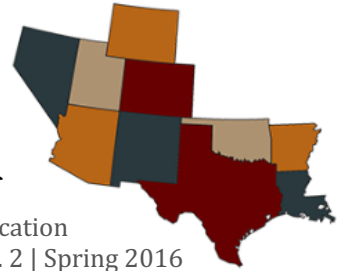


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Beyond Boobs and Beer: Analysis of Masculine Rites of Passage in the Film Superbad

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Abstract

Representations of “ideal” masculinity and the process of achieving that ideal in Western culture constantly change to reflect the current social standards. This critical case study of the 2007 American comedy film *Superbad* uses a textual analysis to identify how the film represents emerging masculinity and the process for achieving an “ideal” masculine status. The results indicate that representations of masculinity in *Superbad* are divided into three categories consistent with Sigmund Freud’s concepts of id, ego and superego. *Superbad* is consistent with the “myth” of hegemonic masculinity in that white, heterosexual, middle-class men are “ideal” regardless of personality and physical beauty. However, the film diverges from the myth of hegemonic masculinity in its exaggerated representations of hyper-masculine male characters thus positioning stereotypical aggressive depictions of masculinity as an outdated farce.

Introduction

Soft light illuminates the boyish faces of film characters Evan and Seth as they lay side by side in blue and red sleeping bags.

“I can’t believe you saved me. You saved me,” Evan states as he looks at Seth.

Seth chuckles and turns on his side to face Evan. The camera pans to a close-up of Evan’s face, his eyes drowsy from a long night of partying.

“You carried me. I love you. I love you man,” Evan whispers.

“I love you. I love you,” Seth states with growing confidence.

“I’m not even embarrassed to say it. I just love you,” Seth firmly declares.

“I’m not embarrassed. I love you. Why don’t we say that every day? Why can’t we say it more often,” Evan asks groggily.

“I want the world to know. It’s the most beautiful thing in the world,” Evan says assertively.

Seth playfully pokes Evan’s nose before embracing Evan in a hug and whispering one final “I love you” in his ear (Apatow, Robertson & Motolla, 2007).

This private intimate moment between the two lead characters in the 2007 American comedy film *Superbad* demonstrates a depth to the characters’ friendship that was previously veiled from the audience beneath a focus on partying, alcohol, and the pursuit of heterosexual sex. This “I love you” scene is not unique to *Superbad* but exists in a number of similar male-

centered modern films like *21 & Over* (2013), *College* (2008), and *Project X* (2012). Though these films focus almost exclusively on a hedonistic pursuit of heterosexual sex and alcohol consumption, they do occasionally offer a peek into the censored world of male-male friendship and the perceived inhibition associated with male emotional bonding, thus suggesting that some men suppress these expressions to comply with a more “ideal” form of American masculinity.

The dominance of one model of masculinity within a specific cultural social moment is referred to by gender studies expert Connell (2005) as “hegemonic masculinity.” The shifting boundaries of hegemonic masculinity cause many American men to live in constant fear that they will someday be emasculated (Kimmel, 2004). Such a fear can produce an overactive “performance” of masculinity through which men constantly prove to one another that they are worthy of the title “man” (Kimmel, 2004). This study identified how the visual and verbal cues in the American comedy film *Superbad* reaffirm some of the boundaries of “ideal” masculinity (race, class, gender) as defined by the current ideology of hegemonic masculinity while simultaneously reinterpreting other boundaries, particularly those that pertain to heteronormativity.

Previous studies have examined this film and others like it under the sub-genre of “bromance” (DeAngelis, 2014 & Alberti, 2013). Discussions about the bromance sub-genre, however, fail to acknowledge the potential differences and implications of a bromance film that focuses specifically on the relationships between emerging adults. This study provides a critical-case analysis of the film *Superbad* with the aim of identifying some of the unique elements that manifest in a film focused on emerging adulthood rather than established adulthood. This analysis builds on previous research of the bromance genre by examining how masculinity and the rites associated with achieving an adult masculinity are represented. The analysis then delves

into the psychological characteristics that distinguish the three main male characters and their individual representations of specific forms of masculinity.

