will show still backgrounds with all movement happening in the characters. Cels will often be recycled in order to save time, effort, and money. On the other hand, in full animation, the background may include movement, perhaps showing the flow of a river or waterfall, and in true full animation, a cel is never reused.

Second, the metamorphosis of images differs between full and limited animation. In full animation, the shape of a character may change in order to show emotion or reaction to particular events. For instance, a character's eyes may literally "pop out" of its head in shock. The full animation seen in certain Disney characters, such as Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse in Clock Cleaners (1937), displays metamorphosis of images in that Donald Duck literally gets stretched out from being pulled in opposite directions by his arms and legs (Furniss 137). Further, metamorphosis also includes changes in proportion of the characters due to movement on the z-axis, or toward and away from the camera. Limited animation in relation to metamorphosis is obvious when characters are seen moving only left and right across the screen, as opposed to diagonally, forward, or backward.

In a typical episode of Family Guy, the audience will most likely never see the characters move toward or away from the screen: interactions between characters are seen from a static position on the z-axis. In other words, the camera hardly ever zooms in or out. If zooming occurs, it is brief. Metamorphosis of images and movement along the z-axis takes an

exceptionally large amount of artwork and more photographic work. Thus, to speed the process of production, it is much easier to limit movement of images in regards to metamorphosis. However, one particular character in Family Guy is seen moving on the z-axis quite often. Stewie, the diabolical baby genius, is picture walking toward and away from the camera on several occasions. In the episode titled "Wasted Talent," Stewie reenacts a scene when he requests that Peter play "that sad walking away song" from The Incredible Hulk. He then reenacts a scene in which he walks away from the camera as if hitchhiking on a highway. While this scene does include movement along the z-axis, in this case Stewie's character simply shrinks and slowly rises along the background image. Considering his size and the relative simplicity of his physical stature, it is most likely much easier to apply metamorphosis to his character than any other. It would be much more difficult, for instance, to show a great deal of movement along the z-axis in Peter's character, since his physical appearance is reliant on heavy curvature and exaggerated facial features, whereas Stewie's character has a squashed head, flat face, and a relatively simple body devoid of curves.

Third, since full animation does not reuse cycles, and because it includes metamorphosis of images, more artwork, and thus more images, is required. Limited animation requires less artwork and fewer images per increment of film. Also coupled with the number of images is the amount of camera work involved: limited animation requires more extensive camera movement in order to retract attention from the repetition of cycles and limited character movement. Camera movement is used to create a sense of motion by panning a scene: the camera will often hold on to the beginning and ending images in order to exaggerate the panning movement. The camera also exaggerates its shots by holding on to a character's face for an extended period of time while the character engages in a simple gesture, such as blinking their eyes (Furniss 136).

In fact, one of Family Guy's unique qualities involves extended camera shots accompanied with humorous content and play. In "Fifteen Minutes of Shame," the camera freezes on Peter laughing at a practical joke he plays on his wife. The camera remains still for twenty-two seconds, and Peter's jovial movements are repeated, although in a random order. Another more extended example comes from the episode "I Am Peter, Hear Me Roar." In this episode, Peter explores his feminine side and attempts to breastfeed Stewie. The visual aspect of Stewie suckling on Peter's nipple is uncomfortable to watch. For one, despite the fact that men are actually capable of breastfeeding (although in a very limited capacity), the idea and image of this act is quite unnatural. Second, Peter's fleshy breast is very effeminate and unattractive, and Stewie is finally awakened to the fact that he is suckling on Peter's nipple when he gets a long, curly chest hair in his mouth. Stewie's slow realization is shown through sleepy blinking, finally culminating with a trembling body and a couple of wretched gags. On the whole, this particular shot is absent of a lot of movement. The primary movement belongs to Stewie through his suckling and repulsive reaction; Peter's image shifts slightly only twice. However, these movements are stretched across 30 seconds of taping, and the audience is forced to sit through an uncomfortable scene for a relatively long period of time.

This particular camera freeze not only represents an aspect of limited animation: it also reflects postmodern programming in that it is a small part of a collage of techniques used to create a pastiche text, discussed in fuller detail below. For now, it is sufficient to point out that the camera freezes possess at least a dual function: (1) they add to the randomness of the text by playing with time – each camera freeze lasts a bit longer than expected, and (2) they extend crude and/or inane jokes not normally coupled with animation. In the example above, the audience is asked to focus more on the content of the scene and Stewie's reactions rather than the

lack of movement and images. In this particular example, however, the suckling sounds and breathy gasps only enhance the scene's effectiveness. In fact, the aural components of this particular scene render a discussion of the final characteristic of limited animation.

Fourth, full animation emphasizes visuals while limited animation is "dominated by its sound, typically in the form of voice-over narration or dialogue between characters" (Furniss 136). Continuing the example from above, the suckling noise from Stewie is quite loud and exaggerated, and his gasps and gags sound very genuine – it is as if MacFarlane actually gagged himself in order to make the scene stand out. Further, an emphasis on voice-over narration is obvious in that the camera may focus on one speaking character for an extended amount of time, spotlighting the content and storyline rather than visual aspects of the animation. The precedence of voice-overs above animation requires more effort in the area of script writing, and in the case of Family Guy, the talent behind this endeavor has been called into question. Nevertheless, limited animation depends more on the content and narrative to pull itself through.

It might seem that given its title of "limited" animation, theorists see this type of animation as lacking in quality and artistic integrity. Quite to the contrary, in William Morritz's "The United Production of America: Reminiscing Thirty Years Later," animation artist and author Jules Engel is quoted saying that there is "no such thing as limited animation, only limited talent . . . Each style of graphic and each kind of gesture has its own requirement for motion" (17). Thus, the artistic merit in this case should not be measured in terms of sheer volume and images, or the amount of labor devoted to each style. "Limited" suggests that something is missing; to the contrary, limited animation is just another stylistic endeavor, and this endeavor is seen in many contemporary animated sitcoms.

Limited animation became more acceptable the 1990s as the animated comedy genre was reborn, and this animation is visible today. Furniss identifies The Simpsons and King of the Hill as both representative examples of limited animation (148). However, the caricatures in Family Guy are drawn a bit differently than the caricatures of The Simpsons and King of the Hill. Both shows' characters are drawn without shading or the suggestion of dimensionality, whereas Family Guy characters have more shading, which, along with the lack of "squash and stretch," adds to the more human-like characteristics.

Limited animation drew much less criticism in the 1990s due in part to the changing cultural context. In essence, the cartoon viewers of the 1990s most likely grew up watching Saturday Morning Cartoons, which also displayed limited animation. Saturday Morning Cartoons were no doubt seen as a cruder form of animation next to Disney Productions; adult viewers are familiar with limited animation and perhaps find solace from the redundancy of "real life" sitcoms. They may also gain nostalgic rewards in the sense that Saturday Morning Cartoons were directed at children through their "kid-only" label (Mittell 50). By driving away adult viewers through the cartoons' intellectual simplicity, children were given a lineup of cartoons developed solely for them. Katz, commenting on the revival of animation and its coupling with adult content, expresses a similar opinion: "the adult audience that was weaned on cartoons and is comfortable with animation is telling us they want a product that just isn't aimed at their kids, and TV is responding" (Richmond 1996: 40). Thus, the redeployment of limited animation is most likely attractive to adult viewers of the past decade and a half; but not without the marriage of limited animation and adult content. Now, the "kid-only" label of childhood cartoons has been shifted to an "adult-only" label, and, ironically, they're both marketing to the same exact generation of consumers, which will be discussed in more detail below. For now, it is important

to understand that the use of limited animation is a widely accepted and visually appealing style in a contemporary setting.

The decline in criticism of limited animation in many ways is symptomatic of postmodernism in the sense that it reflects a breakdown in the distinction between art and popular culture. In many ways, it is becoming more important for a television show to be able to simply stimulate its audience rather than impress them with artistic excellence. In Family Guy, the deployment of limited animation is also coupled with the use of highly detailed backgrounds and bright, diverse colors which, as Furniss suggests, "hardly allows the viewers' eyes to rest on any one spot" (149). For instance, the attire of the Griffin family consists of bright, clashing colors. Meg always wears blue jeans, a hot-pink shirt, and a hot-pink hat. Stewie, who changes clothes most often, usually wears a canary yellow shirt under fire-engine-red overalls with sky blue shoes. Lois contrasts her bright orange hair with a sea green shirt, tan pants, and red shoes. While their attire is relatively fixed in that we rarely see the family wearing other outfits, it is nevertheless quite bright and attractive to the eye. Further, their home is decorated in a menagerie of colors. For instance, Stewie's room has bright yellow carpet, light blue walls, and his crib is equipped with bright blue celestial sheets depicting satellites, rockets, and planets. Their living room, complete with hanging pictures, also shows colors of purple, orange, brown, and yellow. Perhaps these images are attractive because, as Kalle Lasn suggests, our contemporary society is addicted to stimulation in that we continuously seek some form of entertainment (14). The busier the screen, the more stimulation and thus entertainment; the noisier the content, the harder it is to pull away. John Thornton Caldwell likewise addresses texts which utilize visual play. A part of "trash television," these postmodern texts function to

visually stimulate the audience so that they may be overwhelmed at the bright colors and visual play (193).

The use of limited animation in Family Guy is significant in several ways. First, unlike The Simpsons and King of the Hill, which both adopt their own unique limited animation style, Family Guy uses traditional animation which gives the characters more "life." For instance, Homer Simpson largely appears flat and cut out; Peter Griffin, on the other hand, appears more two-dimensional. This traditional look is reminiscent of Saturday Morning Cartoons, and thus offers a nostalgic reference for adults who woke up early as children to spend the morning in front of the television. Further, and more significant, is that this traditional animation is buttressed with untraditional content: the content is rude, obnoxious, random, and highly intertextual. The animation then plays a key role in how the audience is going to interpret the show. Taking a traditional animated style and combining it with untraditional content serves to add adult humor, while simultaneously breaking their expectations and keeping them on their feet. Joining the limited and traditional animation with postmodern content helps to further justify the pastiche nature of the text.

Pastiche

Columnist Tim Feran of the Columbus Dispatch offered his review of Family Guy after its first airing post-Super Bowl on January 31st, 1999: "Nothing about it is unique other than, perhaps, its jaw-dropping bold willingness to steal ideas from other, better sources" (6H). Seipp reports the same reaction from others: "the standard complaint about Family Guy is that it's derivative" ("Cathy's World"). Both statements suggest that Family Guy is a mere collage, or a scrapping together of various texts. Indeed, Family Guy cannibalizes certain stylistic codes from

various genres to craft its own discourse. As already identified above, the text contains elements from situation comedy and limited animation. Further, many episodes refer to various television and movie genres by seizing their style and using it to highlight its narrative. What Feran and other likeminded critics seem to suggest is that Family Guy's enthusiasm for borrowing styles is taken to an extreme, harming its artistic and intellectual integrity. This "extreme" is in large part measured against competing shows within the genre, most notably The Simpsons. Unfortunately for MacFarlane and crew, Family Guy is inevitably compared to The Simpsons – the longest running animated series in history, and the catalyst for the resurrection of animated sitcoms (see introduction). In the wake of The Simpsons, Family Guy has been charged with superficiality: "A gulf separates the wit and character development of TV's longest-running animated hit from the contrived jokes and paper-thin personalities of MacFarlane's cartoon. When it comes to an actual story, the gulf is an ocean and Family Guy is an island of shrill one-liners pretending to be a plot" (McFadden). McFadden suggests a severe lack of character development and depth in comparison to The Simpsons (which seems hardly warranted given the fact that the review is based on the pilot episode). The latter half of this statement suggests a lack of depth in the narrative – a narrative relying on jokes and "one-liners" to carry it through the episode.

McFadden is, along with other critics, forming a web of criticism aimed at the text's supposed lack of intelligent jokes and overuse of randomness and play. What these critics are perhaps missing is that the structure of Family Guy reflects postmodernism, and perhaps their criticism is as much about postmodernism as the texts it produces. Postmodern theorist Frederic Jameson astutely explains that postmodern texts are recognizable in part by their collage-like nature. A postmodern text will adopt modern textual strategies, such as parody, satire, intertextuality, and subversion, which ultimately function to violate both genre forms and

audience expectation. By using a collage of style, postmodern texts represent *pastiche*: "the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style" (17). A pastiche text will cannibalize elements from particular styles in order to construct itself. For instance, in the episodes "Brian Does Hollywood," "From Method to Madness," and "Da Boom," the characters each play out short scenes belonging to the action-thriller genre. This tactic adopts the style of a familiar genre, breaking its own conventions as an animated sitcom.

Another fine example occurs in the episode "Fore Father" when Quagmire takes Chris to the beach. The scene is reminiscent of a 1950s beach party. The beach is full of people decked in 50s style swim gear – the men in short flowered trunks, the women in hip-hugging bikinis and beehive hair. Everyone is coupled off, twisting on top of their long board surfboards, singing to 1950s beach music boasting its own hip catchphrase: "Hic-a-doo-la." When Chris asks Quagmire what "hic-a-doo-la" means, the young crowd answers: "Hic-a-doo-la is that special feeling you get when you hold hands with your best gal! It's cheering real loud for the home team! It's catching the perfect wave!" When an adult interjects his own definition of Hic-a-doo-la – "it's obeying all the rules" – the crowd boos; Quagmire says "Hey, are we in Tiananmen? Because I see a square!" Pulling on 1950s popular culture style and teenage rejection of its conservative morals, the utilization of this genre is part and parcel of this episode's pastiche nature. Other styles adopted by Family Guy include the use of a two part episode, studio audience cues, song and dance from various genres, mobster themes, a Christmas special, reality television, and science fiction.

Adopting these various modernist styles performs multiple functions, which are ultimately determined by how the styles are used. Referring once again to the use of the action-thriller style, each episode cannibalizes fighting sequences for different purposes. In "From

Method to Madness," Stewie and his new singing partner argue over the perfect tonal pitch. This petty argument parodies cocky vocal musicians when it is taken to the level of physical violence. Stewie and Olivia engage in an on-stage and off-stage battle using a variety of physically impossible stunts reminiscent of fighting scenes in movies such as The Matrix and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. Both movies boast the smart union of physically challenging, often impossible stunts and advanced cinematography to portray super human abilities. For instance, Stewie and Olivia spend a few seconds suspended in mid-air, exchanging kicks and blows. Thus, this scene includes parody, action stunts, animation, and the musical film genre, making it harder to place the text in a particular genre. Given the fact that postmodernism shies away from categorization, the collage-like nature of pastiche prevents it from becoming modern property.

For Jameson, pastiche is better understood when compared to parody, a modernist code, which takes a specific framework and reworks the content for comic relief (Rose). For instance, if the aforementioned scene would have referenced a specific text, the audience would be asked to laugh at the reference itself. On the other hand, because the scene references a style, the audience is asked to laugh at the application of this particular style to the framework of animation – a coupling not often witnessed in animated comedies taking place in the domestic domain. Essentially, audiences are asked to laugh at the violation of genre rules. This is not to say, however, that pastiche is absent of parody. Rather, parody becomes just another code pastiche artists borrow.

For instance, one of the most prominent parodies in Family Guy occurs in the episode "One if by Clam, Two if by Sea," which aired during the first part of the third season. Stewie's story is a parody of the 1964 classic My Fair Lady, a movie featuring misogynistic and snobbish phonetics professor Henry Higgins, who agrees to a wager that he can take a poor flower girl,

Eliza Doolittle, and make her presentable in high society. He therefore tries to "fix" her accent and teach her how to behave like a lady. In one of the more well-known scenes of the film, she finally begins to speak "properly" and Eliza and Henry sing "The Rain in Spain," one of the many notable songs from this famous musical. Ms. Doolittle is successfully transformed, and Henry considers himself a success, ultimately winning his bet. Likewise, part of the storyline in "One if by Clam, Two if by Sea" is similar in that Stewie, who also portrays himself as a misogynistic snob throughout the series [in fact, MacFarlane attests to modeling Stewie's character partially after Henry Higgins (Seipp)], attempts to pass off his new British neighbor, Eliza Pinchley, as a lady at her second birthday party. Accepting a bet with Brian, Stewie undergoes a grueling session with little Eliza, trying to rid her of her cockney accent. The phrases Stewie teaches Eliza are in fact the exact phrases Henry Higgins teaches Eliza Doolittle. When Eliza Pinchley begins to speak "properly," she and Stewie break into song, likewise singing "The Rain in Spain." At the birthday party, however, Eliza ends up wetting herself during her grand procession, reverting back to her stymied accent, exclaiming, "Oh, Bloody Hell! I've gone and wet meself!" Brian wins the bet, and Stewie sees himself a failure. Essentially, this storyline keeps the original framework in tact by including a misogynistic snob trying to win a bet by reforming a woman. The content is then derided by the fact that the characters are children, and Stewie loses the bet in the end. Thus, the parody of My Fair Lady in "One if by Clam, Two if by Sea," is an excellent example in that it takes a text, replicates its framework, and mocks its content, all for comic relief.

In contrast, pastiche is parody without an ulterior motive; "parody that has lost its sense of humor" (Jameson 1985, 114). According to Jameson as well as Andreas Höfele, in his article "Parody in Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses," parody is a modernist style typically used to

attack traditional ideas and institutions (Jameson 16-17; Höfele 70). However, because parody can now be seen on billboards, in magazine advertisements, television programs, movies, songs, fashion, and so forth, it can no longer be as powerful a critical tool for authors. Parody is everywhere, and its use in multiple texts prevents the strategy from being associated with a particular author or genre. Rather, parody has emerged in late capitalism as part of pastiche: a collage of styles, whether composed of intertextuality, satire, or travesty. Thus, as Jameson states, "modernist styles thereby become postmodernist codes" (17). Relying on pastiche, postmodern texts necessarily abandon a unique parodic style. Jameson adopts the metaphor of a grab bag or lumber room to explain both the availability of and impulse to use a particular strategy. Borrowing multiple styles from multiple discursive patterns, pastiche artists blend modernist styles together into a postmodern text. This includes, but is not limited to, parody, intertextuality, self-reflexivity, and satire.

The line between pastiche texts and "original" texts, or modernist texts, is hazy. It is difficult to pronounce one text as pastiche and another as original in that it seems all texts "copy" another in certain ways. However, the line begins to appear when considering the difference between a text which belongs to its genre and a text that employs styles from multiple genres. For instance, prime-time sitcoms usually run for one half hour and use audience laughter to construct, in part, the way the television audience is supposed to respond to the text. A viewer can then expect certain characteristics to show up, thereby making the text easier to decode. However, pastiche breaks genre rules and audience expectation by cherry-picking styles and strategies typically belonging to a specific genre. Attempting to imagine this concoction would not necessarily bring to mind a "new" text, rather a combination of familiar styles. While the combination on its own may be unique in that it brings together styles not often seen in

conjunction, the text as a whole is made up of parcels from other styles and texts – thus, becoming a pastiche creation. The audience's ability to decode this text, then, relies not on their experience with reading a particular genre, but their experience with media consumption in general.

