

Broke Girls and Men at Work: 2011-2012's Television Gender Wars

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The 2011-2012 lineup was the oversaturation of the “man-child” on television. The “man-child” is a convenient product of capitalism where men continue to live a prolonged adolescence well into adulthood. The “man-child” represents a masculine fantasy and is “typically” reserved as a privilege of white patriarchy. Much of the lineup already consisted of the “man-child” character-type (ie *Two and Half Men*, *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, *Workaholics*, etc.) to the level that the male-crisis on television has become stale.

Furthermore, the contemporary popularity of the “man-child” in major Hollywood films like *American Pie*, *The Hangover* and a large assortment of Judd Apatow and Adam Sandler movies have positioned the “man-child” as a fixed identity. The existing representations of the “man-child” don't accurately address the male-crisis. Instead they serve as portrayals of unstable identities that often times harken back to social ills of an established patriarchal society. These men live in stagnant worlds where they have the ultimate freedom with no responsibility for anything they say or do. This includes the expression of misogyny. They maybe submissive to female partners, but they still are empowered to say derogatory things about women.

A good example of this is the male characters in the show *Man Up*. They each represented the epitome of the “man-child” struggling to find a way to shore up the masculine ideal. In the pilot episode, they all attempt to establish their position as the man in their lives. Their attempt is a complete failure with the episode concluding in them shouting out fish names and playing video games.

The regressive behavior of the “man-child” is an extreme response to the male crisis that prevents growth and established identity. Instead, the identity of the “man-child” is always in flux, in a sort of “purgatory” of masculinity. The men are portrayed as living out childhood behaviors while in adulthood, yet they are stuck in isolated identities. They have the freedom to act as they please, often times with the inclusion of offensive behaviors that involve racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.

Contemporary representations of men on television are brought together through the discourse of the bromance. These men are bonding as one identity separate from the opposite sex. Yet, is bromance healthy for men and does it accurately address the male-crisis or is the bromance a reinforcement of the anxieties that already exist within the male-crisis? These include anxieties toward gender (the opposite sex) race and sexuality. Is bromance reinforcing the existence of the “man-child”?

Adversely, the female-centered shows, regardless of their controversial nature, represent a level of empowerment for contemporary women. They do not readily submit to a dominant patriarchal force and, instead, live on their own accord. The female-centered

shows serve as a re-emergence of feminism on television and a necessary plea for more diverse empowered representations of women.

Shows like *2 Broke Girls*, *New Girl* and *Girls* (notice how the title of all these shows involves the word “girl” while the male shows include the word “men/man”) feature evolved women on television. For example, there was criticism toward *2 Broke Girls* as a result of racist, sexist, and homophobic jokes that are typically part of each episode. Still, the female characters on *2 Broke Girls* are working from nothing to build a life for themselves (“pulling themselves up by their boot straps”). Their reality reflects the current economic situation while their occupation as a waitress which they are attempting to escape is one that is typically gendered as feminine (not empowered).

Lena Dunham, creator of *Girls*, received criticism about the show’s all-white cast. The show does feature young women that are striving to make a life in New York City. *Girls* may not be racially diverse, but it does open the potential for more representation of independent women working toward their dreams. On *New Girl* Jess may be empowered in her ability to freely express herself, but she is still a product of patriarchy where women depend on men for survival including the fact that she lives with men and they depend on each other for emotional support.

On the other hand, the men of *New Girl* are representative of the “man-child.” They often make really stupid decisions and are generally caught in a funk. The only difference is that Jess is the central focus of the show rather than a female side character. Jess and her male companions are all in crisis together. The reverse of this was the cancelled male-crisis sitcoms that featured men that were mostly in crisis with strong female supporting cast members.

The disregard for the male-crisis programs may mean that men are moving beyond crisis into a healthier, more stable, masculinity. Thus, there is now a disregard for the “man-child” on television due to fatigue of over representation and lack of empowerment.