Literature Review

Defining Masculinity

Development of a firm conceptualization of “masculinity” in the United States is problematic due to the dynamic, fluid, and socially dependent nature of the term. The concept of masculinity is subjected to the variations of culture, location, and historical context, which often leave a clear definition of masculinity vulnerable to multiple interpretations (Nixon, 2013). For an extensive period of time during the twentieth century, masculinity in Western culture was examined by scholars through the lens of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical ideas of gender development, the first scientific attempt to develop a standardized definition of masculinity (Connell, 2005). Freud’s theories claimed that masculinity developed as a result of the Oedipus crisis in which a boy was faced with a decision to reject the feminine in favor of a masculine identification (Nixon, 2013). Included in Freud’s groundbreaking developments of masculinity were his theories of repression and the societal regulation of sexual instincts to achieve the heterosexual masculine ideal (Freud, 1910).

Masculinity was later reexamined by Connell (2005) to include an examination of power relations *between* and *among* genders. Connell’s concept, labeled “hegemonic masculinity,” explored the dominance of an exclusive version of masculinity and the subsequent subordination of women and non-masculine men (Hanke, 1990). Within the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity, power is understood to be limited to an officially authorized performance of manhood; however, the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity in society requires both an acquiescence from males to comply with the culturally specified standards of masculinity and a

passive acceptance of the “status quo” among women and subsidiary male groups to maintain the system of power (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Both men and women are taught that the pain of maintaining the “status quo” is an inevitable and necessary sacrifice for the moral growth of society (Sabo, 2004). Although the approved standards of manhood are constantly changing according to the cultural specifications of a given time and location, it is through the process of maintaining the “status quo” that hegemonic masculinity is normalized and standardized among society.

In the current Western hegemonic system, women, homosexuals, and non-masculine men are made subordinate in the process of establishing an elite white heterosexual male dominance. Demetriou (2001) distinguishes between the subordination of women and “lesser” men as “external hegemony” and “internal hegemony.” While external hegemony refers exclusively to the cultural dominance of men over women, internal hegemony broadly refers to the cultural dominance of heterosexual men over homosexual men and also acknowledges the establishment of power structures through the intersection of sexual orientation, ethnicity, and class (Demetriou, 2001). This establishment of power does not occur in a vacuum but is a social process that occurs as certain men move into positions of power subsequently separating themselves from those without power. The dominant power group is not distinguished solely based on gender and sexuality but is often restricted according to multiple characteristics including socio-economic status, power, and race (Hatfield, 2010).

Within the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity, heteronormative masculinity can be performed through homophobia which has been defined by George Weinberg (1972) as, “the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals” (p. 4). As Kimmel (2004) states, “homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world

that we do not measure up, that we are not real men” (p. 88). The fear of being identified as less than “manly” can result in men performing an exaggerated masculinity as a form of protection from threats of emasculation (Kimmel, 2004). Individuals, however, lack complete autonomy in this exaggerated performance of gender as the performance itself is bound by historical conditions and cultural limitations (Butler, 1988). Gender, including masculinity, is therefore not inherent, but is performed in accordance with social standards in order to avoid social sanctions which may occur if gender is not performed correctly (Butler, 1988). As the social standards change, locations and tactics used to negotiate masculinity also change.

Anderson’s theory of inclusive masculinity has more recently examined the changing standards associated with a heteronormative performance of masculinity. Anderson (2009) argues, “As cultural homophobia significantly declines, a hegemonic form of conservative masculinity will lose its dominance, and softer masculinities will exist without the use of social stigma to police them” (p. 96). The decline of homophobia among males is documented further in Anderson and McCormack’s (2014) research on the growing prevalence of homosocial behaviors among young adult male populations. These homosocial behaviors include same-sex touching like cuddling and spooning (Anderson & McCormack, 2014). West (2001) similarly found that alcohol consumption within male groups not only provides an acceptable environment for men to enact physical closeness through aggression and competition, but is also often used as a tool for men to express deep emotional bonds or “brotherhood.” Drinking with male friends can afford men an opportunity to express homosocial love which they might not feel comfortable expressing when sober (West, 2001).