Further, it is important to consider the fact that some texts may be "more pastiche" than others. For instance, the popular press comments above suggest a strategy of overkill – because Family Guy borrows so heavily from other sources, its originality and creativity is called into question. These critiques highlight, to some degree, a cynical attitude towards postmodernism in that these critics perhaps crave the ability to pull a deeper meaning from the text. These critics are absolutely right in their description of the Family Guy text: it borrows heavily from "other, better sources," and its story is in fact a string of "one-liners pretending to be a plot." However, the evaluation of these characteristics needs to be questioned for the simple fact that Family Guy has caught a large hoard of devoted fans that is in large part responsible for its resurrection. This devotion requires an investigation into *why* pastiche texts, especially those that are extremely superficial, are attractive to audiences. Thus, a crucial question must be asked: "Why is the superficial content of Family Guy rewarding to viewers?"

The answer to this question comes in part from scholarship on humans' desire for constant stimulation. With consistent and rapid technological changes, consumers are encouraged to seek the greatest amount of stimulation or gratification using the least amount of effort. Recall the 1980s, when walkmans flew off the shelves with promises of constant musical stimulation at your fingertips. Now, these seemingly silly and simplistic machines are replaced by IPods, small players capable of holding up to four days' worth of different songs, all easily accessible over the internet. These consumer trends speak to the attractiveness of, and

dependence on, easily accessible stimulation. Kalle Lasn in Culture Jam explains this phenomenon in more detail:

> Two, perhaps three generations have already become stimulation addicted. Can't work without background music. Can't jog without the TV on. Our neurons are continuously massaged by Muzak and the hum of monitors. The essence of our postmodern age may be found in that kind of urban score (14).

Indeed, this craving for constant stimulation is duly satisfied for certain viewers by watching Family Guy. Its superficial style, random play, and rapid-fire jokes keep some audiences tuned in and on their toes, while others, such as Claire Bickley of the Toronto Sun, feel overwhelmed with its pace: "If MacFarlane and company can slow down Family Guy's killing pace and focus on comedy quality rather than form, this has the makings of first-class animation" (35). Perhaps critics are in sync with others who deny the allure of pastiche. In Simulacrum America, Peter Schneck describes pastiche with disappointment: "If, according to McLuhan, old media are not simply replaced but, rather, first contained and then incorporated by new ones, this containment is beset with a tragic yet inevitable obsolescence" (64). Schneck's comment is powerful in that is suggests that the inability to pin media down to an historical category is both necessary for artistic success and disastrous in that those texts will not longer allow the same type of interpretation, thus the tragedy. In fact, Ott and Walter criticize Jameson's discussion of pastiche, claiming that it does not allow for critical evaluation, since it is applied as a blanket term to indicate intertextuality: "Jameson's definition of pastiche reduces intertextuality to a neutral practice of compilation – one shorn of any critical engagement" (435). To the contrary, pastiche does not intend to suggest that intertextuality does not perform a critical function. Further, it does not intend or promise to offer critical engagement. Rather, pastiche functions to

expose the postmodern breakdown in signifier and signified, which necessarily prohibits critical engagement. This is not to say, however, that a pastiche text isn't worthy of critical attention; rather, it suggests these texts open a space for discussing a contemporary postmodernism in which media is everywhere. Postmodernism and pastiche are inevitable. Some cringe from this characteristic; others crave it.

Cleary, at least two camps exist that espouse different ideas of what constitutes a "quality" television program. Some crave a thicker plot, a deeper meaning, and a slower pace. Others are captured by Family Guy's superficial nature – it constantly breaks genre rules, often with a rapid pace. Thus, viewers steeped in popular culture are better able to make sense of the text and be rewarded through stimulation. The elements making up Family Guy's pastiche structure each perform their own unique tasks in attracting audiences. Adopting modernist codes, this text exudes two strategies which attract certain viewers in unique ways. The next chapter discusses intertextual and self-reflexive strategies and their function in the text. Further, looking at a particular episode reveals how these two strategies work together.

Chapter 2

Family Guy as Mischievous Media: Intertextuality and Self-Reflexivity

Family Guy websites attest to the show's growing and unwavering fan loyalty. Several sites encourage browsing fans to become a member in order to gain access to particular information. For instance, becoming a "Quahog Citizen" on familyguyfiles.com grants a citizen access to the Quahog quiz, information on Stewie's campaign for governor (he "ran" against Schwarzenegger in 2003), interviews with creator Seth MacFarlane, and a comment board. While each website may offer something different to its viewers, such as quotes, computer wallpapers, email addresses, or quizzes, most websites contain a reference database, allowing users to browse the popular culture references occurring in each episode. For instance, planetfamilyguy.com contains a search bar for cultural references, and familyguyfiles.com contains a list of every episode's references, including a blurb asking users to fill in missing references. For instance, in "I Never Met the Dead Man," fans created a list of thirty-two different references, including but not limited to the television shows ALF, Beverly Hills 90210, Bewitched, Chips, NYPD Blue, and The Wonder Years (familyguyfiles.com). Likewise, "I Am Peter, Hear Me Roar" earned twenty-four references. Obviously, the title of the episode refers to Helen Reddy's 1970s song "I Am Woman," and the list of references includes Planet of the Apes, Three's Company, Charlie's Angels, Sesame Street, and Fletch (familyguyfiles.com). However, it is crucial to point out that references listed on websites are not specific to popular culture references, per se. For instance, the reference list for "I Am Peter, Hear Me Roar" includes entries such as the Million Man March, the cliché "All the Tea in China," feminist

attorney Gloria Allred, Peter's bumper sticker stating "My Other Penis is a Vagina," Dyslexia, and male attraction to lesbians (familyguyfiles.com).

As evident above, references come in many forms; some may point to a specific commodity, television show, or movie, while others are cultural references. Because these references are not specific to particular texts, and rather point out the multitude of styles and references, these entries reveal a pastiche framework: fans seem to pick apart an episode and tag each piece to a referent, ultimately making sense of the episode through their own media viewing experiences, familiarity with popular media codes, and socialized knowledge. Media scholars Irwin and Lombardo defend this trend:

> There may be intertextual elements (as they are fashionably called) which the writers did not actually intend, but which an ideal, or merely reasonable, viewer notices . . . . There is no harm in taking notice of these intertextual elements as long as we do not incorrectly attribute them to the writers' intentions. They are, properly speaking, our accidental intentions. (84)

These "accidental intentions" merely solidify the fact that intertextual references rest in a bed of pastiche, and the thicker the pastiche, the easier it is to confuse one with the other. They also bolster the notion that pastiche texts require a certain amount of breadth and depth of media knowledge and experience to decode texts. Importantly, intertextual references in Family Guy show how a pastiche text can take several modernist codes and weave them into a narrative to attract audiences. While on the one hand this list of references displays attraction to pastiche, it also displays the variety of ways a text can point to another to create meaning, or function intertextually.

Intertextuality

Direct intertextual references perform a specific, yet mischievous task: to test viewers' knowledge of specific popular culture and high brow texts. Intertextuality is becoming more predominant, particularly in prime-time animated sitcoms. The Simpsons, South Park, and King of the Hill, for instance, all depend, to various extents, on references to drive the narrative. While the types of references may differ – The Simpsons, for instance, is better known for using a larger collection of high brow art as compared to South Park – each show nevertheless accents its narrative by directly pointing to other popular texts. In turn, these references attract certain audiences, namely those who are, at the least, familiar with popular culture and high art. In discussing intertextuality in The Simpsons, media scholar Brian Ott states that "the endless intertextual gestures that animate the series each week function as a sort of quiz, testing viewer knowledge of both high and popular culture texts" (Ott 70). In essence, the more knowledge of popular culture and high art an audience member has, the more they will be able to relate to and understand The Simpsons' text. Family Guy, on the other hand, contains more popular culture than high culture references. Thus, most references are targeted more towards incessant couch potatoes rather than consumers of high culture and art.

To illustrate the essence of Family Guy's use of intertextuality, it is necessary to look at both the types of references made, as well as the way these referencing moves are deployed. To begin this task, it is useful to create a list of references found in the pilot episode "Death Has a Shadow." Familyguyfiles.com offers an extensive collection of references built in part by the creators of the website and fans who donate missing references. According to the website, "Death Has a Shadow" displays thirty-seven different references (familyguyfiles.com). However, this list combines both popular culture references and historical cultural references.

"Death Has a Shadow" won an important and highly coveted spot in the prime-time television lineup. Peter is fired from his job, and in order to continue supporting his family he engages in welfare fraud. When Lois finds out, Peter decides to give his money away publicly by dropping it from a blimp during the Super Bowl. Fox executives were confident the show would fare well and ultimately chose Family Guy over Matt Groening's Futurama for the post-Super Bowl slot on January 31, 1999. Thus, the pilot episode had an important role to play: it needed to keep football fans in front of the television, and it needed to impress its audience to the point that they would tune into the next episode – a difficult task when considering the fact that the next episode would not air until April of that year. The pilot was successful in its first task in that it ranked as the most watched episode while the show was still a regular on Fox (planet-familyguy.com). Its intertextual references, then, are partially responsible for keeping football fans in their seats. During this half hour pilot episode, the following references were made: Super Bowl, Scooby-Doo, the Kool-Aid Man, Brady Bunch, Aunt Jemima, Tom Hanks, Philadelphia, Casablanca, G.I. Joe, Pound Puppies, Animal House, Cocoa Puffs, Jane Fonda, Forest Gump, Diff'rent Strokes, John Madden, Pat Summerall, Joannie Loves Chachi, TV's Bloopers and Practical Jokes, My Fair Lady, Fox Network, Seinfeld, The Omen, Woody Allen, and Annie Hall (familyguyfiles.com). While this list is incomplete, it reveals a lean towards attracting a particular audience – those so saturated in popular culture that they recognize not only television shows and movies, but commercials and action figures. The variety of references illuminates a fervent, interdependent connection between media and consumer culture, or what scholar Kevin Sandler dubs as "synergy nirvana," the cross promotion and cross-selling of individual media merchandise, which in turn use combined efforts between texts to create a

greater effect on sales (91). For instance, Aunt Jemima's placement in the episode references another text but also serves as an advertisement.

Being able to connect the dots and recall references for various forms of popular culture suggests that viewers and fans alike are so steeped in media that they can not only identify specific texts, they can identify the commodities associated with those texts. The viewer with the most popular culture currency will even be able to identify action figures as well as commodities sold via commercial breaks. Ownership of this type of knowledge is attractive because "in an informational economy, knowledge equals prestige," and people desire to be the first to gain and spread new information, whether that information is from popular culture or high culture (Ott 71). Clearly, Family Guy is less interested in referencing high culture.

It is now apparent that the types of references used most often in Family Guy fall in line with popular culture rather than high culture. A closer look reveals that the references are not only low brow, but the particular texts referenced by certain characters also suggest the show aims at a more specific target audience. Intertextual references in Family Guy predominately play on television shows spanning from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. Producer David Zuckerman attributes the nature of these references to fact that he and MacFarlane "were both basically sat in front of TVs and neglected by our parents" (Seipp). The references MacFarlane chose not only give us a glimpse of his own mediated childhood, they attract viewers who either engaged in the same activities as children or paid attention to this period of popular culture. This time period show-cased Saturday Morning Cartoons, which included cartoons such as Pound Puppies (1986-1988), Transformers (1984-1987), Thundercats (1985-1988), Schoolhouse Rock (1973-1996), Smurfs (1981-1989) and G.I Joe (1983-1986). These "TV babies" also witnessed the first decade of Sesame Street (1969-present), The Brady Bunch (1969-1974), Mr. Roger's

Neighborhood (1968-2001), Electric Company (1971-1985), and the like. As these babies grew older, they were offered shows such as CHiPS (1977-1983), Wonder Years (1988-1993), Facts of Life (1979-1988), Golden Girls (1985-1992), Who's the Boss (1984-1992), The Jeffersons (1975-1985), Mr. Belvedere (1985-1990), Silver Spoons (1982-1987), Diff'rent Strokes (1978-1986), Cosby Show (1984-1992), and Taxi (1978-1983). All of these shows are referenced at least once in various episodes of Family Guy, and this list is far from complete. Growing up in the era of the babysitting television, MacFarlane belongs to the large demographic to TV babies who most likely find some solace in nostalgic television references. By combining nostalgic references, audiences are asked to remember these texts within the framework of traditional cartoon artwork. Together, the limited animation and intertextual references instruct us "to recall the pleasant memories and sugared cereal highs of Saturday mornings long since gone" (Irwin 83).

Additionally, references from this time period are not specific to television shows: many references to toys and commercials are found woven into different episodes. For instance, in the episode "Brian Wallows, Peter's Swallows," Brian receives a sentence of community service for drunk driving. While the Griffin family is waiting for the judge's verdict, Peter, with his new bushy beard, complains that it itches. Lois expresses her dissatisfaction with Peter's beard: "Peter, I wish you'd shave that thing. Beards are so ugly!" Wooly Willy, one of the forty most popular toys from 1950-1980, appears in animated form and is extremely offended my Lois' remark (http://www. smethporthistory.org). Lois consoles him: "Oh, relax, Wooly Willy. There's lots of fun things you can do with that." She gets a pen magnet and moves the hair from his beard to his head. Wooly Willy smiles with relief and says, "Thanks!" Although his appearance is brief, it is prominent. For one, it doesn't fit the scene and serves as a very random

gesture. Also, Willy's fleeting appearance boomerangs the audience back to their childhood, only to immediately yank them back to the present when Willy disappears. Audience members will most likely remember this brief, yet significant appearance of a toy that is most likely only found in a vintage store or garage sale.

Another popular toy, Mattel's See-N-Say, is referenced in "I Never Met the Dead Man." The See-N-Say toy was first created in 1965 and was the first in Mattel's line of educational toys (http://bits.me.berkeley.edu/develop/mattel2/111HIST.HTM). It typically has a clock-like arrangement of cartoon animal portraits, with a rotating arrow in the center. When the draw string is pulled, the arrow chooses a picture and the toy emits the appropriate barnyard animal sound. In this episode, Stewie's See-N-Say toy contains pictures of various types of weather. He cleverly connects his toy to a makeshift satellite in attempts to control the weather so that all broccoli will die, freeing him from having to eat it – he uses his See-N-Say toy as his control device.

Besides toys, specific commercials are also referenced. For instance, the giant Kool-Aid Man (1975-present), a popular cultural icon famous for breaking through brick walls and yelling "Oh yah!" makes an appearance in the episode "Death Has a Shadow." The Kool-Aid Man crashes through the walls of a courtroom where Peter is on trial for Welfare fraud. Peter explains to the judge that he would have notified the government of their gross overpayment to the Griffins of $150,000 per week, "but my favorite episode of Diff'rent Strokes was on. You know, the one where Arnold and Dudley get sexually molested by the guy who owns the bike shop? And everybody learns a valuable lesson." He continues to excuse his mistake, offering a heartfelt apology to Lois. The judge sentences Peter to twenty-four months in prison, and Brian, Lois, Chris, and Meg all respond, one at a time, with "Oh no!" Following Meg, The Kool-Aid

Man crashes through the courtroom wall, delivering his famous line, “Oh yah!” When he realizes he has crashed onto the wrong scene and delivered an inappropriate response, he calmly and politely backs out through the broken wall, embarrassed.

Additionally, in “The Thin White Line,” Brian is shown auditioning for the mascot of Fruit Loops. Brian snickers at Toucan Sam’s terrible delivery of his line, “Follow your nose!” When Sam asks how Brian is going to deliver his line, he says, “Oh, I don’t know. I was thinking of doing it, you know, good. Like an actor. But your way is good, too.” Several other cereal commercials and their icons are referenced. In “Death Has a Shadow,” Peter gets fired from his job as the chicken saying “I’m coo-coo for Cocoa Puffs!” In “Let’s Go to the Hop” Peter references the “Breakfast Club,” consisting not of the brat pack from the original 1980s movie Breakfast Club, but a club of cereal icons: Tony the Tiger, Toucan Sam, Cap’n Crunch, the Trix rabbit, and Lucky the Leprechaun, all reenacting a scene from The Breakfast Club movie.

“Let’s Go to the Hop” also contains a reference to the Double Mint gum commercials featuring attractive twins chewing the gum. In this Family Guy episode, the twins are Siamese. In “Chitty Chitty Death Bang,” the Purina Chuck Wagon Dog Chow commercials are referenced. Brian and Peter are having a discussion in the living room, and Brian has to excuse himself when a miniature chuck wagon veers from around the couch. He chases it into the kitchen into the cupboard. When he opens the door and finds only a bag of dog food, he sighs and laments, “someday.” The Klondike Bar commercials, famous for asking various people what they would do for the candy, is referenced in “I Never Met the Dead Man.” In this episode, the commercials ask a man to murder someone for a Klondike Bar. The variety of references made to popular culture in the late 1970s to early 1990s targets several levels of media enthusiasts of this time.

The viewer who gains the most reward from these references is the viewer who can recall commercials, toys, shows, and movies. Because there are so many references that occur in such a short amount of time, it is apparent that their use is to attract viewers enveloped in popular culture but also to poke fun of those who engage in a lot of media viewing. However, the function of intertextual references in Family Guy does not stop here. For instance, many times the audience is asked to laugh at a particular text, ultimately undermining its artistic qualities through the use of parody, as discussed above. Borrowing the reference to Toucan Sam, the audience is asked to laugh at the stupid bird. However, the only reason they are able to laugh at the ridiculousness of this icon and Brian's joke is by being familiar not only with the bird, but with his performances in Fruit Loops' commercials. Thus, the audience is made to feel smart by laughing at a stupid piece of popular culture; however, the only reason they can do so is because they were presumably gullible enough to absorb its image in the first place.

