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Mini Criticism Essay

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Shows on television have the ability to tell stories, but they also can highlight deeper topics, such as gender stereotypes. In CBS' *How I Met Your Mother*, the sitcom heavily portrays different gender stereotypes through the show's main characters. Ted, Barney and Robin are mainly used to highlight these popular dating stereotypes in men and women. In Stevie K. Siebert Desjarlais' *How I Met Your Masculinity: Contrasting Male Personas on How I Met Your Mother*, Desjarlais argues that the sitcom both affirms yet undermines masculinity. In the article, she evaluates popular masculinities stereotypes and analyzes the main characters in the show. Ted and Barney further reinforce different masculinities, showing that males are dominant while Robin in the show is strong, independent woman who is career driven but gets teased by her friends for her values. Through each of the main characters' gender performances, it further reinforces the masculine stereotypes present in society but also undermines the value of women, furthermore, contributing to an overall message to change the way society views masculinity.

The Pilot and The Playbook are two episodes that illustrate clear messages of masculinity stereotypes. In the Pilot, Ted is first introduced as the show's narrator. Marshall and Lily get engaged, and Ted rushes to meet the overly confident, suited-up Barney at the bar as Ted starts to panic about the future. At the bar, Ted meets Robin and the episode ends with Ted and Robin going separate ways after Ted telling Robin he loves her. To set the stage for The Playbook, Robin and Barney had just broken up; the episode focuses on Barney performing his infamous playbook where he picks up girls in deceiving ways. Even though his friends encourage Barney to stop using the playbook, he is further fueled to continue with his successful performances. At the end of the episode, Barney is able to deceive his friends into thinking that he is a changed man and will abandon the playbook. In the article written by Desjarlais, she takes the view that hegemonic masculinity is both reinforced and challenged in the sitcom *How I Met Your Mother*.

She delves into discussing hegemonic masculinity, the new lad and the new man, using Barney and Ted as primary examples. Regarding the female roles, the author states, “Robin complicates the tie between maleness and masculinity by rejecting many familiar feminine stereotypes throughout the series” (Desjarlais, 2018, p. 172). Desjarlais ends the article by mentioning that hegemonic masculinity is used as way to show the patriarchal order that society has instilled.

To begin, it should be noted that, the men have financially adequate jobs (architect, banker, law student) while the women have low paying jobs (kindergarten teacher, news reporter). This distinctive barrier subtly sends the message that higher paying jobs are deemed more masculine in society. Regarding masculinity, the author introduces hegemonic masculinity as, “characterized by the behaviors associate with the ideal man, the set of rules that a society holds men responsible for upholding, even if the ideal is largely unattainable” (Desjarlais, 2018, p. 170). It is perpetuated through the characters’ jobs and their actions. There is a focus mainly on Barney and Ted’s opposing gender performances; Ted most resembles the “new man” and Barney resembles the “new lad”. The “new man” is characterized as, “‘sensitive, emotionally aware, respectful of women and egalitarian in outlook’ and the ‘new lad’—‘hedonistic, post (if not anti) feminist, and pre-eminently concerned with beer, football, and ‘shagging’ women’” (Desjarlais, 2018, p. 171). Through one interaction, the two masculine stereotypes can be articulated when Marshall and Lily get engaged in *The Pilot*. Ted starts to worry that he is single, shown in his dialogue, “This is crazy. I’m not ready to settle down” (Bays & Thomas, 2005, 5:33). While Ted worries about not finding someone, Barney is unfazed, fixating on the fact that the bartender has a girlfriend in a gamified view. Ted and Barney’s actions reveal a deeper message for the viewers; the sitcom playfully criticizes society for thinking that extreme acts of affection and deceitfulness are the norm.

Even though Robin is a woman, her character is used to illustrate the subversion on the role of women in society. The author states, “Robin’s character is assumed masculine-male types of the ensemble with her own masculinity... [she] is not portrayed as a traditionally feminine woman... and puts her career before her romantic life” (Desjarlais, 2018, p. 175). Although it is highly admirable for Robin to be career driven, her friends constantly agitate her by, “expect[ing] her to act like a traditionally feminine woman” who should be submissive to men and society’s norms (Desjarlais, 2018, p. 176). In The Playbook episode, Robin expresses her feeling post-breakup from Barney: “from now on, no more dating. It’s all about work” (Bays & Thomas, 2009, 0:49). While Marshall and Ted keep insisting a relationship despite her wishes to be independent, she is overshadowed by them and is ignored when asking for respect. The underlying message the show demonstrates is that career-driven women are often criticized for not wanting to be in relationships. The sitcom prompts the reader to see the realities of women who strive to be independent.

I agree with Desjarlais’ arguments about the show both affirms yet undermines masculine stereotypes. Barney’s immaturity is shown through his idea of constantly hooking up and viewing women as objects, it further reveals his immaturity. On the other hand, Ted, the emotionally aware and genuine man is teased for being too forward with his actions. Although the show mainly revolves around the male character, HIMYM uses Robin as masculine figure to further assert the realities of gender inequities. I believe that these masculine stereotypes are prevalent in today’s society, but not to the magnitude that is shown on HIMYM. After analyzing Orbe’s article and viewing footage from the show, I am left with the opinion that it is important to challenge popular masculine stereotypes.

References

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