Rites of Passage: The Cycle of Proving Manhood to One’s Peers.

In the United States, the ritualistic passage into “manhood” is not a one-time event, but a constant cycle of testing and proving one’s manhood among male peers (Kimmel, 2005). As with most exclusive and powerful groups, the elite status of idealized masculinity is not inherent but must be constantly tested and deemed worthy by other members of the elite status group (Connell, 2005). Van Gennep (1966) labels this process of transformation from adolescence to adulthood as a “rite of passage.” Among many diverse cultures, rites of passage solidify a boy’s manhood and carry the weight of the acknowledgment and approval of a male’s peers (Raphael, 1988). This rite of passage serves to separate the boy from the females in the community while establishing his position as man according to the cultural specifications of sex, age, and ritualistic accomplishment.

Modern, white American culture lacks a specific standardized ritual for achieving a manhood that is recognized by male peers (Raphael, 1988). This missing, male-sanctioned ritual is acknowledged as a crucial element of the passage into manhood among many other cultures worldwide because “the ceremony ensures conformity by involving the candidate in an intense co-operation with men in the symbolic process” (Young, as cited by Raphael, 1988, p. II). A standardized ritual may, however, exist among subcultures. Indeed, West (2001) identified alcohol consumption as a ritualistic activity among males in fraternities and the U.S. Navy. Research has also identified that some men associate their first heterosexual sex act as the point they became a man (Raphael, 1988; Connell, 2005). Interviews conducted by Raphael (1988) and Kimmel (2008) found that the act of heterosexual sex was not enough to constitute manhood, but that it must be communicated and acknowledged by a man’s peers to garner acceptance. The true ritualization of heterosexual sex as a masculine rite of passage lies not in the sex act, but in the portrayal of the sex act, which must be approved by male peers.

Film as Representations of Masculinity in Transition

Hegemonic masculinity infiltrates the United States media not only through male-dominated control of the film industry but also through the stereotypical representations of gender produced by the film industry (Johnson, 2004). American film institutions are most often owned and their creativity controlled by men (Marable, 2004). This male-identified, male-centered system of representation can result in a devalued representation of women in which a woman's worth is evaluated by men in terms of her beauty and sex appeal (Johnson, 2004). Gender representations in the media are thus negotiated through power relations which emphasize the dominance of certain types of men and the subsequent subordination of women and subversive male types (Nixon, 2013).

Cultural control by the dominant masculine elite is aptly demonstrated by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's (1975) piece on visual narrative, in which she argues that films provide two forms of pleasure for the viewing audience: the pleasure associated with looking at others on the screen (scopophilia) and the narcissistic pleasure of identification. Mulvey (1975) argues that most movies are structured from a male perspective. Audience members form points of identification with the male characters on screen while simultaneously experiencing the pleasure of viewing sexualized female characters. This emphasizes the idea that, within a patriarchy, the heterosexual male experience is synonymous with the human experience (Johnson, 2004).

Between the 1970s and 1990s, a hedonistic representation of white, heterosexual, emerging adult masculinity was explored through a genre of "vulgar teen movies" (Speed, 2010). Vulgar teen movies focused on the hedonistic privileges of the emerging white male population and included movies like *Porky's* (1982), a film detailing the events of emerging males' experiences in a brothel, and *Animal House* (1978), which narrates the sexual pursuits of a group

of college fraternity men (Speed, 2010). These films highlighted the importance of the heterosexual pursuit of sexual conquests and presented a version of masculinity consistent with Anderson's (2009) description of "orthodox" masculinity. Orthodox masculinity is readily identified through a focus on male sport, sexism, and a presumed heterosexual identity (Anderson, 2009).