Further, the way intertextuality is performed determines the position the audience occupies when interpreting the text. Ott and Walter suggest two important types of intertextuality, parodic allusion and inclusion. Unlike parody, which offers a particular read of a specific text, parodic allusion:

> offers no commentary on the original text. Rather, it seeks to amuse through juxtaposition – a goal that is enhanced by the reader's recognition of the parodic gesture. The audience is, in effect, transformed into the site of critical commentary. (436)

For instance, in the episode "Ready, Willing, and Disabled," Peter Griffin references rumors about George W. Bush in order to egg on Joe in his wheelchair race. Peter addresses the rumors circulated, but deploys them in a positive manner, requesting the audience to laugh at Bush's status as President and society's negligence and ignorance in electing a President with such a

record. When Joe decides to throw in the towel at Quahog's Special People Games, Peter attempts to convince him otherwise:

> What kinda talk is that? It's un-American! Did George W. Bush quit even after losing the popular vote? No! Did he quit after losing millions of dollars of his father's friends' money in failed oil companies? No! Did he quit after knocking that girl up? No! Did he quit after he got that DUI? No! Did he quit after getting arrested for drunk and disorderly conduct at a football game? No!

Clearly, this reference does not point to a specific text; rather it suggests a parody of socialized knowledge about George W. Bush and questions the use of that knowledge. While some overlook it and support him, others find the rumors damaging to his credibility as President. Nevertheless, the audience becomes the producer of critical commentary in that they decide which to laugh at – the absurdity of the rumors or the absurdity of the lack of negative valence placed on those rumors by voters.

Another type of intertextuality is inclusion, which "frequently comments on the text that it steals from or on that text's role in the larger culture" (Ott and Walter 437). For instance, in the episode "A Hero Sits Next Door," Peter discusses copyright infringement while simultaneously growing Mickey Mouse ears and a Mickey Mouse nose. While this scene comments self-reflexively, as discussed in more detail below, it also, at least, calls attention to a popular icon – Mickey Mouse – and his presence and influence in the larger culture. This type of inclusion plays on the very problem with appropriation itself in that "its use as stylistic device has spawned a number of lawsuits concerned with intellectual property rights and freedom of expression" (Ott and Walter 437). Another simpler example is found in the episode "Emission Impossible," when Stewie plays an Air Supply song, in its original form, on his spaceship radio.

Thus, intertextual strategies come in different forms, depending on the affect the author intends on his or her audience. They may function as direct parodies, as discussed above in the parody of My Fair Lady. They may also come in the form of parodic allusion, where a text is referenced but not commented upon, ultimately putting the audience in the critic's chair. Finally, an intertextual reference may appropriate an existing text, or comment on the source of a reference and its position in society. Ott and Walter suggest self-reflexivity as an additional form of intertextuality. However, examples prove that self-reflexivity does not necessarily depend on intertextual references, discussed in further detail below.

In general, these forms of intertextual references serve to reward audiences for media saturation. This reward comes often given the fact that postmodern society is inundated with popular culture, and many media viewers are unaware of the exorbitant amount of time they waste in front of the television. Nevertheless, intertextual references hide the laziness from the couch potato by making him or her feel smart for understanding the text more accurately than his or her friends. This is not to say, however, that audiences are being completely duped by Family Guy. It does, however, expose the ways in which this text, like other texts of its kind, can utilize intertextuality and self-reflexivity in a mischievous manner by covertly poking fun of audiences who purposely stew in popular culture. Perhaps some actually realize the extent of their own popular culture saturation when they finish watching an episode. However, it is more likely that they come away from the show laughing at *Peter's* obsession with popular culture. Indeed, Peter's relationship with media is profound in that he makes sense of his life and fixes his problems by relying solely on his bank of popular culture references. Theoretically, Peter embodies an important characteristic of postmodernism: the breakdown of the distinction between popular culture and reality. Taking a closer look at his own obsession with television

illuminates a rhetorical strategy which, in a very cunning way, makes viewers feel smart for not succumbing to the power of the media. However, in order to feel smart and make the connections, media saturation is necessary.

Peter Griffin

Several theorists have discussed the core of postmodernism to be "the culture of the consumer society," due mainly to the shift in capitalism from a production-based society to a service society based largely on such technologies as the media and electronic communication (Anderson 92-93). Postmodern media, then, is largely dependent on advertising, at the least in the form of traditional advertisement, product endorsement by certain programs (i.e. The Simpsons are used as spokes characters for Butterfinger), and product placement in shows. Thus, "popular cultural signs and media images increasingly dominate our sense of reality, and the way we define ourselves and the world around us" resulting in the increased difficulty in distinguishing between reality and popular culture (Strinati 1995, 224). While many argue about the accuracy of popular culture functioning as a mirror of reality, it is generally held that the media, in a large part, constructs our sense of reality to varying degrees, and by engaging with media and taking part in consumer culture, we can participate in this reality.

Peter Griffin represents an exaggerated postmodern man in the sense that his character satirizes this phenomenon. He represents a daunting obsession with television and popular culture commodities. Sandler notes brand placement in television shows, encouraging viewers not only to watch shows but buy the action figures, toys, games, and other trinkets ("Synergy Nirvana"). Through their purchasing power, a fan can "own" a piece of their favorite popular culture. A Family Guy fan may don a t-shirt with Chris's face and the quote, "School is Friggin

Crap!" (www.wacky planet .com). A fan of The Simpsons may collect Bart Simpson dolls and display them proudly on their shelf. Others may purchase a "Ren and Stimpy Lemon Fresh Air Freshener" from eMerchandise.com. In essence, television programs have moved from a realm of entertainment and fame to the realm of commodity: they become increasingly dependent on attracting audiences with buying power (and with the current phenomenon of DVD versions of television series, this shift is much more prominent). Thus, these commodities and the bleeding of television shows onto the store shelves create an almost ubiquitous popular culture presence in reality, thereby further erasing the distinction between the two. In any case, it is impossible for one to be completely removed from this omnipresence, but they may choose the extent to which they respond to it. For instance, they may watch an episode every once in a while, or they may own the DVD series, collector's items, t-shirts, and the like.

Peter, on the other hand, seems to have no control over deciding how to respond to popular culture. In fact, he seems to have trouble drawing any sort of boundary between popular culture and reality, and his recklessness with media use is portrayed in nearly every episode. One profound example comes from "Death Has a Shadow." Peter commits welfare fraud in order to give his family a good life. He splurges on fancy furniture, new clothes, a motorboat, and even puts a moat around his home for extra protection. He buys Meg a collagen injection for her lips, and buys silicone breast implants for Chris (they are never implanted in him – he carries them around, squishing them between his fingers). More importantly, though, Peter buys pieces of popular culture for his family. Ironically, these commodities are not figurines, t-shirts, mugs, stickers, or posters: they are the television characters themselves. To make Lois feel like a queen, Peter hires Jerry Seinfeld as the family jester. To eliminate Lois' housework, he hires Martha Stewart to cook and clean for the family. While money is often spent on these types of

luxuries through hiring cooks and maids for the home and entertainers for parties, Peter obtains these luxuries from popular culture itself, ignoring other types of services offering the same work. The fact that he actually buys the characters themselves suggests, for one, that Peter has trouble distinguishing between popular culture and reality: his ideal form of service involves dissolving the television screen and bringing the characters into his home and life, an activity that is displayed as seamlessly easy as long as someone has a lot of money. Additionally, Peter's purchases offer a satirical comment on behalf of the authors regarding the commercialization and commodification of popular culture.

Another example of Peter's unique relationship with popular culture is found in the episode "Peter Griffin: Husband, Father…Brother?" In this episode, Peter discovers he has an African American ancestor. When Lois' father reveals that his family owned Peter's relative, Peter demands reparations. Rather than sharing his money with Quahog's African American Brotherhood, he instead uses the money to turn his living room into an exact replica of the living room in Pee Wee's Playhouse, a children's show that ran from 1986-1991. His replica is nearly exact; he even owns the characters on Pee Wee's Playhouse including Jambi the genie (played by Brian), Chairry the chair, Conky the Robot, and the talking fish, to name just a few. Thus, while some gain the ultimate connection to their favorite show by purchasing collectibles, Peter is driven to bring popular culture into his home, physically. He doesn't want Seinfeld the action figure, he wants Seinfeld the person. He doesn't want an image or miniature model of the playhouse – he wants it in his home. He craves and creates a strong connection between his personal life and popular culture, and his behaviors suggest the absurdity of his inability to distinguish the real from the unreal.

Yet another example of the strong influence media has on Peter comes in the episode "A Hero Sits Next Door." While talking to Brian, Peter recalls a time when he sang to the children at church. A flashback shows Peter sitting in a chair in the middle of a room with children circled around him. When he forgets the words to the song, he improvises: "Jesus loves me, he loves me a bunch. Cuz he always puts Skippy in my lunch." Peter clearly forgets the words to the well-known church song "Jesus Loves Me," and instead uses a Skippy Peanut Butter commercial to fill in the gaps. Audiences no doubt laugh at the references and Peter's vulnerability to media's persuasion. However, at the same time, several of the viewers who mock Peter's behavior are perhaps sitting in their living room decorated with an Animal House poster. On top of their TV set may be a miniature replica of Homer Simpson. Perhaps they're wearing a t-shirt with Stewie's face, yelling "Damn You All!" While they may laugh at Peter's stupidity in wasting his money on such frivolous commodities, they, too, are guilty of succumbing to the same marketing ploys.

Peter not only (over)actively participates in popular culture's consumer society, his very idea of reality is dominated by popular culture – to the extent that his past is remembered in the context of popular culture events and historical phenomena, experienced solely through television coverage. For instance, Peter claims that when he was in high school he belonged to the Jets gang from West Side Story ("Chitty Chitty Death Bang"). He also claims to have run over the Road Runner while picking up a hitchhiking Wile E. Coyote, and to have toured Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory in the place of Veruca Salt, even blowing up into a giant blueberry after eating Wonka's candy ("I Never Met the Dead Man"). Amazingly enough, when Peter is telling these stories, the listeners rarely challenge his assertions, and in some cases even take part in recounting Peter's history with similar references. The normality of Peter's history is

particularly valuable considering that Peter lives in a particularly postmodern world – one in which a cacophony of events, seen largely through popular culture references, may take place in one episode, attributing not only to the show's randomness, but also to the randomness of Peter's world.

Because he lives in a random, mediated world, he often makes sense of his life through television programs. He consistently uses television references to get himself out of trouble or find a solution to a problem. In the episode "Peter: Husband, Father…Brother?" when he learns of his black slave ancestor, Cleveland encourages Peter to join him at the Quahog African American Brotherhood. When the members question his affiliation, he stands up on stage and persuades his audience not to oust him because he, too, has seen tough times:

> Judge me not by the color of my skin, for I have always been there with you. I was there when George and Wheezy moved on up to the East Side! Hallelujah those were happy times! But, I was also there for the bad times. When Florida lost James to that tragic auto accident! And I was there when Tootie got those terribly painful braces! Oh, yes! And when Arnold Jackson got beat up by the Gootch, I was there. So before you decide that I don't belong here, remember this: I was there!

Peter makes no claims to have witnessed real events. Rather, his similarity with the African American Brotherhood lies solely in the fact that they watched the same television shows. Peter also assumes that watching newscasts is enough to experience the event itself, giving him the ability to say "I was there." One may expect, and rightly so, that the crowd would become angry, ultimately finding offense in Peter's ignorance and lack of respect for actual problems the men may have gone through. Surprisingly, Peter's references work to gain support: the audience stands up and cheers after his speech, suggesting it is enough to understand the pain and

suffering undergone by African Americans simply by watching representations on television, a representation that is consistently questioned and often labeled as reaffirming white hegemony. Nevertheless, the audience accepts Peter's affirmations, suggesting that media does not only mirror reality, it *replaces* reality.

Another interesting example occurs in "A Hero Sits Next Door." Peter references the character Blair from Facts of Life, a show that ran from 1979 to 1988 and was one of the longest running programs of the 1980s (tvtome.com). The sitcom followed the lives of four teenage girls living with a caretaker, Mrs. Garrett. Although the number of girls in the home changed over the course of its nine years on the air, a steady four are most notable: Blair, Tootie, Natalie, and Joe. Peter invents a "Blair Doll" that transforms from a thin "Blair" to a large "Blair" and finally to a large insect. Mocking the Transformer dolls popular in the 1980s, Peter tries to convince the owner of the toy factory, Mr. Weed, to produce his "Blair" transformer so that Peter can receive a raise or promotion

Interestingly, this Blair doll, although seemingly simpleminded, is quite complex in that it firmly represents a postmodern breakdown between popular culture and reality in Peter's mind. His knowledge of the transformer toy, a consumer product that doubled as a television show, suggests he pined for these toys as a child. Hijacking the Transformer idea and applying it to another television show represents an intersection between various popular culture texts. Finally, knowledge of the actress outside of the television show suggests Peter's familiarity of socialized knowledge in that he not only watched the show and played with corresponding toys; he also kept tabs on the private lives of television stars. Further, his attempt to combine this knowledge into one toy potentially promising a better life for he and his family further blurs the line

between popular culture and reality. For Peter, popular culture is not only ubiquitous; it is necessary for his sanity and survival.

The above examples show Peter's saturation in popular culture and his tendency to look to media examples in order to solve problems. While these examples merely highlight a narrative, an entire episode is devoted to Peter's obsession with television. "I Never Met the Dead Man" was the second episode to air, and its narrative focuses on community outcry and Peter's mental breakdown when the entire town of Quahog loses cable feed.

Intertextual references are among one of the many adopted styles of pastiche. While they add to its collage-like nature, they also function to reward the audience for voluntary media saturation. Intertextual references function in part to create an interactive relationship between text and audience, ultimately creating a self-reflexive piece of discourse. This relationship is discussed in more detail below.

Self-Reflexivity

At end of the episode, "Lethal Weapon," Peter gets a taste of Lois' recently perfected Tae-Jitsu skills. She began taking lessons to release the anger she feels towards Peter and his behaviors: "You never listen to me, you undermine me in front of the kids, and besides…you're not exactly father of the year yourself!" During the episode, Lois gets in several fights, and Peter even takes her to a bar, gets into verbal arguments, and forces Lois to physically finish the argument for him, as his fighting skills are clearly inferior to hers. Throughout the episode, the family begins arguing a lot, and their pent up rage is released at the end of the episode.

The fight breaks out when Lois and Peter begin calling each other names. Lois delivers the first physical blow by using her newly attained Tae-Jitsu skills to punch Peter and send him

crashing into the speaker of their entertainment center. Peter hits back which sends Lois crashing into the wall. They continue to rumble, and the anger fires everyone up. Chris cheers on his father, "Go Dad! Kick her ass!" Meg retorts by blaming the fight on her father and pushes Chris, who yells "I don't like to be touched!" Chris tackles Meg, and the two of them fight – Chris eventually slaps a table lamp across Meg's face, and she retaliates by breaking a large glass vase on his head. Brian and Stewie feed off the fury and begin their own scuffle. The family's fighting continues to escalate: punches become jump kicks, and soon they all begin throwing vases, chairs, pictures, and each other. Peter brutally slams Lois' head through another glass plate in their entertainment center. Stewie destroys a kitchen chair on Lois's back. Chris throws Meg off of the steps and launches himself on top of her, crushing her beneath a WWF-style body slam. Lois kicks Peter and sends him sailing through the living room window, leaving him sprawled out on the front lawn. The family goes at it for a while, and the battle finally ends when they expunge the fury from their system.

While they are recovering on the couch, they ponder the reasons for their scuffle and violent outbursts of anger. Surprisingly, they do not mention that their anger has something to do with Lois' recent expression of hostility through learning and using Tae-Jitsu. Nor do they mention that it has something to do with the fact that the entire family has difficulty finding ways to express anger towards one another. Instead, in an uncharacteristic moment of wisdom and clarity, Chris suggests that "maybe people are just naturally violent." His intelligent remark is quickly and firmly rejected: "I don't believe that. I think it's all the TV we watch," says Lois, who is ironically, sitting with her family around the television set. "There's so much violence!" Peter passionately agrees: "Yah! TV is dangerous. Why the hell doesn't the government step in and tell us what we can and can't watch? And shame on the network for putting this junk on the

air!" Lois looks shiftily about the room and nervously replies, "Peter? Peter, maybe you shouldn't say anything bad about the network." Peter retorts, "Why, what are they gonna do, cut our budget? Pshhht! I'm gonna go get a beer." As Peter walks away, he morphs into a flat cookie-cutter drawing and choppily shimmies across the screen, bringing the episode to a close.

This scene from "Lethal Weapon" represents a core component to the success of Family Guy: self-reflexivity. Picking this scene apart will reveal self-reflexivity functioning in two forms: by commenting on animation creation and industry, and by utilizing socialized knowledge through intertextual references, self-reflexivity in Family Guy "tweaks our anticipation and cynicism by adding a whole new level of self-centered amusement" (Campbell 80). These various strategies may come in the form of a very isolated section of an episode, such as the example above. They may also be found embedded in the narrative of an episode. For instance, the episode discussed above, "I Never Met the Dead Man," explores self-reflexivity in that it comments on society's obsession with television while at the same time depending on that very obsession for its own success. Using examples from other episodes, self-reflexivity in Family Guy is illustrated.

Self-Reflexivity in Animation

One way a text can be reflexive is through animation. Animation allows a different form of self-reflexivity that is not available to texts played by 'real people.' In their study of intertextuality as "interpretive practice and textual strategy," Ott and Walter discuss Ally McBeal as making self-reflexive moves by using socialized knowledge of Calista Flockhart, who plays the role of attorney Ally. In this case, self-reflexivity is created by making intertextual references to popular press texts. In the latter months of 1998, several media sources, including

the September issue of New York Daily News, circulated rumors about Flockhart's apparent eating disorder (Ott and Walter 440). In the October 16th issue of Entertainment Weekly, Flockhart was featured under the headline "Weighty Matters (allegations that actress Calista Flockhart is suffering from an eating disorder)." A waiflike Flockhart, wearing size zero clothes, slyly used other media sources to deny the rumors and attack the press. In the December 14th, 1998 episode of Ally McBeal, as reported by Ott and Walter, Ally accidentally bumps into another woman in the office, who scoffs, "Maybe you should eat a cookie." McBeal cattily responds, "Maybe we could share it." Through this dialogue, McBeal comments on the circulating rumors about Flockhart, thereby calling attention to "the fictional status of the show" while "applaud[ing] loyal viewers for getting the joke" (440). For Ott and Walter, then, self-reflexivity is specifically categorized as an intertextual strategy: one text refers to another in order to call attention to its cultural placement, social function, and its popular circulation (Ott and Walter 439).

Ally McBeal is not the only show to use this strategy, of course. One episode of Friends, for instance, calls attention to the fact that live characters exist both on and off the screen. For instance, the character Rachel Green embodies two identities: (1) Rachel Green, the aloof, fashionable, young mother who is part of a close circle of wealthy friends living in New York City, and (2) Jennifer Aniston, the successful actress with Brad Pitt for a husband. Playing on her dual identity, Friends made their own self-reflexive move in "The One with the Rumor," which aired on November 22nd, 2001. Having their relationship publicized, 'Brad and Jennifer' (as they are fondly dubbed in popular press) worked together on the set when Brad starred in a cameo role playing Will Colbert, Monica's high school friend. As a result, the characters were double-coded as the audience is reminded of their on- and off-screen lives. The flesh-and-blood

nature of these shows allows a kind of self-reflexivity which calls attention to both the make-believe nature of the characters and their 'real life' characters, especially when elements of their personal lives are incorporated into the text. Thus, audiences are reminded of the fictitiousness of the characters, which in turn rewards faithful television viewers as well as tabloid readers.

