

Female characters and narratives played a significant role in the 2011-2012 television season. Critics and viewers readily welcomed the female presence, as evidenced by the success of CBS's *2 Broke Girls*, FOX's *The New Girl*, and HBO's *Girls*. On the surface, these programs seemed to promote the female as an autonomous and central character. Yet, after closely examining these shows, I contend that they are successful because they merely re-present hysterics by providing the illusion of female empowerment and centrality. Ultimately, these particular programs succeed because (1) society accepts and expects young females to be in crisis, (2) male figures consistently guide the frenetic women, and (3) the structure of the narrative is unique and malleable, allowing the appearance of play and subversion of stereotypes. I further argue my point by providing the contrasting example of *Last Man Standing*, a program that appeared on ABC and supposedly represented a male in crisis by relying on tired televisual formats.

The female-driven narratives succeed because they center on struggling women, and portray them as damsels in distress. Context is the only thing that separates these contemporary programs from exhausted Disney princess paradigms. *Girls* presents the life of twenty-something, post graduate, Hannah, who is an intelligent, yet incapable young woman. Her interactions with close friends and acquaintances are predominately awkward, and her existence seems burdened by self-inflicted chaos. During the first season, she relies on her boyfriend, Adam, to guide, relax, and aid in her Brooklyn endeavors.

Similarly, *New Girl*, showcases Jess (the main character) who lives with Nick, Schmidt, and Winston. Without fail, Jess finds herself in predicaments, often extolling her ability and independence. However, at the end of the half-hour segment, she relies on her male friends to guide her through each situation. In addition, *2 Broke Girls*, presents the storyline of Max and Caroline. While the existence of dominant male figures is more covert, I suggest that Max adopts traditional male characteristics to lead her bubbly, blonde counterpart. From her dress to her pattern of speech, Max exudes masculinity, which is often softened by Caroline and her storylines. Further, certain characters, including Oleg (the chef), Earl (the cashier), Han (the owner of the diner), and Caroline's father act as guiding beacons of male hegemony to remind the "girls" of their place. The successful programs surreptitiously portray women in a chaotic and submissive position, which echoes social constructions of femininity and masculinity, and explains their mainstream success.

*Girls*, *New Girl*, and *2 Broke Girls* also succeed because they break from traditional network sitcom structures, promoting alternative realities and ideologies. *Girls* airs on HBO and is shot using a single camera. Further, because it airs on a cable network, *Girls* is not bound to such stringent decency regulations. These factors position *Girls* as a departure from other programs. Alternatively, *2 Broke Girls* and *New Girl* premiered on network channels and use a multi-camera setup. In addition, *2 Broke Girls* uses a laugh track to secure punch lines and forgive crude jokes. Despite the appeal to traditional structures, each of the narratives breaks from these conventions, promoting the incorrect ideal of individuality. This portrayal can lead the viewer to incorrectly assume that the program will reject stereotypes and present something unique and unseen. These shows simply

repackage television tropes and gender stereotypes.

ABC renewed *Last Man Standing* for a second season, and this program appeared to deviate from the successful female-centered line up. *Last Man Standing* focuses on Mike, an outdoorsman, who lives at home with his wife and three daughters. Mike is seemingly overwhelmed by the amount of estrogen, and he is often seen trying to assert himself. Although this representation is partially accurate, it is juxtaposed by the conclusion of the episodic tension; Mike always prevails. Whether he is incorrect or inappropriate, his family forgives and idolizes him. The success of *Last Man Standing* proves society's readiness to accept and maintain traditional gender norms, which are displayed throughout the 2011-2012 season.

The notion of the female-centric narrative is very much a misnomer. On the surface, females appear to have agency, and they appear to dominate. Yet, males influence their action and development. The 2011-2012 television season is an illusion, a cover for hegemonic norms that submit females. Although the television season appears to depict a post-gendered state where men and women are equal, gender stereotypes and fallacies are simply re-presented. In short, nothing has changed but the packaging.