Masculinity was once again reinterpreted in the early 2000's in the emerging genre of "dude flicks" which depicted the insecurities and relational bonds between white, middle-class, middle-aged, American men (Alilunas, 2008). One analysis, conducted by media studies scholar Alilunas (2008), recognized a recent shift in the depiction of masculinity away from heroic and aggressive masculinity towards a discussion of the middle-aged male psyche including men's goals and emotional traumas (Alilunas, 2008). This shift in representations of masculinity has been depicted in movies like *Dodgeball* (2004), a film about a group of middle-aged men fighting to save their gym, and *Old School* (2003), which tells the story of adult male friends desperate to relive their college years (Alilunas, 2008). These films are structured around male-male friendship narratives indicating the changing nature of socially acceptable masculine performances. These masculine performances indicate a shift towards Anderson's notion of inclusive masculinity (2009). Although the cast of actors in these films are typically white heterosexual men, there is a noticeable decrease in "homophobia" (Anderson, 2009) as demonstrated by the intimate nature of the male-male relationships within the film. More recently, films that focus on male-male homosocial relationships have been labeled bromances and are considered a sub-genre of romantic comedies (Alberti, 2013). The bromance category is associated with the Judd Apatow narrative style that explores relationships between male friends. While many of the Apatow style films are categorized and analyzed broadly, this analysis

attempts to distinguish some of the narrative elements that occur in bromance films about emerging adults by conducting an in-depth analysis of the popular film *Superbad*. The present study therefore seeks to expand upon previous research by focusing specifically on representations of the ritualistic passage of American white emerging males within the bromance sub-genre. This study will specifically examine *Superbad* (2007) as a criterion case of bro-films which combines many of the hedonistic elements found in vulgar teen movies with the male bonding narratives found in dude flicks.

Methodology

A qualitative textual analysis of the film *Superbad* (2007) was conducted to identify how “ideal” masculinity is represented, using the lens of hegemonic masculinity. The study observed how the primary male characters interact verbally and physically with each other, with other male characters and with female characters.

Interpretation and Analysis

As the researcher, I began the analysis by watching the *Superbad* film in its entirety. I then broadly identified key themes concerning the representation of ideal masculinity. I then created an Excel chart in which I listed the verbal and visual elements of each individual scene in the film and the related denotations and connotations of these elements as related to my research questions. For the purpose of this study, a scene is defined as any change in time or place. According to Barthes, *denotation* is the representational and more obvious interpretation of the sign whereas *connotation* refers to the cultural associations of the sign (Chandler, 2000). Denotations and connotations contribute to the power of dominant cultural ideologies or “myths” (Chandler, 2000). I then examined how these elements reaffirmed the “myth” of hegemonic

masculinity particularly as it relates to interactions between male peers and interactions between males and female peers.

Findings

Representations of masculinity, as they are depicted in *Superbad*, are most readily analyzed through an examination of Seth, Evan, and Fogell, who are the most prominent male characters in the film. The three characters are occasionally depicted together as a cohesive group, but each character operates autonomously and is motivated by different needs. When the three characters are on screen together each member contributes a specific type of masculinity to the group. Through dialogue and action the characters negotiate their masculinity with one another and, at times, establish clear hierarchies within the group. The incredibly restricted representations depicted by the three male characters are reminiscent of Freud's concepts of id, ego and superego. The boundaries of each main male character are established early in the film and remain consistent. Freud (1950) explains, "The ego represents what we call reason and sanity, in contrast to the id which contains the passions" (p. 30). The superego, however, represents a structural relationship providing an opposing tension to the id (Freud, 1910). The id is therefore a representation of unrepressed sexuality where the ego represents the sexually repressed and socially presentable mask of control (Freud, 1910). The presence of the superego then serves as the social and individual conscience which works to repress the sexual desires of the ego. Each male adheres to his ordained representation of the male psyche and is given little room to change or develop as the movie progresses.