On the other hand, animation does not allow for this type of play. To call attention to the fictitiousness of a character would require exposing its animated nature. To expose the fictional nature of an animated character, then, requires deconstructing the animation itself, which inevitably destroys the character all together. Take for example Peter Griffin – remove the two-dimensionality, and he ceases to be: his existence is limited to the animated world. Ott explains: "As cartoons, the characters are not 'played' by actors and subsequently they exist only as images" (61). This is not to say that any change in Peter's image will kill him off; in fact, several episodes feature Peter changing in size and shape. However, calling attention to his animated construction necessarily takes the "life" out of him: he is no longer Peter, he is a drawing of Peter. Likewise, Lois is not a character played by a human being, she *is* Lois: the wife, the mother, the piano teacher, the feminist, the lounge singer, the Tae-Jitsu fighter. Take away her animated and 2-dimensional image, and she is destroyed.

Additionally, socialized knowledge about particular characters is nearly absent: a character's identity is largely restricted to the text, thus rumors and tabloid topics are unavailable. So, while Ally McBeal and Friends use intertextuality to create self-reflexivity (referring to tabloids and other socialized knowledge about specific actors), they necessarily point to the mediated existence of those characters. The construction of those characters depends on a "real" person. On the other hand, animation contains no such loopholes, and to expose the make-believe identity of Peter, for example, requires referencing the *process* of

animation and/or the creator and voiceover. This move can be done intertextually by referencing rumors about the show's creation, and can also be done by characters suggesting their own creation. However, the text does not have the option to use tabloid press to create self-reflexivity.

In the above example, when Peter's cookie-cutter image appears, both self-reflexive strategies are used. Peter's punishment for criticizing the network was to be dismantled: his animation is exposed and deconstructed. The audience no longer sees Peter – they see a drawing of Peter and are thus forced to remember that he is merely an image they are consuming. Thus, self-reflexivity in animation requires, in some cases, the death of the subject. When Peter turns into a crude drawing, his identity collapses and the audience is immediately reminded of his celluloid existence. Similarly, in the episode "A Hero Sits Next Door," Peter asks his new neighbor, Joe Swanson, to play on the Happy Go Lucky Toy Company's softball team. Joe accepts, stating that it sounds like fun. Peter agrees: "So much fun it should be illegal, like copyright infringement." After this statement, Peter grows a Mickey Mouse nose and ears, and his voice changes pitch. Mimicking Mickey's famous laugh, Peter says, "Ho Ho! See you at the game, Joe! Ho Ho!" A cartoon has the ability to dismantle the filmmaking process by exposing a character's vulnerability as an object or drawing, rather than a subject or character. As an object or drawing, an animator has the power to change its image, character, or destroy it all together. Once again, the audience is reminded of the amount of play the animator has with his creations.

These examples not only use the animation to create self-reflexivity; they also use socialized knowledge of the animation and production process. Lois's remark about the network reminds the audience that Fox Network has the ability to take the show off the air, and that it indeed is a commodity. Ironically, "Lethal Weapon" was the seventh episode of Family Guy's

third, and last, season on air. With news of its cancellation in popular circulation, this reference functions threefold: (1) it deconstructs the animation process, (2) it references the production process by suggesting Fox Network's power to cancel the show, and (3) it contains an intertextual reference pointing to socialized knowledge about the program's status on air.

In the same vein, Peter's Mickey Mouse image functions the same way. It comments on his status as an animated character while referencing the restrictions an animator has with his or her creation and production. Furthermore, this self-reflexive move does more than expose the animated nature of Peter and his production: it nods to the proliferation of intertextuality in society. It suggests that, while laws are in place to prohibit the robbing and copying of ideas, texts are still able to cash in on using other texts. The play with copyright infringement not only suggests that the show is willing to break rules (also obvious in its satire of political correctness), it also nods to the omnipresence of intertextual references, both in the text itself and in media texts in general.

Animated texts thus have to use slightly different strategies in order to create self-reflexivity. Much of this difference lies in the fact that animated characters do not have an "off-screen" character, and they largely exist only in the animated world. On the other hand, with technological advancements, animated characters are now able to leave their own animated world and enter the "real" world, thereby making them more "real" to viewers. In their chapter "Towards a Post-Modern Animated Discourse," Lindvall and Melton explain that this flexibility of movement is both used and commented upon in the 1999 movie Who Framed Roger Rabbit? (Lindvall 207). In a bed of intertextual references, the cartoon world and the movie world are joined in a display of cunning technology and cinematography, reminding the audience of their submersion in textual excess. The interaction of cartoon characters and flesh-and-blood actors

served to play with the audience's expectations. While both texts are fictitious, animation also has the ability to enter 'real' life, as exemplified in Stewie's campaign for Governor of California. On August 28th, 2000, Stewie appeared on MTV Music Awards, announcing his campaign against Arnold Schwarzenegger and commenting on his distaste for rappers Eminem and 50 Cent:

> I say, Eminem and 50 Cent wouldn't know a proper lyric if it crawled up their asses and brought them to orgasm through prostate stimulation. Here's a grammatical curiosity from 50 Cent's "Wanksta." "We in the club doin' the same ol' two-step/Guerilla unit/Cause they say we bugged out/Cause we don't go nowhere without toast." Now you listen to me, Mr. Cent. You want to make it in this business? Lay off the doobie! Stewie for Governor! (http://www.familyguyfiles.com/oldnews.php?month=08&year=2003).

Stewie thus creates an off-screen existence with his appearance on the live awards show. His 'real life' status was also supported in that his political campaign was also announced on the internet, and rumors (albeit farfetched) of his name on the California ballot circulated. Thus, socialized knowledge of Stewie's life beyond the show began to spread. For instance, on fgg.com, internet users can download Stewie's promotional advertisement, created by Family Guy's publicity department (www.cinescape.com). Stewie's existence in a variety of mediated texts makes him feel more "real" to viewers and browsers, despite the fact that he's an animated creation, which nods to our inability to distinguish between popular culture and reality.

Thus, self-reflexive moves which call attention to the animated nature of Family Guy characters and its production are seen as more disruptive when the character's off-screen identity is either absent *or* stable. Despite his animated nature, he seems more "real" to viewers because we do not have the capacity to deconstruct him – that capacity is limited to the animator and

producers. Thus, when the animated text calls attention to its fictitious nature, the self-reflexivity becomes much more prominent and significant. It does not necessarily remind us of constant intertextuality; rather, it reminds us that although characters exist in a variety of arenas – the Internet, real life, and on the show – they are still and only just figments of someone's, in this case MacFarlane's, imagination.

Family Guy is a self-reflexive text in that it exposes its own animated nature and production process and guidelines. According to Ott and Walter, self-reflexivity is an intertextual strategy: it points to other texts to call attention to its own textual nature. However, what they perhaps overlook is that self-reflexivity can happen without an intertextual reference, exemplified clearly by Peter's transition into sketch. The reference to Fox Network is not necessary for the audience to read the self-reflexivity, suggesting that self-reflexivity is not necessarily limited to intertextuality. An animated text can play with the animation in order to expose its singular and mediated identity. Perhaps (re)considering self-reflexive moves in animation would further inform Ott and Walter's treatment of intertextuality. Nevertheless, they astutely resolve that intertextuality is a very substantial component of self-reflexivity. It at once creates a bond between text and audience, rewards viewers for knowing media codes, while sneakily calling attention to its own placement in an intertextual world. Examining a particular episode of Family Guy, exposes how these two modernist codes, intertextuality and self-reflexivity, work together to craft a piece of discourse which rewards viewers for media saturation. "I Never Met the Dead Man" revolves around media saturation and obsession, and by combining intertextuality and self-reflexivity, the audience is rewarded in a very unique way.

"I Never Met the Dead Man"

Perhaps no episode better establishes Family Guy as a television show about television shows than "I Never Met the Dead Man." In nearly every episode of Family Guy, Peter tries to get out of doing work around the house and helping his children. In this episode, he explains to Meg that he cannot teach her to drive because, "In all fairness, Star Trek was here first." Putting his devotion to television shows over his devotion to his family, Peter displays the irony in his dub as the "family guy." Meg begs and pleads until he acquiesces. After he teaches her how to drag race and give other drivers "the bird," Peter gets behind the wheel and speeds home in order to catch the beginning of MacFarlane's version of Fox's new reality TV program, *Fast Animals, Slow Children*. When he realizes the show has already started, he begins to look through neighborhood windows, hoping to catch a glimpse of the show on their TV sets. Fortunately, he catches a glimpse in a few windows. Unfortunately, he is unable to look away and crashes into the Quahog television tower. The Quahog cable feed is knocked out, the town is in an angry uproar, and Peter blames the accident on his daughter to escape blame and humiliation.

While Meg deals with angry classmates and teachers who blame her for "ruining TV," Peter begins to show symptoms of withdrawal. He even has to call his out-of-town friend to tell him what happens on NYPD Blue, all the while sitting on his couch nervously rocking back and forth. He even stays up all night and flips through the endless channels of static, hoping that with each new push of a button, cable would reappear. The loss of cable also triggers intertextual dreams. He dreams he is in Dorothy Gail's house in Wizard of Oz, spinning inside the cyclone. As he's spinning up in the cyclone, he begins to talk in his sleep: "Can't live without TV. Must see TV!" Alluding to the slogan advertising the weeknight lineup on NBC, Peter suggests the power this slogan has over him. While in the cyclone, he sees popular

television characters spinning outside his window: ALF, Samantha from Bewitched, Gilligan from Gilligan's Island, and Jeannie from I Dream of Jeannie. This dream again represents Peter's complete immersion in television shows in that the structure and framework of the dream is in the form of one text, The Wizard of Oz, and the characters and elements of the brief storyline are a concoction of a variety of Peter's favorite shows. His exposure to and obsession with television begins to occupy his mind and drive him crazy.

Realizing that he must alter his lifestyle in order to live without television, Peter creates a contraption that allows him to see his world through a makeshift television set. Peter constructs the frame of a television out of cardboard and attaches it to his body so that everywhere he looks he sees his world through his new TV screen. If he wants to change channels, he simply goes into another room or drives to a different part of the neighborhood. He even goes to Meg's school and responds as if he's watching Beverly Hills, 90210. When he sees Meg standing outside alone, he says, "Meg, what are you doing at West Beverly? Oh boy! They're really reaching for guest stars in the tenth season." Lois shows up to save Meg and Peter from embarrassment, and convinces Peter and the community to feel lucky for being released from TV's powerful spell.

From Lois, Peter realizes the damage television has done and decides to turn over a new leaf and make an effort to enjoy life without television. However, when he wakes up on the morning of his new, media free life, he continues to see the world through mediated eyes, although he does not realize it. For example, he opens his bedroom window in the morning, exclaiming, "What a gorgeous day!" He looks up and says, "Isn't it a gorgeous day, Mr. Sun?" The sun looks back at him through sunglasses while sprinkling raisins on the ground: "It's always a nice day with two scoops of raisins, Peter!" Referencing the long running Kellog's

Raisin Bran commercial, Peter still sees his world in a bed of intertextual references. In fact, several of the family's activities include elements of popular culture. On their first outing, they go fishing and catch the Lock Ness Monster. While laying in the grass and gazing at the clouds, they see the Batman symbol calling the superhero to work. In a significant move, this section of the episode calls attention to and mocks both the omnipresence of media and the difficulty people have in distinguishing media from reality.

After their long day of family activities, the family returns to find their television working. Peter refuses to get sucked into the TV again, so he leaves his family in front of the TV and goes to a German Festival with William Shatner, who conveniently appears at the Griffin's door while they're watching Star Trek. After the festival, Peter and William hop through mud puddles on their walk home, and Meg hits both of them with the car, killing Shatner. Upon visiting him in the hospital, Peter claims he'll never watch television again. This statement upsets the family, and Lois wails, "Oh no! We've lost him!" The episode ends when a nurse enters the room, turns on the television, and walks away without turning it off as Peter demanded. He attempts to keep his eyes averted, but ends up getting sucked into a Klondike Bar commercial, curious as to whether or not the man would commit murder for one tasty bite.

This episode not only puts a humorous spin on Peter's obsession with television, it also suggests that Peter cannot live in his own world without the help of a mediated world. Several theorists, drawing on the work of Kenneth Burke, suggest that people use media as "equipment for living." In his article "Electric Literature as Equipment for Living: Haunted House Films," Barry Brummet suggests that stories teach us how to solve problems, and audiences are able to connect events that happen in media texts with events in their own life, thus creating a template for making decisions and working through problems. Because Peter is so immersed in popular

culture, he both uses and depends on it to make sense of his life. His dependency is obvious when considering his attempt to cope with the loss of television by creating his own portable television frame. Peter's boredom with his "real" life is quickly remedied by placing a frame in front of his face. Once the frame is in place, he sees a new "reality" which he can now understand by applying television codes. For example, he is pleased with the variety of "channels" he can get on his new television, and thus codes each image he sees as belonging to different stations. For instance, when Peter observes two women eating lunch together in a quiet café, he sees them through the Lifetime channel. An elderly couple walking on the sidewalk comes from CBS. When he sees a group of African American men playing basketball, he is happy to discover he gets UPN. Further, when he goes to Meg's school, he thinks his daughter is a guest star on Beverly Hills, 90210. He recognizes his daughter, but is unable to remover her from his television frame, suggesting that he is in fact incapable of distinguishing reality from popular culture. Further, the ease with which Peter makes the transition from reality to television likewise exemplifies his difficulty in determining reality from media. By looking through a cardboard frame, Peter's life is transformed into television spectacle. Essentially, he cannot function without buffering his observation of reality with a television screen. He understands how to interact and react to his world through mediated codes.

Further, the episode nods to the inundation of media into reality. The town of Quahog is unable to watch television, but media forms still remain, suggesting that there is no divide between media and reality – media *is* reality. When the family is lying in the grass watching the clouds, they see more than nature: they see media symbols in the sky. Further, Peter sees the Raisin Bran Sun in place of the natural sun. This move suggests that although we may choose to close the magazine, turn off the television, or even vow that we will avoid voluntarily consuming

popular culture altogether, we are incapable of escaping it. We are coded to interpret reality through popular culture, and the ability to distinguish between the two is diminishing, if not absent altogether.

Likewise, Peter's story illustrates a postmodern symptom which suggests that media use and consumption work to create identity. Media and advertising pervade the contemporary social and cultural landscape. It is nearly impossible to drive more than ten miles without encountering an advertisement of some kind. If one is lucky enough to avoid it, they most likely *hear* an advertisement blaring through their radio. Further, technologies such as the internet and video games blur the line between media, popular culture, and reality. Thus, modern identities offered people a sense of security and also gave people a place to fit – they outlined their position in the world. However, the once limited and coherent set of modern identities is beginning to fragment into diverse and unstable identities. These identities are unstable precisely because as a consumer culture, we become what we wear, what we buy, and what we watch rather than what we make, what we sell, and what we build. While these identities are being fragmented, postmodern theorists argue that no new stable identities emerge to take their place – media and consumerism fail to offer legitimate beliefs, identities, or communities because they define viewers and buyers as anonymous consumers. Thus,

> neither consumerism, nor popular culture and the mass media, such as television culture, can provide viable and acceptable sources of belief, community and identity. However, since there are no alternatives, they come to serve as the only bases from which collective and personal identities can be formed. (Strinati 2000, 239)

Thus, increased consumerism and media saturation may pretend to offer people a more stable sense of identity, despite the fact that their identity will be criticized and thrown out next season

and deemed "out of style." Ott suggests that:

> identity today has not simply transformed the modern individual into the postmodern personae. They indicate a range of spaces between the outward projection of a relatively stable and essential self, grounded in inherited and pre-given, categories, and the performance of a flexible and radically under-determined self, located in images and styles. (62)

In Peter's case, it is quite obvious that his identity, and existence, depends on television. Without his "normal" obsession, he is dead in his family's eyes. They no longer recognize Peter when he is coated in his new, zesty, anti-television attitude. His nurse even passes him off as crazy. While Peter may feel like a new man, his family no longer recognizes him, suggesting that without a mediated identity, he cannot relate to his loved ones, and his loved ones cannot relate to him. Essentially, his identity, as does Homer Simpsons', rests in his consumer activities – drinking at The Drunken Clam or watching television with a can of Pawtucket beer in his hand. Without engaging in these activities, Peter (and Homer) "[are] reduced to the now vacuous categories of father and husband" (Ott 65).

When viewing this episode, the audience members are most likely laughing at Peter's pathetic reliance on television. "I Never Met the Dead Man" is indeed a satirical look at society's obsession with television. Exaggerating Peter's response to losing television suggests that his dependency on popular culture is unhealthy, and that in order to live a full life, people need to turn off their televisions and go outside once in a while. With television, Peter continually wastes money on stupid commodities and often solves problems based on lessons he has learned from episodes of his favorite shows. Without television, he wears his family out, and his new zest for life pushes them away. When they jump back into their television-dominated

life as the cable feed returns, Peter's family is no longer able to recognize, and subsequently no longer wish to have him in their lives. Thus, without television, Peter loses his original identity, his family, and his ability to relate to anyone, save William Shatner.

On a broader scale, this narrative suggests that in order to function in society, an individual needs to be, at the very least, familiar with popular culture. It further suggests that television has become a very powerful institution capable of causing community discord and relational trouble. Like all other episodes, "I Never Met the Dead Man" is packed full of intertextual references, and these references continue to appear in the Griffins' lives, even without television. While these references serve to ground the Griffins in the mediated lives of the audience, they also perform a self-reflexive function in that they criticize media saturation while simultaneously being a part of media itself. One glaring and blatant self-reflexive move, in fact, serves to remind the audience that Family Guy is just a show. After Peter breaks the cable feed, the audience sees the reactions from random Quahog citizens. An elderly couple, tuned in to *Slow Children, Fast Animals*, look at each other in puzzlement when the show turns to static. A father and son are standing on the street, watching the same show through a window display of stacked television sets for sale. They exchange the same confused look when the show turns to static. Lois and Chris, also watching the show, are likewise confused. In this particular string of shots, the audience is asked to laugh at the fact that all of these people are watching not only a reality TV show, a genre dominating prime-time television, but a reality TV show depicting extreme violence, mutilation, and death. However, their laughter is interrupted with a simple self-reflexive move: their own television turns to static and cuts to a commercial break. With this move, the text changes the position of the audience: at one minute, they are

asked to laugh at the parodic allusion; in the next, they are placed in extreme self-centeredness, reminded that they, in fact, are saturated in media as well.