Seth's role as the id is established early in the film through his unwavering sexual focus demonstrated in the opening scene of *Superbad* in which he discusses porn viewing. The audience is exposed visually to Seth as an overweight, sloppy, white male seen driving an old rusty brown car. Seth is more expressive than the other two male characters and often uses his body to communicate his intentions, such as gesturing grandly and frantically with his hands as he talks. Seth also uses his body to communicate his sexual intentions to his male peers. This is demonstrated in scene 22 when Seth is paired with a pretty white female partner, Jules, in home economics class. Seth looks at his friend Evan to make sure Evan is watching as he begins to pantomime sexually explicit gestures behind Jules.

Seth uses his body to express emotions such as anger, aggravation, and love. Seth's first aggressive act occurs in scene 13 as he slaps Evan's hand away from his car radio. Seth's aggressive actions increase in intensity as the movie progresses. In scene 42, Seth pokes Fogell in the chest, grabs Fogell's face, and finally pushes Fogell. Seth's final aggressive action occurs in scene 73 when Seth pushes Evan twice using both hands. In scene 98, Seth communicates love by playfully tapping Evan's nose and then reaching out to embrace Evan in a hug demonstrating his propensity for expressive nonverbal communication. Seth's decision to use tender gestures only when drunkenly uninhibited and in private are consistent with the notion that some men perceive "ideal" masculinity as a public performance of aggressive and competitive behaviors.

Seth's verbal communication is also the least censored among the group of three men. Seth is loud and frequently uses expletives and sexually explicit language. He also uses dialogue to communicate his sexual appetites and his aggression. For example, he uses the word "f**k" more consistently than the other two characters in the film. Seth's insults are often derogatory expressions against women or homosexual men and include phrases like "you pussy," "don't be

such a vagine,” and, “they should be sucking on my ball sack.” Out of the six main female and male characters, Seth verbally communicates aggression most frequently towards both Fogell and Becca, Evan’s love interest. Seth often calls Fogell, “Fagell” and tells Evan that Becca “looks like a good f**ker” in scene 16. Seth’s nonverbal and verbal motivations are rooted in his unbridled sexuality and his thinly masked aggression. This demonstrates Seth’s representation of a type of masculinity most consistent with Freud’s notions of the id.

Evan is the second character introduced in the movie *Superbad*. He is white, thin, and well-groomed yet distinctly average in his appearance. He is not stereotypically handsome, nor is he unattractive. His lack of unique visual distinction make him an “everyman” who could easily represent anybody and everybody (with the caveat that they are white and male). Throughout the movie, Evan wears simple brown corduroy pants and brown or green shirts that are reminiscent of the 1970’s. Evan’s clothing obscures the time period in which he lives, making it possible to interpret him as any white man from almost any recent generation. Evan uses his hands minimally to gesture as he talks, thus preventing him from taking up as much space on screen as Seth. Evan is visually ordinary and unexpressive, providing room for the audience to project their own thoughts and emotions onto the character.

Evan is usually the ‘voice of reason’ in the movie and attempts to prevent Seth’s impulsive decisions. He says things like, “let’s not do anything hasty” and “let’s just calm down” as a counter to Seth’s aggressive and imprudent behavior (Apatow et al., 2007). Evan’s regulation of Seth’s impulses, his ability to present socially refined ideas and expressions, and his subsequent rejection of crude and aggressive language solidifies his role as the relatable ego character. Evan is soft-spoken and rarely raises his voice in aggression. This is demonstrated by the fact that he tends to use the term “having sex” instead of “f**king” and uses significantly

fewer expletives in his language than Seth. Evan also communicates more selective sexual preferences than Seth and demonstrates a respect for women that is not exemplified in Seth's id representation. In scene 59, for example, Seth asks Evan why Evan has never tried to have sex with Becca. Evan responds, "Because I respect her, Seth. I'm not going to put that kind of unfair pressure on her." Evan later toasts to "respecting women" in scene 84 (Apatow et al., 2007).

Fogell, the final main male character, is not introduced to the audience until 14 minutes into the film which establishes his subversive role in the friendship between the three men. Fogell is representative of the superego because he stands as a source of tension opposing Seth as id. Evan, as the ego, often mediates between the two opposing natures of Seth as id and Fogell as Superego. Epstein and Steinberg (2003) explain, "In Freud's characterization, the ego (balanced, realistic, adult) represents the resolution of the struggle between the primitive/infantile/desire-led id and the controlling, parental, conscience of the superego" (p. 101). Fogell's adoption of the McLovin identity further solidifies his role as the superego. McLovin is an extreme extension of Fogell in that he is a 25-year-old Hawaiian organ donor and it is through the identity of McLovin that Fogell is able to have sex.

Fogell's subordinate role in the friendship is highlighted by the fact that he is not on screen with the other two male characters for the majority of the film. Fogell is skinny, white, and wears glasses throughout the film. He is stereotypically 'nerdy' and his movements are occasionally spastic and childlike. Fogell is the least physically developed of the three characters but increases his representation of masculine physicality by holding and eventually shooting a gun. The visual potency of Fogell's masculinity is also intensified in scene 47 when Fogell gets punched in the face by a male liquor store robber, which leaves a red gash on his face for the rest

of the film and represents the mark of masculine aggression on the face of a non-aggressive character.

Despite the fact that the three male characters are not stereotypical representations of masculine beauty, their physical characteristics do function to establish an internal hierarchy. Fogell is scrawny, weak, and undeveloped. This makes him the least visually “masculine” character and serves as an ironic comment on his role as the superego. Seth is physically more developed than Fogell, but his weight and lack of physical attractiveness make him a poor specimen of masculine physical prowess. Evan, while physically unremarkable, is not unattractive and possesses a standard masculine body type. The initial internal hierarchy, as determined through the characters’ physical characteristics, is thus established as Evan, Seth, and then Fogell.

The internal hierarchy is further solidified through the interactions between the three males. Seth, for example, continually reaffirms his position over Fogell through displays of physical violence and verbal aggression. Seth constantly tries to represent what he perceives to be a dominant form of masculinity by using language that demeans women and homosexual men such as ‘pussy’ and ‘fag.’ Despite Seth’s efforts to establish himself as the alpha male of the group, his attempts appear to be a thinly veiled façade of masculinity which serve to constantly promote Evan as the most “sincere” version of manliness. This demonstrates a consistency with Anderson’s (2009) notion of inclusive masculinity. The orthodox representation of masculinity is depicted as an insincere and crude illustration of an outdated form of masculinity while the soft-spoken Evan embodies a more inclusive and socially current depiction of masculinity.

Seth and Evan also attempt to negotiate a hierarchy through sexual preferences as demonstrated in the following dialogue:

Evan: "That's disgusting. You're like an animal."

Seth: "What? I'm disgusting? You're the weird one man. Don't make me feel weird because I like porn. You're the weird one for not liking porn. I'm normal as shit.

(Apatow et al., 2007).

The internal hierarchy is also established through the discussion of sexual experience. In scene 16, for example, Evan and Seth discuss the amount of hand jobs and blow jobs Seth has received. Similarly, when Fogell is first introduced in scene 24, he excitedly tells Evan that he saw Nicola's thong. Evan asserts his dominant position as he later tells Seth that he offered to buy Becca alcohol. Seth then affirms Evan's actions by telling Evan that what he did with Becca was 'pimp.' Each main male character brags about his sexual experience, reaffirming the idea that male peers must garner praise for their sexual conquests to establish their status within the internal hierarchy.