In essence, this episode, and the Family Guy text as a whole, largely depends on intertextual play to attract and sustain its audience, while the audience depends of intertextual knowledge to get the most out of the text. This juxtaposition of intertextuality in the text and the audience serves a self-reflexive function: the text criticizes media while depending on media for its own success. In conjunction, the audience is made to feel smart for being able to pick up the most intertextual references, yet in the end, the only reason they can interpret the text as such depends on their own media saturation.

Stepping back, these modernist strategies work together with styles from situation comedy and limited animation to make up the text's pastiche framework. Viewers who appreciate this unique formula do so because they are familiar with reading texts and can identify modern codes. Further, by picking specific references from a particular era, an isolated audience will gain still more reward. In the case of Family Guy, this audience consists of TV Babies who can recall and identify with the toys, games, TV shows, and music of their past. Ultimately delivering nostalgic references within adult content, viewers can feel both young at old at once.

Additionally, the viewers' media knowledge is toyed with through self-reflexive moves. By grounding itself in reality by referencing media both the characters and the audience consumes, the audience is encouraged to forget about Family Guy's fictitious nature. However, intertextual strategies as well as animation function to call attention to both the texts fakeness and the audience's submersion in popular culture. While the audience is meant to feel smart for getting all of the references, they are likewise encouraged to further mold their spot of the couch and spend more time learning the language of popular culture.

Clearly, TV Babies and other avid media consumers make up a large part of the Family Guy audience. However, as noted above, the audience consists of more men than women, suggesting that the text offers men a form of entertainment not as enticing to women. Perhaps the male attraction to Family Guy has to do with its content. In the same way that intertextuality and self-reflexivity reward viewers for media saturation while simultaneously making themselves feel smart for not being as foolishly dependent on media as Peter Griffin, in the same light, several episodes in Family Guy possibly make men feel smart for being more masculine than Peter. Chapter Three will address the way that Family Guy includes narratives which reflect a larger social phenomenon regarding masculinity. By investigation Peter's attempts to prove his manliness, the male appeal to this text is made clearer.

Chapter Three

Family Guy and the Construction of Working-Class Masculinity: Continuing a Debauched Tradition

Susan Sackett, in her examination of popular prime-time television programs in Prime-Time Hits: Televisions' Most Popular Network Programs, describes Archie Bunker from the popular All in the Family as "an equal-opportunity bigot, a no-hold-barred conservative, a last gasp holdout of an endangered species. Twenty years earlier audiences would have nodded in sympathetic agreement with his beliefs, laughing with him rather than at him" (183). Although her statement intends to describe an "in-your-face" working-class character specific to the 1970s, the same description applies to Peter Griffin. Peter has moments of racism, sexism, and classism, and he is not afraid to throw insults at a variety of people. Likewise, his attitudes are extremely out of date, and the audience laughs at his asinine behavior and faithful yet ignorant violation of political correctness. For instance, in the episode "A Hero Sits Next Door," Peter protests the neighbors' acceptance of Joe: "Since when is it ok to be handicapped?" In essence, Archie and Peter both represent a long enduring depiction of working-class males in domestic sitcoms. Despite his celluloid nature, Peter Griffin perpetuates this tradition of working-class representation, which began in part with I Remember Mama (1949-1957).

Following the lives of an immigrant family from Norway, I Remember Mama focused on the strong and independent Mama who often had to take care of her sweet, harmless, yet highly dependent and ridiculous husband, Lars (Cantor 277). The show's success paved the way for the popularity of other bumbling and inept working-class male characters, including but not limited

to portrayals found in the following shows: The Life of Riley, The Honeymooners, The Flintstones, and All in the Family. The latter boasts probably the most famous working-class character, Archie Bunker. Muriel Cantor discusses the popularity of Archie's character: "All in the Family was considered a breakthrough in a genre whose stories and characters previously had been bland, homogenized, and inoffensive. In contrast, Archie was a loud-mouthed bigot who openly expressed his dislike for minority groups, using typically shunned epithets" (278). Archie personifies an ongoing theme occurring in working-class depictions as revealed in a comprehensive study of family portrayals from 1949 to 1992. According to Richard Butsch, sitcom depictions of working-class fathers are characterized as bumbling, inept, and childlike (1982; 1992, 391). Often times, his wife and children are portrayed as more intelligent, logical, prudent, and responsible than their husband and father. It is these traits that the audience is encouraged to laugh at, as they are often the main reason this character gets into trouble. Thus, appointing childlike characteristics to working-class men, as Butsch points out, "not only devalues them as men but also uses gender to establish their subordinate class status. Men may be de-masculinized by describing them as women or as boys, making them . . . childlike" (387).

While his character definitely adopted these characteristics, Archie differed in his representation of the working-class father in that he was both bumbling and inept as well as largely offensive not only to other characters, but to the audience as well. His nasty attitude opened the door for other offensive characters and is echoed in 1980's and 1990's characters Al Bundy from Married…With Children and Homer Simpson from The Simpsons. While both characters' offensive mannerisms differ in frequency and intensity, they nevertheless hold little regard for political correctness while simultaneously acting foolish.

Additionally, television portrays that many working-class fathers waste a lot of time with "get rich quick" schemes that never work out, and their attempts at upward mobility often require their wives to bail them out of trouble (Butsch). For instance, as early as the 1950s and 1960s, attempts at jumping to the middle-class caused problems for several television characters. For one, The Honeymooners' Ralph Kramden was obsessed with making more money "toward which ends he constantly schemes but invariable fails" (Butsch 391). In the 1970's, Archie's dim-witted money schemes caused problems that required Edith's attention (Butsch 392). Likewise, Peter Griffin displays characteristics associated with the portrayal of the working-class father.

The 1980s and early 1990s continued this portrayal of working-class fathers, although in some cases his character changed slightly. Homer Simpson continued the trend of working-class men being less intelligent and mature than their wife and children. Homer's daughter, Lisa, is the brain in the family and was even capable of beating her father at Scrabble in the second grade. Likewise, Al Bundy of Married…With Children is often bested by his son, Bud. However, Al's childish qualities are much less extreme: the show uses class alone to devalue the characters by consistently comparing the Bundy's with their successful middle-class neighbors. Nevertheless, Al possesses a lack of intelligence and maturity when compared to his family, who often express embarrassment and disappointment in his failures to provide a life comparable to that of their middle-class neighbors. While nearly all working-class portrayals in the 1980s and early 1990s include a father and husband who is often an embarrassment to his family, an exception is found in Dan Conner of Roseanne. He appears relatively intelligent, comfortable with his working-class status, and respected by this wife and children (Butsch).

While the characteristics of working-class men on television may have changed slightly over time (for instance, Archie Bunker added an offensiveness to working-class portrayals; Dan Conner garnered respect from his family), they resonate today. Peter Griffin's character continues the long tradition in television's debauched portrayal of working-class men. He is loud, brutish, clumsy, offensive, stupid, and depends on his wife, and sometimes even his children, to bail him out when he gets into trouble. Similar to The Flintstones and its obvious inspiration from The Honeymooners, Peter Griffin's childlike characteristics are taken to an extreme and his offensive comments come from his stupidity and ignorance. Rather than taking his comments seriously, the audience is invited to laugh at his follies and assume he knows no better. Further, while Peter's attempts to "get rich quick" largely fail and require Lois to save him, he nevertheless crosses, although momentarily, the boundary of middle- and working-class status more so than, for instance, Homer Simpson and Al Bundy. For one, Peter buys a sports car, takes his family on vacations, and inherits a summer mansion from Lois's aunt, temporarily placing his family with the upper echelons of Quahog society. While the inheritance gives them ample opportunity to join a higher class, Peter's ineptitude and dimwittedness kill the opportunity because he is, in fact, too irresponsible to handle such a large amount of money. He also has great difficulty in controlling his behavior so that it is appropriate for, say, the local country club. Thus, in this case, Peter attains at least middle-class status, but his immaturity prevents him from sustaining it.

Coupled with his continuous attempts to provide for his family, Peter Griffin spends a lot of time trying to prove his masculinity, which is constantly challenged by his childlike behavior and utter stupidity. While his attempts to make more money are an important factor in his representation of the working-class father, his attempts to remedy his lost masculinity are of

more interest in this project. For one, Joan Scott, in Gender and the Politics of History, draws a connection between gender and class, suggesting that gender becomes a way of confirming class status. By de-masculinizing working-class men, television portrayals necessarily subordinate their status. Moreover, Peter is capable of attaining middle-class status; however, it is his foolishness and ignorance, his incompetent masculinity, which pulls him back to where he started. Thus, it is the perpetual failure in Peter's masculinity that prevents upward mobility.

Placing Peter's character in the context of contemporary discussions about and displays of masculinity begins to address part of the attraction Family Guy has to eighteen to thirty-four year old males. The extent to which Peter exaggerates the stereotypical characteristics of working-class men on television helps the male audience differentiate themselves from this type of working-class masculinity. Further, Family Guy continues the trend of portraying the working-class man as foolish and unmanly. While these depictions largely distort reality, they nevertheless situate and solidify the "country bumpkin in our panoply of cultural types" (Butsch 391).

Masculinity in Crisis

Scholarship demonstrates a lively interest in men and their display of masculinity in a variety of forms, suggesting that the parameters of masculine performance are changing. From the implementation of men's studies programs in universities around the United States, to a shift in the way masculine interests are structured on television, America is witnessing a growth of interest in men and masculinity. Recent work highlights men's issues in a variety of arenas. While many theorists argue for organizational changes in the workplace, others are examining cultural sites, practices, and articulations of masculinity in both progressive and regressive forms

(Bordo; Faludi; Ferber and Kimmel; Hall; Hanke; Kimmel). Progressive forms of masculinity may be found in the occupational arena through "father friendly" policies in the workplace, and such discussion may be echoed in magazines, such as XY, which espouses a progressive masculine tenet:

> XY starts from the belief that many of our society's attitudes about masculinity are harmful to men and boys in a variety of ways, as well as being oppressive to women and children. XY is a forum for men who are seeking to build life-affirming, joyful, and non-oppressive ways of being. (www.xyonline. net)

Progressive masculinity encourages men to show emotion and admit weakness (characteristics traditionally associated with femininity) while recognizing their own oppressive actions (i.e. allocating feminine qualities as inherently inferior).

In contrast, regressive forms of masculinity continue the tradition of scoffing at weakness. These forms may be found paraded at NASCAR races, gun shows, and in magazines such as Maxim and FHM, which both objectify and demean women through risqué images and sexual content. Both magazines entertain readers by talking about gadgets, sports, and business strategies. This traditional form of masculinity is partly in response to feminist movement, as discussed by Susan Bordo in The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private:

> Today, with many men feeling that women – particularly feminists – have been pushing them around for a couple of decades, the idea of a return to manhood 'in the raw' has a refreshed, contemporary appeal. The 'Return of the Alpha Male' literature and a good deal of the mythopoetic men's movement seem clearly to be 'backlash' reclamations of manhood, which, like some their Victorian counterparts, view women as responsible for having tamed the beast in man. (251)

This type of masculinity is present in new shows targeted to men, such as The Man Show and Spike TV: The First Network for Men. Thus, manhood 'in the raw' is marketed, to some extent, as a liberating masculinity in that it suggests men have been pushed around enough by feminists, and the natural "beast" in every man has been unduly criticized and oppressed.

In a variety of arenas, both progressive and regressive forms of masculinity are expressed and encouraged. Not surprisingly, the presence of both forms of masculinity is driven by adverts who simultaneously sell and promote various masculine images, whether in the form of regressive or progressive masculinity. Recently popular T-shirts with witty statements include a line of clothing for men flaunting such sayings as "Destroy All Girls" and "Wife Beater" (Faludi 7). Encouraging men to display a rugged and traditional masculinity, advertisers both feed off of and perpetuate a bad boy image most closely aligned with regressive masculinity. A man, in this case, is strictly defined as one who rejects all characteristics associated with women: he is in fact defined by what he is not – feminine. On the other hand, progressive forms of masculinity, as detailed in XY's tenet, attempt to perpetuate a masculinity that is neither sexist nor oppressive. Thus, rugged masculinity in the form of dominance and aggressiveness is discouraged, and these men are encouraged to adopt habits and behaviors traditionally defined as feminine. For instance, the boom in male cosmetic surgery reflects the growing importance for men to pay attention to their appearance (Faludi 6). Magazines such as Men's Health and GQ likewise keep men up to date on current fashion while simultaneously encouraging men to maintain a healthy and attractive image by working out, eating healthy, and performing such "feminine" hygiene rituals as facials and manicures (www.gq.com).

By examining these various articulations of masculinity, it is clear that in a postmodern world where identities are fragmented, the definition of "masculinity" is becoming more

incoherent. While the traditional notion of the robust and unflinching man is being simultaneously challenged *and* perpetuated through the various publications mentioned above, a new form of masculinity is emerging. Thus, men are caught in a "masculinity crisis," framed by the following periodical headlines: "The Crisis of Manliness" from Weekly Standard, "White Male Paranoia" from Newsweek, and "Men: It's Time to Pull Together" from Utne Reader (Faludi 6). Each headline echoes a different concern regarding masculinity; still all suggest confusion over its performance. In essence, the "masculinity crisis" refers to the definition of masculinity itself. In order to understand this "masculinity crisis" and its relevance to Family Guy, it is important to discuss the position occupied by working-class men in this struggle.

Faludi, among others (Catano; Kimmel and Ferber; McDowell; Robinson; Savran), argues that the late 20th and early 21st century have witnessed and continue to witness "the betrayal of the American man." Faludi cites this betrayal as inherently connected to the transition from an industrial society to a service society: the role of the working-class, blue collar American man in society is becoming hazy, and these changes suggest a dying need for traditional male roles. In Redundant Masculinities, geographer Linda McDowell asserts that "waged employment, identified as a core element in the social construction of a masculine identity, has altered in its nature and form and, in particular, in its association with masculinity" (3). Men can no longer rely on the certainties of their construction as breadwinners and women as primary dependents and homemakers. With the gradual yet fervent shift to outsourcing manufactured products, the United States economy is more reliant on service work, which has traditionally been most aligned with femininity. "Service-sector work, especially at the bottom end, demands care, deference and docility as key attributes of a desirable workplace identity – characteristics that are more commonly identified as feminine than masculine traits and it seems

that women rather than men are now preferred employees" (McDowell 3). Performing a masculine workplace identity, then, requires men to sell themselves so consumers will buy their products. The frequency with which service workers must interact with potential consumers is increasing, and focus on communication, magnetism, and display (historically grounded as feminine) is encouraged. Now, rather than *making* commodities, which requires blue-collar labor and manufacturing, customer service – in all forms – has become fundamental to most occupations in order to *sell* commodities. In essence, "for young men in particular, it is a difficult time to negotiate the transition to adulthood and pathways to employment when traditional ways of becoming a man are increasingly less available" (McDowell 4).

This trend is reflected in the growing attention given to the 'metrosexual' male. According to The Word Spy, a website devoted to "*lexpionage*, the sleuthing of new words and phrases," the term "metrosexual" refers to "an urban male with a strong aesthetic sense who spends a great deal of time and money on his appearance and lifestyle" (wordspy.com). It is this man who will likely be most successful in the service sector economy due to his ability to charm and impress his customers with his congenial attitude and polished, fashionable look. Further, advertisers crave this man, as he will spend his paycheck focusing on his appearance. At same time that working-class or waged employment is decaying, men in the service sector are encouraged to acquire an aestheticized body through the consumptions of goods, in the form of clothes, cosmetics, colognes, and accessories, in order to become successful in the workplace. Thus, a cycle ensues: the ability to consume "both permits and demands the performance of an aestheticized identity in which the body is a key indicator of social status" (McDowell 46). Targeting a wealthy demographic encouraged to consume in order to maintain their status, advertisers consistently covet the metrosexual customer. The reflection of a "job well done" is

no longer seen in the greased-up, oversized muscles of hard manual labor; it is now reflected in the donning of designer suits, expensive watches, and a groomed appearance.

It is important to mention, however, that the metrosexual male is not replacing the rugged and traditionally masculine male. In contradiction to the metrosexual man, a class of men dubbed as "NASCAR Dads" have become a prime political target, and their masculinity resides in part by mocking and refusing the idea of the metrosexual male. The earliest citation of this term is found in Will Lester's June 25, 2002 article for the Associated Press, "Poll Show's Bush Still Dominates" (www.wordspy.com; Lester). To gain voters, it was suggested by Democratic pollster Celinda Lake that the Democratic Party target "NASCAR Dads" rather than focusing so much attention on "office park dads" as they had in the past (Lester). While the birth of the term is specific to political agenda, the NASCAR Dad owns more cultural significance. According to Word Spy, this term is used to refer to "a white, working-class father" who, in general, places strong emphasis on values rather than party politics (www.wordspy.com). Despite that NASCAR is typically seen as a sporting event attracting blue-collar, beer chugging men who live paycheck to paycheck, it is becoming just as attractive to middle-class men. A study reported in USA Today reveals that in 2001, 42% of NASCAR fans had an income of over $50,000 (Lesmerisis). NASCAR Dads, who are increasingly assumed to be Southern working-class men, typically lean Republican but are likely to be swayed by value appeals. While Democrats did attempt to gain some NASCAR Dad voters in the 2004 Presidential elections, most voted for Republican incumbent George W. Bush (despite the fact that his administration largely ignores working-class needs). As Senator Bob Graham (D-FL) suggests, NASCAR Dads "vote Bush because there's a perception that Democrats are a bunch of wusses" (Wells). The attitude purportedly held by NASCAR Dads suggests that their notion of masculinity involves the

rejection of weakness and timidity, and the proper way to run a country is to uphold these traditional masculine ideals.

The metrosexual man and the NASCAR Dad in no way represent the only ways men explore, express, and define masculinity. Rather, they demonstrate polar extremes on a continuum of available options for performing hegemonic masculinity in contemporary postmodern society. A man need not be *either* a metrosexual man *or* NASCAR Dad. Rather, each represents the extreme to which each type of masculinity is polarized: one embraces a more feminine look, style, and mannerisms, while the other rejects those qualities and embraces the traditionally rugged and tough masculinity. Nevertheless, both types of men are now given invigorated attention. On the one hand, advertisers seek out the metrosexual male because his success in the service economy requires him to spend and consume. On the other hand, NASCAR Dads do not go unnoticed, as evidenced by the magazines and television shows. Thus, it seems that although a shift in masculine interest is evident in shows and advertisements that target the metrosexual male, attention to NASCAR Dads is still present, if not growing due to political interest. More importantly, although these NASCAR Dads have gained more political attention and clout, their depiction in television has not changed, suggesting that, on a whole, they are still largely ignored, stereotyped, and mocked.