The relationship between Seth and Evan is the crux of the movie. Their relationship unveils the often hidden insecurities and emotions associated with male-male friendship and serves to emphasize the necessity of establishing a heterosexual identity. Seth and Evan are seen on screen together more frequently than any other combination of characters. The physical contact between the two characters is a visual indicator of the changing emotions of the relationship. In the beginning of the movie, Seth playfully slaps Evan's hand away from his car radio. As Seth and Evan begin to experience tension in their relationship, Seth's actions become physically aggressive as he pushes Evan twice. The reconciliation between the two friends occurs in scene 98 as Seth embraces Evan. This intimate moment between the two characters is however actively repressed in the last scene of the movie when Seth formally shakes Evan's hand before walking away with Jules. This final act solidifies the fact that as "ideal" men their

physical relationship must be sterilized as their heterosexual relationships take a position of prominence.

The Women of Superbad

The main function of the three white women in the film is to serve as heterosexual partners for the three male peers. Mulvey (1975) explains, “traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen” (p. 204). Little emphasis is placed on the relationship between the three female characters, but they are given distinct visual and verbal characteristics. All three female characters are introduced to the audience through the male gaze and do not speak until after they are “gazed at” by their male partner.

It is no coincidence that each main male character is paired up with one female character as a heterosexual partnership in the movie. Demetriou (2001) noted that the selection of a heterosexual object-choice is a crucial factor in the reification of the dominant patriarchal system. Freud (1910) similarly claims that a heterosexual object-choice is an integral part of a man’s sexual development. The primary purpose of the women in *Superbad* is thus to provide the male characters with heterosexual object-choices which reestablish the dominant patriarchal system.

The three main women also function as a threat of potential emasculation. An example of the threat of emasculation occurs in scene 30 when in a flashback a child version of Becca discovers Seth’s obsession with “drawing dicks” and turns him in to the principle. Another example occurs in scene 92 when Seth, after being sexually rejected by Jules, stands crying by a

car. The following dialogue demonstrates Seth's attempts to prevent against the threat of Jules emasculating him:

Jules: "Seth, are you crying?"

Seth: "No, I just have something in both my eyes. I don't cry. That's funny."

It is noteworthy that both prominent attempts to guard against the threat of emasculation occur with Seth who most consistently performs the myth of a hyper-sexual, aggressive version of masculinity. This reinforces Kimmel's (2004) idea that the performance of hyper-masculinity is used to protect oneself from emasculation.

Fogell's Journey to Manhood

One of the most distinct features of a bromance film about emerging adult males is the portrayal of the passage from boyhood to manhood. Fogell, for example, relies on two white male cops as the figurative and literal authority of manhood. Fogell is temporarily separated from Evan and Seth about forty minutes into the film and does not reunite with them until almost thirty minutes later. During the separation from his friends, Fogell is guided into the world of "ideal masculinity" by two white police officers who could also be considered superego representations of masculinity. The cops expose Fogell to progressively more stereotypical "manly" activities. In scene 64, the officers buy Fogell a beer, and in scene 73, they give Fogell a cigarette. The culmination of stereotypical images of masculinity occurs in scene 97 when the officers allow Fogell to shoot a gun. In scene 67, Fogel asks Officer Michaels what it is like to have a gun. Officer Michaels responds, "It's like having two cocks, if one of your cocks could kill somebody" (Apatow et al., 2007). The exaggerated nature of the police officers' expressions of masculinity are reminiscent of the more familiar stereotypes of orthodox masculine authority figures.

The two cop characters also play a pivotal role in demonstrating that the cycle of testing and proving manhood does not end after the emerging adult stage of life. In scene 94, the officers confess to Fogell that they know he isn't 25 and state, "when we saw you in the liquor store today we saw ourselves and we wanted to show you that cops can have a good time too" (Apatow et al., 2007). This demonstrates the notion that proving one's worth to other men is a constant cycle in the performance of "ideal" masculinity.