Shows such as Queer Eye for the Straight Guy work to promote the metrosexual image by featuring five homosexual men making over a man's apartment and wardrobe so that he can attract his female partner and/or gain professional success. By adding a "homosexual touch" to a rugged man's lifestyle, a compromise is found in the metrosexual who makes an appearance in his newly outfitted apartment and self. He learns how to style his hair, pluck his eyebrows, pick out expensive bedding, and cook a gourmet meal. Further examples include shows such as The

Bachelorette, American Idol, Will and Grace, Friends, and Joe Millionaire. The latter, for example, takes a working-class male, passes him off as a millionaire, and makes him available to a horde of eager and attractive women. Of course, in order to successfully trick the women, "Joe" not only has to possess millionaire commodities, he has to *look* like a millionaire and abandon his work boots, holey jeans, and scruffy appearance and don designer clothing and a dapper image. In this case, Joe Millionaire suggests that working-class men are inept at finding partners, are unattractive, and therefore require "fixing." On the contrary, traditionally masculine depictions are still in place in popular media. Rugged and regressive forms of masculinity are displayed in, for example, The Man Show and WWF wrestling, a sport that continues to grow in popularity. These shows continue to perpetuate the image of the brawny and domineering man by encouraging his behavior.

Family Guy, in a different vein, portrays this type of masculinity through a working-class father who represents, as Archie Bunker does, a dying breed or "endangered species." He is endangered in part by both the changing economic structure and the rise of the metrosexual man. In another sense, he is endangered by his absence in news media. Gregory Mantsios, in "Media Magic: Making Class Invisible," suggests that "the news media clearly distinguishes the middle class (employees) from the working class (i.e., blue collar workers) who are portrayed, at best, as irrelevant, outmoded, and a dying breed" (Kimmel and Ferber 106). He goes on to suggest that working-class hardships are seen as a result of bad luck or a result of their own mistakes. While he will most likely never disappear, the working-class man's status is continually challenged and his masculinity called into question.

Family Guy thus functions to continue sitcom media representation of working-class men as failures. Through his actions in several episodes, Peter represents this very stereotypical,

inaccurate, yet popular portrayal of working-class masculinity. His performance of masculinity through loutish and ignorant action pokes fun of working-class men. However, at the same time, his attempts at boosting his masculine status satire alternate performances of masculinity. His struggle to gain status and his various strategies for doing so reaffirm and reflect a "masculinity in crisis." The following sections will address these issues as played out in the episodes "And the Weiner Is…," "He's Too Sexy for His Fat," and "I Am Peter, Hear Me Roar."

"And the Weiner Is…"

Aired on August 8th, 2001, as the fifth episode of season three, "And the Weiner Is…" makes no attempt to hide its premise in the title. Ashamed to discover his son has a bigger penis than he, Peter sets out to reconcile his deficiency using numerous competitive strategies. His disappointment intensifies when he discovers that this is the first time Chris has beat him at *anything.* Up to this point, Peter was the reigning champion of ice skating, magic tricks, basketball, and a dinner-time competition – the one who could balance the most plates, pots, utensils, and cups on his head and face was crowned "The Man." However, where Peter dominates on the ice rink, at the dinner table, at darts, and in the realm of magic, he cannot dominate in the most important of arenas: penis size. For Susan Bordo, although the phallus is a cultural symbol, many see the penis as interchangeable with the phallus – having a penis means owning the cultural codes associated with the phallus: "The phallus is the penis that takes one's breath away – not merely because of length or thickness . . . but because of its majesty. Those who gaze upon it immediately feel themselves to be its subjects" (Bordo 87). Thus, ownership of a phallus exudes majestic control over others and promises the perpetual winning of all competitions. Peter's so called "reverence" and competitive success is undermined when he

realizes his "phallus" cannot measure up to his son's. So, when Peter discovers that Chris's large member is not in fact a growth on his leg, as he originally thought, he immediately covers himself up, shameful of his own lack of "majesty."

In this particular episode, Peter attempts to damper the pain from his status of "lesser man" in several ways. For one, he refuses to let Chris drink milk because it might in fact make him 'too strong.' He also refuses to help Chris with his homework because, as Peter reasons, "You're a big man, figure it out!" In this case, ownership of a phallus equals intellectual independence. When he goes to bed with Lois, he grunts and whines: "Lois, I'm trying to make love to you but you're thinking about Chris." Peter is ignorant of the incestual nature of his remarks and associates the phallus with sexual prowess and attractiveness. However, it is when these attempts fail that Peter turns to more drastic measures.

Peter's response in fact may not be a gross exaggeration, considering that many men struggle with anxiety and incompetence in the size of their member, reflected in the marketing of "performance enhancement" drugs such as "Longitude" and "Size Max," both earning positive reviews on the conspicuous website www.penis-enlargement-planet.com. It is this anxiety, in part, that drives men to compete with one another. In fact, Michael Kimmel discusses the drive behind phallic competition is his essay "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity":

> Always be prepared to demonstrate sexual interest in women that you meet, so it is impossible for any woman to get the wrong idea about you. In this sense, homophobia is the fear of being perceived as gay, as not a real man, keeps men exaggerating all the traditional rules of masculinity, including sexual predation with women. (2003, 65-66)

If men are incapable of impressing women with their phalluses, they may in fact attempt to

supplant their small members with a bigger, more impressive phallus. This notion is displayed in Peter's attempts to reconcile his masculinity to that of his championed manliness capable of beating his son in every competition.

His mending begins at Jim's Exotic Cars. Playing on the myth of sports cars and their relationship to penis size, Peter buys a bright red, phallic-shaped sports car. A one-seat red convertible with no trunk, the car's bulk sits in the front and extends into a long nose, complete with a bulbous tip. Peter purchases the temporary fix he is looking for. Now able to compete with other men on the road, he acts offensively while behind the wheel. His offensive nature is not surprising when recalling that his working-class portrayal represents Archie Bunker's in his willingness to offend anyone and everyone. For instance, one man finds Peter and his new car next to him at a red light. Peter crows, "Hey! When you pull that thing into the garage, does your garage say 'Is it in yet'?" This scene alone deserves much attention, for it begins to reveal much about the myth of masculinity and the phallus. This myth perpetuates the idea that one is able to determine a man's penis size by identifying the size of other phallus markers. For instance, some claim similarity between the size of a man's shoes and the size of his penis. Others may suggest that big trucks are meant to make up for a lack in the pants. Regardless of the commodity, this myth, both exploited and promoted by advertisers, establishes a connection between buying power and masculinity: if a man is uncomfortable with his tumescence, or lack thereof, phallic commodities may offer a fast fix.

The connection between automobiles and the phallus is most notable in truck commercials showing rugged men conquering nature in, for example, their Ford F150. These strategies include the use of phallic imagery to guarantee customer satisfaction. Bordo traces the phallus – a cultural symbol – "from the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris to twentieth-century

automobile advertisements," and astutely discusses literary phallic metaphors used to sell the 1946 Chevrolet: a dapper gentleman is pictured yelling to the driver of a Chevrolet full of young women. The barefaced metaphors stand out on the page: "Hi, Fifteen-Footer, You're THE LONGEST of the LOT …the very longest of all lowest-priced cars!" A subscript reads: "It measures a thrilling fifteen feet plus – 181 inches from front of grille to rear of body – and it's 'every inch the kin' of lowest priced cars'!" (87). Although unabashed phallic metaphors are few and far between in contemporary advertisements, they reflect a common myth: whether or not men use this connection to guide their spending habits, advertisers nevertheless feed off of and perpetuate phallic inadequacy to sell their products. These metaphors become even more powerful when combining images with metaphor. Still, "it's not just the visual or verbal allusion to penis-like anatomical features that makes a car (or rocket) a phallic symbol (those allusions may in fact be pretty schematic or obscure); rather, the suggestion of masculine authority and power is required" (Bordo 85). Thus, advertisers market the verbal and visual phallic allusions by attaching the promise of heroism and power. This advertising strategy proves particularly successful in that those products are filled with empty promises, and a male consumer will be encouraged to keep consuming. As Bordo puts it:

> Even those who think that they measure up in size, cannot measure up in heroic, unflinching constancy. The phallus, we might say, haunts the penis. Paradoxically, at the same time the penis – capable of being soft as well as hard, helpless as well as proud, emotionally needy as well as a masterful sexual performer – also haunts phallic authority, threatens its undoing. Of course, I'm no longer talking about rockets or automobiles. I'm talking about those cultural images that depict the penis as though it were a phallus, and in doing to hold manhood hostage to an impossible idea. (95)

Thus, perpetuating this myth through advertisement will keep men consuming products guaranteed to boost their manliness. In essence, advertisers sell majestic phalluses, whether they come in the form of a sports car, an SUV, or Longitude.

Peter's childlike and immature nature invites parodic laughter through exaggerating the connection between commodity and phallus. While his purchase is significant in itself, the way he behaves in his car offers a blunt satire of this myth. Not only does he literally attempt to compete with another man on the road, drawing an implicit connection between car and phallus, garage and vagina, this explicit innuendo is surpassed by a more obscene comparison between car, penis, and intercourse. As Peter approaches a tunnel with his shiny red car, he verbally comforts the tunnel: "Don't worry, baby. I'll be gentle." He proceeds to forward and reverse three times before attempting to go through the entire tunnel. His attempt to penetrate the tunnel with his phallic convertible is, of course, ultimately unsuccessful, as a train smashes the front end, crushing his car and causing Peter to lament "Ow, my pride," as a bus full of bikini-clad models drives by pointing and laughing. This event suggests that an attempt to reconcile lost masculinity through purchasing commodities will end in forceful, embarrassing rejection, thus the satire.

Looking at this string of events, the masculinity crisis is addressed in several ways. First, by satirizing the connection between purchasing power and masculinity, this particular episode reveals the absurdity in connecting commodities, namely cars, to phallus size. Second, and more important, it reveals the limits of working-class men for performing such reconciliatory acts. Working-class men are largely isolated from the exotic car market precisely because they cannot afford to belong. In no way would Peter be able to afford the car he purchased from Jim's Exotic Cars. Third, Peter's behavior as a working-class man struggling with masculinity pokes fun of

working-class failures. Because Peter is daft enough to assume his car would make up for his lack in the pants, in conjunction with his behavior while in the car, his placement in the foolish and ignorant working-class portrayal identified by Cantor and Butsch is solidified.

If purchasing commodities is able to make up for a lack in the pants, what options are available to a working-class man? Considering his occupation as an assembly line worker at a toy factory, Peter would have had to spend a significant amount of his savings to buy his convertible in the first place. Thus, while the audience is asked to laugh at his foolish connection between car and phallus, the fact that his economic position prevents him from participating in this reconciliatory act is kept relatively quiet. In this case, Peter cannot participate in masculine affirming practices along with middle- and upper-class men, thus dooming Peter to his perpetually subordinate working-class masculine status.

After his car is smashed and his pride is damaged, Peter's next move is to visit a gun club. In the middle of his sulky walk home, Peter passes the National Gun Association, which attracts its members with a sign of a burly man holding a gun while a scantily clad woman clings to his right leg. The sign reads, "Real men pack heat. Join the NGA!" While touring the facilities, including the locker room, he notices that all of the men showering have small penises. His tour guide and president of the National Gun Association explains: "Well, you see, Peter, the way we look at it, a man's only as big as the gun he carries." Peter promptly requests that he be signed up and given the biggest gun the Association carries. (He then opens the front of his pants to let Stewie out, who was placed in Peter's crotch to make him look bigger. However, Stewie declines the request: "Ah! Turn out the light! I'm reading a ghost story!") Again, this example satires the commodified phallus.

This example also pokes fun of a different crowd of people: gun aficionados. Spoofing the NRA and perpetuating the stereotype that male NRA members and gun enthusiasts (largely seen as blue collar men) harbor feelings of manly inadequacy, Peter eagerly joins the club and insists to Lois that his new membership is a safe and smart choice. Once again, his behavior with his gun is significant. Lois returns home from shopping to find Brian throwing makeshift skeets – CDs from the monumental female artists Madonna and Janet Jackson – for Peter to shoot. When Lois asks Peter what he's doing, Peter begins to behave as if his gun *is* his phallus. His crude behavior not only pokes fun of the gun as a cultural phallic symbol, it likewise deems Lois to the realm of female sexual subordination: "Do ya wanna touch it? Go on. You gotta be careful, though. I don't want it to get excited and go off in your hair." The blatant reference to ejaculation positions Lois as inferior to Peter, not only because he speaks to her in a very condescending tone, but also because he speaks to her as a young and sexually inexperienced girl. Also, in handling his gun/phallus as a prized possession deserved of special treatment, he designates his commodity to the realm of his body, therefore suggesting that the ownership of commodities has the potential to create and maintain our identity.

Contrary to his previous attempt at building masculinity by purchasing an expensive and exotic car, which is inevitably futile due to his status as a working-class man with limited spending power, joining a national gun club offers a fix that Peter could most likely afford. Thus, for working-class men to build their masculinity, joining a gun club is a feasible option, and in fact NRA members and gun-lovers are largely stereotyped as working-class men. However, does this option fulfill the task of delivering extra doses of masculinity? Peter seems to gain confidence with gun in hand, performing the illusion that this purchase fulfills its duties. This illusion is debunked, however, in the parody of gun lovers. The NGA owner's blatant

attempts at selling membership by drawing the physical connection between gun and penis size parodies and pokes fun at men who join such clubs. While Peter accepts these obviously unfounded connections as true, he simultaneously denies the fact that his purchases are in response to his feelings of inadequacy next to his son.

Because he is unable to connect his purchase to his feelings of phallic inadequacy, Peter becomes lost in the realm of consumerism, ultimately forgetting his intentions for buying the gun in the first place. His purchase therefore loses all meaning, save for the fact that it functions as a penis and is capable of destroying CDs. Thus, because Peter admits no connection between his feelings of inadequacy and his gun purchase, he has not regained any masculine clout lost in his discovery. What he has displayed, rather, is utter stupidity and gullibility when it comes to commodification of the phallus. Peter, at once attempting to make himself feel more manly by purchasing a gun and joining a gun club, gains nothing but a destructive toy that simulates a penis. Rather than holding his behaviors as a viable means of establishing masculinity, this episode debunks and discredits these actions, leaving Peter, once again, unable to boost his masculinity.

With the decline in working-class jobs and the increase in the aestheticization of the male body through the rise of the metrosexual man, working-class options for performing masculinity are few. The rugged, brawny, and scruffy construction worker, such as the star in *Joe Millionaire*, is increasingly encouraged to abandon his "working-class" look and adopt a more polished, refined, and fashioned character. True, Peter expects to regain his lost masculinity through first buying a car, and then a gun, but the tactics prove faulty: despite his purchases, he has done nothing but waste money.

Ironically, this episode suggests the absurdity of advertising ploys promising men, both overtly and covertly, that possession of certain tangible items will boost their masculinity. Rather, this episode suggests that men who believe these ridiculous connections are both duped by advertisers and ultimately non-masculine: after all, Peter Griffin, the emasculated working-class buffoon, quickly falls prey to these strategies. Inevitably, Peter, in all his stupidity and ignorance, is mocked for his attempts at rebuilding his manliness. No matter how hard he tries, his stupidity prevents him from succeeding. After all, it is never the commodity itself that fails – it is the way Peter *uses* the commodity. Thus, as Peter Griffin joins the rank with other television portrayals of working-class men, his actions suggest that appearing masculine is not only an important part of their identity, but that these men will go to great lengths to make themselves appear more masculine. However, as this episode suggests, Peter represents working-class men who are doomed to failure as their stupidity consistently gets the best of them. Since they are unable to assert their masculinity and debunk their stereotype of ignorant and inept men, their status as working-class men is consistently devalued and mocked.

"He's Too Sexy for His Fat"

It is clear that the previous example articulates a larger social phenomenon of advertising strategies utilizing masculine myth to sell products. "And the Weiner Is…" deals with the consumption of tangible goods in order to establish masculinity, which end up making empty promises. On the other hand, the episode "He's Too Sexy for His Fat" (which clearly references the song by one-hit-wonder Right Said Fred, "I'm Too Sexy,") stages the reassertion of masculinity, although in a parodic manner, in the aesthetic realm, a realm more familiar to the 'metrosexual' male than the traditional, regressive male. In this episode, Peter is appointed as

Chris's trainer so that he may help him shed his plump appearance, yet is persuaded by neighbor Cleveland to take Chris in for liposuction. At the clinic, Chris wisely decides to stick with his diet and exercise plan, while Peter opts to get liposuction for himself. Now addicted to this "quick fix," Peter's appearance transforms from an overweight, sloppy man to a robust, muscle-rippling Adonis. This physical transition opens new doors for Peter and allows him to participate in a prestigious sect of Quahog society. While the previous episode discusses possibilities for negotiating the crisis of masculinity in consuming tangible items, "He's Too Sexy for His Fat" speaks to the rise of the aestheticized male body as a form of constructing and displaying masculinity.

As mentioned earlier, a quick glance at men's magazines like Gentlemen's Quarterly or Men's Health reveals an agenda set on encouraging male readers to focus on their appearance, from fashion to health. Bordo suggests the importance of this phenomenon in that "until recently only heterosexual men have continually been inundated by popular culture images *designed* with their sexual responses . . . in mind" (170). Essentially, sexual pictures have been historically tailored to the male gaze. However, as the male demographic continues to become more important to consumers, images of men are increasingly characterized by aestheticization of the male body, found in such media arenas as magazine advertisements for men's underwear and designer clothes. For instance, Bordo discusses her first experience with adopting a male gaze towards a male underwear model for Calvin Klein:

> It was both thrilling and disconcerting. It was the first time in my experience that I had encountered a commercial representation of a male body that seemed to deliberately invite me to linger over it. . . . Women – both straight and gay – have always gazed covertly, of course, squeezing our illicit little titillations out of representations designed

> for – or pretending to – other purposes than to turn us on. *This* ad made no such pretense. (168-169)

Bordo' discovery was in the spring of 1995, and since then, advertisements have exploited this image, asking the public to let their eyes linger on his body, while encouraging men to consume products guaranteed to improve their appearance. As noted above, this advertising strategy in part reflects the transition of the American economy from a production- to consumer-based economy while also exposing the rise of marketing for the metrosexual man.

Thus, men are increasingly encouraged to consume for the sake of a new male aesthetic required for success in the service-sector – a sector that is becoming much more prominent. Peter Griffin, on the other hand, belongs to the diminishing group of men whose jobs will most likely be replaced by a machine or outsourced for cheaper labor. Verifying masculinity through his working-class occupation does not compete with more contemporary ways due to the fact that the defining parameters conflict: one professes brawn and ruggedness while the other professes fashion and handsomeness. Typically, Peter's working-class masculinity is most aligned with brawn, ruggedness, ignorance, and foolishness. However, in this episode, Peter toys with the idea of masculinity as fashion and beauty. Through Peter's obsession with molding his appearance by getting liposuction, muscle implants, and facial-cranial surgery, we are given a satirical look at the aestheticization of the male body. Further, by gauging the reactions to his full-body makeover from Lois, we see that despite its satirical standpoint, this new "objectification" and aestheticization of the male body is justified.

Chris, who labels himself as "rubenesque" rather than fat, experiences verbal abuse about his size in public: once by a police officer wrongfully accusing him of stealing hams, and again by a hotel worker who mistakes Chris for the Griffin family's van. Taking this verbal abuse to

heart, Chris decides to start a workout program, and Peter is appointed as Chris's new exercise coach. Unfortunately, Peter's tactics for getting Chris to increase his heart rate expose the reason Chris is struggling with his weight. For instance, he suctions a plunger to Chris's forehead and hangs a Twinkie on a string from the end of the plunger handle. The Twinkie is just out of Chris's reach, which causes him to stupidly run after it. After one week of working out, impatient Peter becomes frustrated with Chris's lack of progress and decides to take him in to get liposuction. At this point in the episode, we begin to see the intersection between body image and masculinity.

It must be considered that Chris is not unhappy with his progress, yet his failure to lose any weight within the first week makes *Peter* feel like a failure. His ability to perform his role as father depends on Chris's success at losing weight. Rather than learn patience, Peter considers risking his son's life (although not explicitly stated but evidenced in scientific publications detailing the dangers of liposuction) in order to offer a quick fix. Chris wisely decides against liposuction, preferring to stick to his diet. Contrarily, Peter, demonstrating the traditional stereotype of foolish working-class father, makes an insensible and idiotic decision to get his own liposuction treatment, which results in him losing 200 pounds in one afternoon.

Of course, in reality this magnitude of weight loss would most likely send a person into immediate cardiac arrest. However, celluloid Peter manages fine and easily walks out of the hospital and into his home a new man. In this case, liposuction is pictured as quick, pain free, and affordable – even a man of working-class status can shuffle into a hospital and reemerge 200 pounds lighter in the same day. In fact, his family hardly recognizes his absence. Peter finds that with his new body, he can do things he has always dreamed of doing had he a fit body. The activity he is most interested in is riding Brian like a horse (Brian refuses, so Peter tackles him

from behind, sending Brian into a bucking rage). This activity obviously undercuts Peter's masculinity by associating him with childlike behavior.

Peter's new body leaves him wanting more, so he decides to continue his surgical stint and heads off to the clinic. When he arrives home, Brian mistakes him for a stranger, and his family is in shock. Their reaction is warranted as Peter is much altered: he stands taller and his chest is fit to bust his shirt open. His biceps bulge, his bottom is round and firm, his shoulders are broad, his legs are cut and muscular, and his neck is thick and round. He even reconstructed his face: he has a strong, solid jaw and a chiseled chin. The extremely drastic changes Peter undergoes through plastic surgery offer a satirical look at contemporary society's obsession with surgically constructed beauty and media's portrayal of such practices.

Realistically, if any human being were to undergo the changes Peter has gone through, they would not survive. Dropping 200 pounds in a day would, at the least, send a body into shock. Further, the muscular implants in his body and his facial-cranial surgery would be impossible to perform in such a short amount of time. Peter in fact seems to have undergone absolutely no pain. He walks into his home lively and smiling, he has no scars or bruises, he is not swollen, and it seems the surgery was quick and painless. Additionally, Peter's reasons for changing his appearance seem to lie solely in the ease of the procedure; it is almost as easy as getting an oil change. His decisions are in fact nonchalant and matter-of-fact, so much so that he finds it unnecessary to inform his family beforehand. He clearly does not get the surgery for its supposed benefits, and it is only after his surgery that he discovers the biggest perks: not only is he now capable of riding Brian like a horse, he gains access to a prestigious and highly selective sect of Quahog society.

The ease with which Peter undergoes his plastic surgery nods to the recent plastic surgery boom and media advertisement and representation of the process. Currently, many television programs center on a man or woman receiving some sort of surgical makeover and presented to the public on air. The process is personalized by shooting family and friends' reactions to the change, sometimes expressed through tears of joy. Most often, shows focus only on the patient before their surgery and after they have recovered from surgery: it is rare that the camera is present when the person comes out of surgery and to terms with the effects. Rarely will the camera show the patient when they try to eat for the first time, try to walk, try to ice their swollen body parts, and try to pop pain pills. Rarely will a show portray the surgical process of, for example, sliding calf implants into a patient's leg, or breaking, re-breaking, and shaving someone's nose. Rarely will a show expose the strong prospect that a liposuction patient will be immobile for days.

Likewise, it is rare that unsuccessful surgeries are reported. Liposuction, for instance, can cause blood clots, and fat can be detached from the body and float freely throughout the body, possibly relocating in an odd spot as an abnormally shaped pocket of fat. Although some shows will highlight the negative aspects of plastic surgery, such as MTV's True Life edition of the truth behind plastic surgery (which most likely does not expose the complete truth), media at large tends to market plastic surgery as easy, convenient, and relatively painless. Thus, Peter's experience with plastic surgery satires the media depiction of the process by exaggerating his smooth, pain-free, and affordable experiment.

Further, the fact that Peter's new treatment is exaggerated mocks the importance people put on beauty and the reverence and credibility people give to those who are more attractive. As mentioned earlier, those who are seen as more attractive will most likely be hired for service jobs

over others. Obsession with celebrities also speaks to the valence given to beauty. It is unlikely for an unattractive actor to be cast as a hero or lover: unattractive actors, if found, are usually cast as the "bad" or "funny" guy. Interpreting Peter's new treatment mocks the obsession with beauty and the reverence and adoration society has for physically beautiful people.

Additionally, the reactions to Peter's new look mock the attention American society places on beauty. For one, Lois's reaction is significant. She becomes angry with Peter for getting liposuction, labeling him conceited and superficial. Her attraction to Peter does not grow, and she is in fact less attracted to him because of his willingness to go through what she labels a very idiotic and narcissistic process. Her reaction suggests that men may be either large or small, it does not matter. However, when Peter walks into their home as a muscle-rippling Adonis, she is immediately attracted to him and even throws her children, including baby Stewie, out of the house so she can tackle Peter with wild sexual aggression. She even admits to Brian that although Peter has turned into a narcissistic and superficial man, she is still enamored with his appearance: "He has become a maniacal jerk, but I've never been more attracted to him!" Lois's reaction to Peter's new body obviously points to society's obsession with appearance and beauty. More important to this discussion, however, is the reference it makes to an increased emphasis on masculine aesthetics.

For Lois, it is not enough that Peter has become thin: it is only after he purchases his Schwarzenegger-like body that her sexual attraction increases. Muscularity and masculinity have, for a long time, gone hand in hand, as seen in action movies featuring characters such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, and more recently, The Rock, Vin Diesel, and Jean Claude Van Dam. Ironically, as working-class jobs become fewer, the need for large muscles lessens: "Unless one is a manual laborer, muscles have little use value in our management- and

service-oriented culture; the potency of muscles resides largely in their cultural meanings" (Bordo 89). In Peter's case, the cultural meaning behind muscles promotes Peter to a rank only attractive and muscle-bound men are capable of achieving. When Peter is spotted in line at a grocery store, a dapper man approaches him and asks him why he is at the back of the line. Peter is baffled, and the man replies with a chuckle, "I see you haven't been beautiful for very long. It's OK to cut in front of people: you're beautiful!" At this moment, Peter starts to reap some of the benefits of his new look: he gets inducted into the Quahog's Beautiful People Club. His membership offers him access to other equally attractive people, not to mention a gift basket full of diet pills, protein supplements, and other drugs to help him maintain his figure. It even comes with a pill that "will make your bowel movements smell like freshly baked cinnamon rolls." Peter begins to spend a lot of time at the club, and his family begins to notice his absence. However, he is not allowed to take his family to the club nor introduce them to any of his new friends: members of the Quahog Beautiful People's Club do not associate with "normies."

Peter's new treatment by Lois and the larger Quahog society suggests that it is not enough for men to be thin in order to gain notoriety and respect. A man needs to be muscular and fit; he needs the "complete package." Paradoxically, muscularity is not necessary for occupational success in a service-based economy. Although manual labor is fading, muscularity still holds some significance in its cultural meaning, and this significance possibly goes up considering that men are encouraged to spend more time perfecting their look. As Bordo notes, the meanings associated with muscularity "are varied, but the display of masculinity is chief among them. How else to explain why the ideal male body (as depicted in the underwear ads and the like) has become more ostentatiously muscular" (89)? While not all masculine aesthetic ideals are associated with muscularity (after all, Calvin Klein ads from the early 1990s contained

many skinny and boney men), it serves as an indication of a masculinity most aligned with ruggedness, strength, and heroism.

Further, whereas in a production-based economy muscularity might have been related to occupational success in part by indicating the man spends a lot of time lifting and moving heavy items, it is no longer as closely aligned with physical labor – it has become purely aesthetic. A beefy man walking down the street most likely did not get his look from the daily grind; he gets it from putting in hours at the gym, quite likely after he leaves his office job. Or, perhaps he is like Peter in that he purchased portions of his body. Nevertheless, his body is the result of extra devoted to developing his look.

Thus, this episode of Family Guy depicts a shlubby, childlike, foolish working-class man who buys a new body. He is then given access to an isolated, higher-class club which inevitably earns him social respect, a sexually aroused wife, and public admiration. Considering his working-class status, the episode suggests that one way Peter can boost his social status is to get plastic surgery, inevitably praising the perfected male body. However, his new body only leaves his family behind, who long for him to return to his old self. Not only does this episode satire the popularity and depiction of plastic surgery, it also suggests that working-class men, especially Peter, do not belong with beautiful, upper- and middle-class people. Despite his attempt to fit in with his new look, Peter only retained his emasculated self while at the same time attaining a shallow and narcissistic attitude. The audience is thus asked to mock superficial people obsessed the plastic surgery because, as the episode suggests, only Peter Griffin would be stupid enough to take plastic surgery to such an extent. However, the fact that his stupidity and

ineptitude serve as the agent to undercut such activities inevitably leaves the audience laughing more at the inept working-class fool than the beauty industry.

"I Am Peter, Hear Me Roar"

The title of this episode of course refers to Helen Reddy's 1972 Second Wave Feminist song "I Am Woman, Here Me Roar," which argues the strength of women developed from years of struggle. This literary parody hints at the narrative of this episode: Peter gets in touch with his "feminine" side. His sexist remarks at work get him in trouble with feminist attorney Gloria Ironbachs, which is no doubt a spoof of Gloria Allred, known for her involvement in cases such as Jones vs. Clinton representing Paula Jones and The People vs. O.J. Simpson, representing the family of Nicole Brown Simpson. Gloria Ironbachs requests that Peter complete a sensitivity training program. Peter's new interest in made-for-women television programs and his more feminine communication style exhibit his transition from the macho man to the sensitive, feminist, husband. However, Lois's desire to turn him back into the macho man he once was reaffirms heteromasculinity and normalizes the buffoon, beer drinking, sexist male. Thus Family Guy, while offering a momentary feminist viewpoint through the consequence of Peter's sexist actions, shifts the perspective of patriarchy back to a masculine discourse. Further, given all of the components discussed thus far, "I Am Peter, Hear Me Roar" contains multiple references to metrosexuality, macho masculinity, feminism, and working-class masculinity; this episode articulates several contesting viewpoints. However, in the end, it solidifies an attitude suggesting that, once again, working-class men are incapable of adopting a progressive form of masculinity.

Throughout the Family Guy series, Peter clearly portrays himself to possess a regressive masculinity. He often times has difficulty respecting his wife. For instance, as mentioned in

Chapter One, “Lethal Weapon” contains the narrative in which Lois learns Tai-Jitsu to release pent-up anger caused by Peter’s refusal to listen to her and include her in decisions. He often suggests that women are not people. In “Running Mates,” for example, Lois scolds Chris for peeping in the girls’ locker room at school. “We’ll continue this discussion tonight young man! A woman is not an object!” Peter responds, “Your mother’s right. Listen to what it says.” Also, when he first meets Lois’ wealthy and powerful father, Carter Pewterschmidt, Peter indicates that his interest in Lois is based on looks:

> . . . I’m taken with her. I mean, look at her! . . . Show us front and back there, Lois. (*Lois spins*) Don’t think that I don’t know where *that* comes from! That’s some world class juice you got brewing in the old flesh balloon down their, Carter! Hey, based on what you’ve seen with your wife, what can we expect in terms of droopage, here? Are we talking a slight slope or the full blown fried eggs hanging on a nail thing? (

Clearly, Peter is not ashamed of exposing his sexist, superficial, and demeaning attitude towards women to Lois’ father. Carter breaks an early Etruscan vase on Peter’s head, yet Peter fails to recognize his wrongdoings. In fact, throughout the entire series Peter never seems to learn how to treat women, despite the amount of times he gets himself in trouble for his sexist attitude. Perhaps he is too stupid to know any better. Or, perhaps he had not been through the necessary experience to get him in touch with his feminine side. “I Am Peter, Hear Me Roar” addresses Peter’s difficulty with understanding a woman’s perspective by offering Peter the chance to experience life from a woman’s perspective while on his retreat.

During a little water cooler talk with his male coworkers, Peter (who recently discovered how “funny” he is) tells his newest joke: “Why do women have boobs? So you got something to look at when you’re talking to them!” His buddies crack up, but when a female coworker comes

around the corner and insists on hearing the joke, she becomes so offended that she files a lawsuit against Peter and Happy-Go-Lucky Toys for sexual harassment. While in a meeting with attorney Gloria Ironbachs and his boss, Mr. Weed, Peter fails miserably to understand the harm his sexist attitude has caused. When alerted to the fact that his female coworker, Sarah, is filing a law suit against him, Peter responds in a pathetically ignorant manner, "Sarah…Sarah…Oh, is she the one we videotaped taking a dump? Why, what happened?" After more discussion, Peter still does not understand the cruelty in his behavior: "First of all, if I can speak in my own defense, all I did was tell a little joke! Second of all, women are not people. They are devices built by the Lord Jesus Christ for our entertainment." Peter's attitude reflects an extremely regressive, ignorant, and outdated posture towards women. However, his remarks invite laughter because it fits with his ignorant and outdated attitude, reserved for the extreme "Archie Bunkers" of the past.

Mr. Weed cannot remove himself from blame, given his mandatory sexual harassment video for the workplace is likewise ignorant. Dated 1956 and evoking films from that era, the black and white video glaringly exposes its own sexism. Titled "Women in the Workplace," the video's narrator instructs what he holds as "proper treatment" of female coworkers:

> Irrational and emotionally fragile by nature, female workers are a peculiar animal. They are very insecure about their appearance. Be sure to tell them how good they look every day, even if they're homely and unkempt. *He glances at one of female typist sitting in a row who has a severe lazy-eye, pudgy nose, and large mole. Demonstrating proper behavior, the narrator encourages the woman:* You're doing a great job, Muriel, and you're prettier than Mamie Van Doran! *He looks into the camera and gives a sly wink, suggesting that women are easy to trick.* And Remember, nothing says 'Good Job' like a

> firm, open-palmed, slap on the behind. *He approaches a young, attractive and shapely woman, bending suggestively over a file cabinet, and gives her a theatrical slap on the bottom. She turns, surprised, and blushes in pleasant docility, taking her boss's condescending gesture with delight.*

This mandatory instructional video, used at Happy-Go-Lucky Toys for almost fifty years, comments on the reality of masculinity as a social construction. As noted above, progressive masculinity seeks to abandon these traditional forms of masculinity and encourage expression of emotions and the relinquishment of social power. Involved in this process is deconstructing masculine socialization. Mr. Weed's video tape is in some part responsible for the workplace harassment, suggesting that Peter's behavior is learned. It then becomes more acceptable in the sense that social construction is the real culprit; Peter is an innocent pawn. Peter thus has the capability of unlearning this behavior. To the contrary, unlearning this behavior is very difficult for Peter, and his process of adopting a feminine and feminist perspective is not steady and gradual. In fact, Peter does not unlearn anything: he simply replaces his masculine perspective with a feminine one. Interestingly, it takes physical pain rather than mental and emotional stimulation to trigger his switch.

After his failure at a workshop led by Ms. Ironbachs, Peter is committed to a women's retreat. He is invited to role play in front of the class with Ms. Ironbachs to demonstrate what he has learned; however, Peter proves that he has learned nothing. Pretending to be a subordinate, Ms. Ironbachs hands Peter a file. Peter responds, "Thank you, Miss Ironbachs. You are a valuable member of our team, and I will give you a raise tomorrow if you come to work without a shirt on." After Ms. Ironbachs verbal retribution, he tries again: "Nice Ass." When explaining his failure, he says, "I've heard everything you've said. It's just that there are some subtleties to

the rules that aren't so easy to understand." He then squeezes her breast, saying "Honk Honk." An angry and offended Ironbachs decides to "do something drastic," and send Peter, the only guy at the retreat who didn't "get it," on a women's retreat.

Packing his suitcase with only beer and nudie-magazines, Peter joins a bus full of women and immediately displays his attitude towards women by attempting to start a Charlie's Angel's role playing game to pass the time. At the retreat, he continues his sexist comments. While discussing proper ways to listen and offer confirmation to others, Peter pitches in by encouraging two women to hug and caress each other in a sexual nature. When the women are celebrating their ability to bear the pain of childbirth, Peter retorts with his own story of pain when Lois was pregnant: "Wah, Wah, Wah! Come on! It's only childbirth! How much could it hurt?" A woman responds in a smart attitude, "Peter, it's like taking your bottom lip and stretching it over your head to the back of your neck." Peter conspicuously ignores her comment: "Hey, you wanna hear some horror stories, you wouldn't *believe* what *I* had to go through when Lois was pregnant!" Peter refers to a time when Lois's violent and wretched vomiting interrupted Three's Company, and Peter was forced to turn up the television with his remote control. Obviously, Peter's lack of listening (and perhaps information processing) skills offers no improvement.