Discussion

Consistent with the findings of "dude-flicks," representations of masculinity in comedic genres are moving beyond physical stereotypes and manifesting through stereotypical representations of the male psyche. Seth's character as the id for example is consistent with aggressive hyper-masculine representations of masculinity, however his character is unlikable. The film depicts hyper-sexual and aggressive masculinity as an extreme comedic farce. This represents an oppositional reading of *Superbad*'s contributions to the myths of hegemonic masculinity. The audience is however encouraged to relate to Evan who, in contrast to Seth, respects women, does not initiate physical aggression, and values emotional male bonding. Evan is thus positioned as a "new" type of "ideal" masculinity demonstrating that the dominant male standard can and does change. It is important to note that while Evan's relationships with women depict a progressive masculine "ideal," the film is virtually silent in regards to progressive depictions of racial relations. The three divergent depictions of masculinity therefore provide an argument that there is no "ideal" physical, verbal, or non-verbal component of manhood so long as the man is white and at least nominally heterosexual. Through the lack of a physical standard of ideal masculinity, the ideals of whiteness and heterosexuality become more pronounced. The fact that the three characters do not develop beyond the boundaries of their stereotypes, but do

find heterosexual partners, emphasizes the idea that achieving a masculine “ideal” is still equated with solidifying a heterosexual identity.

The necessity of establishing a heterosexual ideal is specifically addressed through the interactions between Evan and Seth. The two characters’ inability to engage emotionally with one another during the beginning of the film is countered by the declaration of love between the two friends at the end of the film. In scene 98 of the film, the two boys drunkenly express their love for one another and their frustration at not being able to express this love more frequently. It is at this point in the movie that *Superbad* develops a more complex perspective of the socially accepted standards of masculinity and the heterosexual rite of passage. Seth and Evan both fail to consummate the heterosexual rite of passage and yet this lack of completion is, in the end, deemed acceptable. While the movie creates a possible queer reading of the relationship between Evan and Seth, it is more important to note that whatever the sexual categorization of their feelings may be, they feel they cannot express these feelings until they are drunk. In the final scene of the movie, Evan and Seth actively repress their feelings for one another by walking away with their heterosexual object-choices and affirming for the audience their heterosexual identities. While the film appears to problematize the ideal of the heterosexual male through the relationship between Evan and Seth, this ideal is reaffirmed when Evan and Seth choose to comply with the heterosexual standard.

It is worth noting that the six main female and male characters in the film are white. Dyer’s (2003) notion of ‘whiteness,’ while not the main focus of this discussion, is difficult to ignore in *Superbad*. The hedonistic freedoms afforded to the white male characters are not consistent across all ethnic categories. As such, these movies predominantly limit the rite of passage and the establishment of an ‘ideal’ masculine identity to an experience achieved only by

the white male. Yet, this notion of “whiteness” is at times hard to grasp because the film is first and foremost about three “average” American guys. As Dyer (2003) states, “white people – not there as a category and everywhere as a fact – are difficult, if not impossible to analyze qua white. The subject seems to fall apart in your hands as soon as you begin. Any instance of white representation is always immediately something more specific” (p. 3).

Superbad is consistent with the “myth” of hegemonic masculinity in that white, heterosexual, middle-class men are “ideal” regardless of personality and physical beauty. However, the film diverges from the myth of hegemonic masculinity in its exaggerated representations of hyper-masculine male characters. The two police officers for example represent a critical discourse of white male authority. An oppositional reading of the text may provide more insight about how the film potentially satirizes stereotypical masculinity. *Superbad* reaffirms the white middle-class status of “elite” masculinity but also provides a new interpretation of “ideal” masculinity through the representation of Evan. The depiction of the process of achieving masculinity in the film *Superbad* provides interesting context to the type of masculinity depicted in other bromance films. In essence, Evan, Seth and Fogell are the teenage versions of many of the masculine characters portrayed in the bromance sub-genre. *Superbad* is therefore unique in that it provides the audience with the background, process, and rituals that were necessary in creating the male characters depicted in the bromance sub-genre. Furthermore, the film establishes the prominent representation of male characters as oppositional parts of the male subconscious.

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