It is not until Peter has a terrible accident that he adopts his feminine perspective. Peter selects the near top of an evergreen tree as his jumping point into the "trust quilt," which, he claims, will be a "Greg Louganis triple Salchow and tuck into a flying Mary Lou Retton half-calf." For Peter, the exercise has nothing to do with trust, and everything to do with show. Before he can begin, however, the branch breaks, and Peter falls from the tree, bludgeoned by every tree branch. When he nears the bottom, he gets his bottom lip stuck on the end of a branch, and his lip is in fact stretched over his head to the back of his neck. As this moment,

Peter is changed.

Peter's experience at the retreat is significant. As discussed above, working-class men are traditionally stereotyped as sexist men both on- and off-screen, and Peter's actions invite the audience to mock this stereotype. For one, Peter is incapable of learning through communication and thought provoking discussion, and in fact seems almost incapable of both listening and decoding what he hears. Second, and most important, Peter is capable of adopting a new perspective only when he experiences a physical change: in this case, physical pain associated, through analogy, with childbirth. Therefore, for Peter, mental change is in response to physical change, and gendered perspectives are tied directly to the body. While male viewers likely laugh at his antics, his desperate attempts at resisting change, and the stereotypes associated with working-class men, their laughter only serves to further devalue these men and affirm their disgraceful and undeserved status.

This laughter only continues when Peter returns home, where he takes his new feminine perspective to an extreme. His behaviors are so feminine that they seem absurd to apply to any woman. Additionally, Peter not only adopts this feminine perspective; he is in fact convinced he *is* a woman. For one, he attempts to breast feed Stewie. Despite the fact that men are physically capable of producing milk, the audience is nevertheless encouraged to laugh and even feel uncomfortable watching this long, drawn out scene (see Chapter One, Limited Animation). Further, he becomes overly distraught and emotional when he realizes that he is "late" and might be pregnant. Peter is clearly in the dark when it comes to getting in touch with his "feminine side." Lois and Ironbachs did not intend for, nor expect, Peter to take his retreat to such an extreme. Peter performs a very stereotypical womanhood by exaggerating his emotional outbursts and incessant love for the Lifetime Channel – a channel targeted towards women, yet

done in a way which suggests women prefer shows that depict the heroine overcoming rape, sexual harassment, eating disorders, and teen pregnancy. He also fails to understand that men are capable of adopting a feminine point of view; for Peter, to adopt this view requires he abandon both his masculine perspective and his masculine body. Through his actions, the audience finds humor in Peter's boorish and ignorant attitude towards women. Although they simultaneously mock Peter's stupidity and the stereotypes of working-class men, the audience nevertheless is invited to devalue working-class masculinity.

It seems as if Peter is going to remain his womanly self for a while, as Lois's attempts to turn him on sexually continually fail. However, the old Peter does reemerge. At the Women's Action Coalition Charity Dinner, Lois and Ironbachs get into an argument. The argument becomes heated, and Lois and Ironbachs end up physically fighting. The scene is painfully stereotypical of female fight scenes tailored for the male gaze: Lois and Gloria both fall into a pool of water, Lois's dress straps snap, and Gloria's shirt gets ripped off, exposing her red bra. This scene no doubt pokes fun of the stereotype that men are always aroused by a good "cat fight." The joke becomes even more potent when Peter suddenly snaps out of his feminine self by becoming turned on. He forcefully grabs Lois's arm and whisks her home.

This scene nods to a socially constructed masculine desire in its depiction of a stereotypical male fantasy perpetuated by media. Peter does not revert to his old self when seeing Lois in a sexy pink dress, nor does he take notice of her when she attempts to turn him on. It in fact takes the fantastical experience of seeing two beautiful women express extreme aggressiveness and hostility through physical contact, a scene largely limited to a television or movie screen. Peter's ephemeral feminine experience is abruptly ended when he becomes turned on. In this case, Peter adds meaning to the stereotype that men often "think with their penises."

After intercourse, Lois is satisfied, dreamily saying, “That was wonderful!” Peter responds in his brutish, rude, and sexist way. “Who said that? Oh, hey Lois. I’m starving – how about a sandwich?” As she gets out of bed, Peter gives her an open-palmed slap on the behind. His transition is evident, and he reverts back to his old, masculine personality which asserts than women are created for men’s amusement.

This episode, then, suggests that Peter is a lost cause when it comes to respecting women and understanding their point of view. He is in fact incapable of understanding another’s perspective without “being” that person. While his physiology never changed, he was convinced it had. Mocking the outdated notion that gender is biologically rooted, the audience is asked to laugh at Peter’s inability to change his outlook without relinquishing his masculinity.

“I Am Peter, Hear Me Roar,” is a rather complex episode. In this case, working-class masculinity is depicted as inevitably domineering, sexist, and heterosexual. Because Peter is unable to understand his own oppressive attitudes and actions, he would no doubt be seen as a failure by progressive men who understand the harm in a patriarchal attitude. While the episode seems to espouse a feminist perspective through Peter’s corrective activities, this perspective is immediately undercut when Lois rejects Peter’s new feminine stance. However, it is not the feminist practices *per se* that invite laughter: rather, it is Peter’s treatment of these practices and his inability to engage in them appropriately. Nevertheless, the audience is encouraged to laugh at Peter’s stupidity and the stereotype that working-class men will inevitably adhere to regressive masculinity, not because they choose, but because it is all they can manage.

The aforementioned episodes clearly reveal the fact that Peter Griffin’s character continues the unfortunate tradition of media portrayals of working-class men. For one, Peter is a man easily duped by advertisers selling empty promises of masculinity. He is so blindly duped,

in fact, that he misses the irony, a joke shared between the text and its male viewers who laugh at Peter's attempts to re-masculate himself. In particular, the audience is asked to mock the man who picks up hunting – a stereotypically working-class male sport. Further, Peter is also easily tempted by plastic surgery, a cosmetic commodity becoming more prevalent in media. His surgical whims satire the incorrigible marketing of plastic surgery and cosmetic perfection by makeover shows, magazine covers, and celebrity profiles. Further, Peter is easily convinced to hide his relationship with his family of "normies," a prime example of brash decision making characteristic of media representation of working-class. Similarly, Peter is a man unable to understand, nor consider, a woman's perspective. He is painfully ignorant in assuming his body is capable of performing female reproductive functions, which mocks the belief that emotional behavior and domesticity are biological traits. Further, as working-class men have traditionally been characterized by the media as brutish, sexist, stupid men, Peter's antics suggest that along with these characteristics comes an inability to understand women.

Male viewers likely snicker at these parodies, as viewers are encouraged to laugh at Peter's attempts at making himself more masculine and attractive. Peter is essentially too stupid and foolish to understand that his methods will not work. However, it is imperative to point out that these episodes never suggest men such as Peter *should not have* to reconcile their masculinity. The audience is not encouraged to laugh at Peter *feeling* inept next to Chris, they laugh at his behavior is response to those feelings. They are not encouraged to laugh at Peter feeling unattractive and overweight, they laugh at his laziness and stupidity in making himself more attractive. They are not encouraged to laugh at Peter for attempting to make contact with his "feminine" side; they laugh at the extent to which he takes it and his inability to distinguish between a "progressive" and "regressive" man. Thus, Peter's character continues the debauched

tradition of connecting working-class masculinity with a lack of intelligence, wit, and wisdom. Unfortunately, the continuation of this tradition only offers a bleak and highly inaccurate representation of more than 50 percent of the adult working population (Kimmel and Ferber 106).

Thus, Family Guy adds to the regrettable portrayal of working-class men. The audience is invited to laugh at Peter's methods of building his masculinity, which is, ironically, always in need of a fix. The laughter is parodic in the sense that it pokes fun of men who feel unmasculine enough to blindly assume commodities will make up for phallic inadequacies. However, despite the parodic laughter, the stereotype is never debunked, thus continuing the traditional portrayal of working-class men as stupid, clumsy, and emasculated.

Conclusion

This project has set out to explore the success of Family Guy by identifying some of its most prominent rhetorical strategies. Due to its unique life on Fox Network, its record breaking DVD sales, and its un-cancellation based on DVD success, this text breaks ground as the first to directly benefit from DVD technology. Further, its unique aspects of postmodern television programming serve to attract a particular audience comprised of mainly 19-35 year old males. These young men are largely coveted by advertisers, as they hold a lot of spending power and the potential for economic success. Playing on their childhood media experiences, as shared with creator Seth McFarlane, the Family Guy text rewards those who spent a lot of time in front of the television as children. By offering familiar modern codes of situation comedy and traditional animation, viewers are asked to read this pastiche text as representative of a familiar code or style. While these elements seem to offer nothing new, the specific strategies serve to offset the

traditional animation and situation comedy codes by incorporating untraditional content. Similarly, this content employs intertextuality and self-reflexivity to reward viewers for consuming contemporary media by creating a parody of or pointing to recent texts. While older references dominate, recent references encourage audiences to keep consuming media. Further, while establishing itself as a television show about watching television, Family Guy both comments on its own creation for consumption while moving the audience in and out of different positions, keeping them on their toes.

Chapter One addresses the styles of situation comedy and limited animation as part of its larger pastiche framework. Limited animation is popular in contemporary animated sitcoms precisely because it takes less money and effort to create. Further, Family Guy's use of limited animation adds to its traditional structure: it contains softly drawn characters that appear much more two-dimensional than its full animation counterparts. Does this phenomenon suggest the decline in the use of full animation? Not necessarily. However, as technology advances, animation changes. For instance, Pixar Studios is most well known for its digitally animated movies Shrek, Toy Story I and II, and A Bug's Life. The animation is highly developed and thus falls outside the realm of both limited and full animation. Ironically, Disney's hallmark use of full animation was challenged by Pixar, so much so that Disney forged a deal to distribute the films; however, the contract has since been cancelled, and Pixar will likely continue independent success. Thus, standards for animated movies are likely changing. Further, it seems that limited animation, due to its affordability and quickness, is largely limited to television, which suggests that it may soon live up to its "limited" label. At any rate, analyzing the animation of Family Guy assists in understanding both the visual and aural components of this pastiche text. By utilizing an array of modern styles, including those belonging to limited animation, situation

comedy, action-thriller movies, documentaries, and old black-and-white movies, an audience is shown a variety of generic clues as to how to decode the text.

Chapter Two addresses more specific modernist styles imbedded in the Family Guy text. The pastiche framework is thus also composed of modern strategies, including, but not limited to, parody, parodic allusion, inclusion, and self-reflexivity. With these strategies, the text performs the mischievous task of attracting an audience saturated in media by convincing them that intelligence lies in the ability to recognize various texts. Further, the audience's ability to criticize the referenced text makes them feel smart for understanding its failure or success in the larger cultural arena. However, to criticize requires knowledge gained from both media viewing experience and social involvement.

Further, the text brings together critical comments through intertextuality with self-reflexive moves. Working in conjunction, while the audience is laughing at Mickey Mouse, The Facts of Life, or the reality television genre, they are consuming a meaningless text which borrows from other sources. Thus, the audience is once again shifted around in terms of text deconstruction: at one moment they may be silently criticizing media consumption, at the next minute a self-centered move may leave them questioning their own media involvement.

Finally, Chapter Three picks at the male attraction to Family Guy. As do intertextual references, Peter's attempts to perform masculinity function to make the audience of males feel successful for laughing at and perhaps mocking Peter's regressive form of masculinity. Not only do they mock his masculinity, but they mock his status as a working-class man. Peter Griffin compares to other working-class depictions which establish the working-class man as aloof, childish, ignorant, boorish, and self-centered. By encouraging the audience to consistently align working-class status with these personality characteristics, three Family Guy episodes reflect the

larger social intersection between class and masculinity. Arguing that these texts address and reflect a crisis in masculinity, Family Guy situates working-class masculinity (or lack there of) as inevitably inferior, static, and in need of repair. The male audience is then asked to laugh at the way this broken masculinity is "repaired" through Peter's foolish and ignorant antics. Thus, male audiences can feel removed from this devalued status by recognizing that their own behavior is not reminiscent of Peter's. By applying these behaviors to a working-class man, the text perpetuates the debauched stereotype of working-class men on television.

Throughout the process of this project, several new ideas have surfaced, and many can serve as an adequate jumping point for further research and analysis of Family Guy. The first and most important aspect is the text's use of subversion, a popular characteristic of successful animated sitcoms. Several animated shows contain highly offensive material; South Park is perhaps the most offensive, with Family Guy running a close second. Others include King of the Hill, The Simpsons, and McFarlane's most recent creation, American Dad. This offensive nature pushes genre boundaries and content rules. For instance, in "Peter Griffin: Husband, Father, Brother?" the episode ends when Quagmire finds a tied and bound cheerleader in the men's bathroom stall. In his usual perverted nature, he sees this hostage as wish granted and triumphantly yells, "Jackpot!" In the episode "Mr. Griffin Goes to Washington," a member of the senate accidentally kills a stripper by shoving dollar bills down her throat. In "Da Boom," Asian news correspondent Trisha Takanawa gets burned to a crisp; her news cohorts eat her remains, wondering whether or not they should be eating her with chopsticks. Clearly, Family Guy is not afraid of offending anyone and everyone.

Stewie also plays an important role in giving the text its rebelliousness. For one, Stewie pines for world domination, and his first step to completing that task involves killing his mother.

Countless episodes contain clips of Stewie's plans to kill Lois, including death by bow-and-arrow, laser, poison, and explosion. His banter is often about Lois and "wretched existence." He laments the time he was held up in her "uterine gulog" for nine months, depicting his mother's body as a Russian labor camp for political prisoners. In several episodes, he slaps his mother across the face, calls her a "whore," and threatens her life. Of course, Lois and the family – save Brian – only hear cute baby coos. Among Stewie's idols are God, because he is so "deliciously evil" ("Holy Crap"), and the Grim Reaper.

Ironically, in some episodes, Stewie is depicted as craving his mother and depending on her for survival. He even sings "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face" from My Fair Lady when he realizes his mother's recent absence has left him lonely and gloomy. He has yet to grow out of his dependency on pacifiers, rocking, and stuffed animals. He often drifts off to sleep in his mother's arms mid-sentence. His dual attitude towards his mother not only suggests a type of Oedipal complex; it also suggests Stewie's attitude on authority and control, which may be projected to the larger political scene. While some may hate government and continually break the law with indifference, they simultaneously benefit from the law by being protected. Perhaps Stewie's relationship with his mother reflects a particular attitude towards politics.

Additionally, Stewie's character seems, in a sense, to be very critical of postmodernism in that he rejects contemporary stimulation and prefers high art and literature as opposed to television. For instance, when Lois is out of the house, Brian is in charge of reading Stewie to sleep. Rather than requesting a children's book, Stewie demands Brian read Faust, while using a scary voice for Mephistopheles. Further, Stewie reacts negatively toward postmodern stimulation. In "A Hero Sits Next Door," Stewie is reading Sun Tzu's The Art of War to pick up strategies for world domination. When Lois finds Stewie, she takes the books away, claiming

they are not for babies. She turns on Telletubbies instead. Stewie is immediately sucked in, and even comments on how he cannot look away. It is not until Peter switches the channel that Stewie is free from the "Diabolical Telletubbies." Clearly, this sense of captivation suggests he has no control over what he watches, largely reflecting postmodernisms ubiquitous media presence. When he is released, he is very thankful, suggesting that he prefers modern over postmodern stimulation.

Additionally, Brian serves as the moral center of the Griffin family and is often trying to talk Peter through a difficult situation. He also adopts a liberal political stance and cynical view on American politics. For instance, in "I Never Met the Dead Man," Brian explains that he refuses to vote because the government distributes money unevenly. He also sings a song (which won an Emmy for best song in a television series) about societal changes from the 1950s to today. Offering a subversive reading, Brian suggests that although American society boasts its generosity and "pristine" democracy, its racism, sexism, elitism, et cetera are readily visible. For instance, he comments on George W. Bush's first election victory in 2000, suggesting that drug dependency is not a crucial factor in the ability to run a country. He also suggests that America will treat you fairly as long as you're not "Black, White, or Cherokee" ("Brian Wallows, Peter's Swallows"). In offering an oppositional reading, Brian challenges the status quo by articulating an otherwise quiet stance.

Both Stewie and Brian also push envelope with their backhanded comments, which serve to pepper the show and keep viewers intently listening. These quips may range from poking fun of the Catholic Church to asking a prostitute what she can do with a banana. While these comments are short and sharp, usually lasting a mere five seconds, they nevertheless pepper the

text with crude, rude, sexist, racist, and classist comments that leave the audience asking, "Can they really say that on TV?"

Hopefully, this project will add to current discourse on animated sitcoms. As a genre enjoying a successful resurrection, it deserves continued attention. Stable and Harrison's Prime-Time Animation is an extremely useful text for understanding animation strategies, textual strategies, public reception, and changes in animated situation comedies over time. However, given the still growing popularity of animated sitcoms, it is important to continue developing a strong and cohesive rhetorical theory of animation. For one, animation exemplifies a type of self-reflexivity unavailable to unanimated texts. It also allows for more irreverence and rule breaking (both rules of style and rules of television behavior and content) due to its unrealistic nature. Animated comedies, such as South Park and Family Guy push the boundaries of offensiveness in a way that real life sitcoms cannot. Further, technological advancements are opening up the possibility for real live actors to interact with animated characters on screen, ultimately toying with our ability to distinguish media and reality. As animated comedies have gone through a revival in the past decade, and as new animated sitcoms continue to emerge, the development of a rhetoric of animation becomes more attractive.

Finally, its resurrection on Fox Network opens another door for critique. Perhaps the makeup of the new Family Guy will be different. Nevertheless, as one of the most successful animated sitcoms since 1999, Family Guy has proven that in both media and reality, textual excess in all forms shapes the way we interpret our world. It calls attention to the fact that most of us, whether we like it or not, are interpreting our world as intertextual beings: we largely make sense of our world in comparison and contrast to media texts. We most likely can regurgitate more movie quotes than we would like to admit, especially if we are the type to be attracted to

Family Guy. It takes very little mental and intellectual stimulation to captivate this particular audience. This is not to say, however, that this audience is stupid, and that all people are flooded by media; rather, it seems those who are perhaps enjoy a rapid pace, an overload of intertextual references, and political incorrectness when it comes to TV.

If television shows of this nature are popular, and perhaps becoming more popular, what does it reflect about society? Are we experiencing a decline in society's expectations for entertainment? Are we developing a slapdash attitude towards art? Have we become so easy to entertain that we no longer need new and innovative ideas to stimulate us? Are we getting stupider? To answer these questions, which are crucial in understanding our relationship with media, programs like Family Guy and other animated comedies should remain a focal point of rhetorical criticism.

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