Discourses of Masculinity in the Contemporary Male-Centred Drama

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This analysis explicates television as site of maintenance and production of masculine identity, acknowledging the medium's ability to preserve and pervert gender norms. The object of analysis is the white male-centred drama. Through divergent representations of male experiences and struggles, the meta-genre has the capacity to inculcate an important distrust in male authority. This analysis examines representations of men and masculinities on two leading American basic cable networks, FX and AMC, parsing the discourses of masculinity represented in the serial dramas *The Shield* (2002-08), *Nip/Tuck* (2003-09), *Rescue Me* (2004-), *The Riches* (2007-2008), *Mad Men* (2007-) and *Breaking Bad* (2008-). FX and AMC have become known as vanguards of 'quality' television in recent years. They have, it has been argued, contributed to the masculinization of the medium.[1] Because of its location in the home, television has been perceived as domestic, interpreted through a distracted, passive “glance,” and thus, culturally coded as feminine (Shimpach 38). The push to masculinize the medium appears a calculated attempt to imbue the perennially lambasted box with a level of respectability previously denied to the medium as well as bait a coveted high-end clientele. This constitutes a multipronged endeavour to virilize televisual content, networks, and audiences. Both FX and AMC espouse a type of transmissive exceptionalism. By touting the cache of its programming and aestheticizing content considered

1 The medium is a market in this interpretation. Television is a debased medium “and, therefore, by implication, a feminized form, [while] the same discourses idealized the television audience as the consumer (Thumin 32). The push to masculinize the medium, one can argue, is a calculated attempt to imbue the perennially lambasted box with a level of respectability previously denied to the medium and attract a coveted high-end clientelle. This constitutes a multipronged endeavour to virilize televisual content, networks, and audiences.

verboten on other outlets, the networks cultivate an aura of "boutique television," marked by "an air of selectivity, refineness, uniqueness, and privilege" (Leverette citing Caldwell 141).[2] Through "quality" adult programming, resistive networks deliberately position themselves "in opposition to the perceived feminization of networks through the habitual "re-marking" of the masculinity of its series" (Santos 34). The content functions to affirm the viewer's own respectable (and "masculine" qualities), validating audiences' discerning tastes and maturity. When the cast and producers of FX's *Damages*

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2 According to Amanda D. Lotz, marketing strategies touting the culture of higher quality, less-accessible accessible content constitute a concerted effort to differentiate ones network from everyday fare (Santo citing Lotz 32). Distinguishing a network is done first and foremost through branding. As Kelso explains, FX and other networks have launched "branding campaigns to forge unique identities" (Kelso 57). These "unique identities," however, are quite similar to the apotheosis, HBO, touting transmissive exceptionalism. Notably, both networks have co-opted the "not TV" aura. FX's current slogan, "There is no box," implies no taboos, and none of the restrictions that would typically limit those who operate within the parameters of "the box." Likewise, AMC's "Story Matters Here," ostensibly quality content *and* an inherent lack in other networks, those that rely on traditional fare, predictable stories, and antiquated, outmoded content. Bolstered by branding, the deference extended to both outlets is the result of a changing marketplace, institutional changes, and shifting purviews at each network. All relative, as Santo explains is a means of differentiating ones product from the next. Exclusivity is colliagted with quality, and access to this content, in turns, reflects positively on the calibre of the clientele.

FX, a subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch's Fox Television Network, was launched June 1, 1994. Initially a showcase/receptacle for 20th Century Television-owned classic programming like *Batman*, *Wonder Woman*, and other nostalgic, kitschy fare, it was one of the first networks to take advantage of the burgeoning Internet culture; the early years of FX were marked/marketed by an increased interactivity afforded to avid viewers, those who could visit FX's website, participate in discussions in their chat rooms, or send an e-mail to programs live on-air. This interactive, laid-back vibe was jettisoned in the late 1990s and the schedule would soon incorporate programming from its big sister, Fox. FX's first significant and successful attempt at baiting the coveted 18-49 male crowd was its acquisition of NASCAR races. The network made its initial foray into original programming with *Son of the Beach*, a comedic parody of *Baywatch* (1990-1999). Reruns of *Married... with Children* (1987-1997), the exclusive right to broadcast millionaires driving in circles, and buxom babes partaking in beach-side buffoonery secured a niche audience of men. However, as a brand, this incarnation of FX lacked a significant, distinct voice in the multichannel universe. The artistic integrity and cultural relevance of FX has augmented significantly within the last decade. Following the critical and commercial success of *The Shield* (2002-08), the network's first foray into drama that marked a watershed moment for the network, other successful original programs such as *Nip/Tuck* (2003), *Rescue Me* (2004), and in recent years *Damages* (2007) ,and *Sons of Anarchy* (2008) have developed loyal fan bases and critical acclaim. In recent years, FX has been lauded with critical praise, renowned for gutsy decisions that challenge basic cable expectations, and respected amongst both insiders and viewers for its willingness to broadcast unconventional, genre-b(l)ending programs. The basic cable outlet has been compared favourably to subscription-based titan HBO.

AMC is a relative newcomer to the quality television table. The network was launched as American Movie Classics in 1984. Now, like Kentucky Fried Chicken or The Learning Channel, it is referred to only by its acronym (ostensibly because of its shifting focus towards original programming, evidenced by its recent slew of quality television dramas). As the name suggests, the station was designed as a repository for classic American cinema. TCM Over time, however, the channel began to develop its own original programming, garnering positive reviews for its miniseries *Broken Trails* (2006). Its first widely-recognized original drama series and soon-to-be flagship program, *Mad Men*, premiered in 2007 to even greater critical acclaim, and over time, has developed a strong viewership. *Breaking Bad* (2008-) premiered the following year, and like *Mad Men*, is a favourite amongst critics that has developed a respectable viewership, earned Emmy awards, and has been deemed one of the best dramas on television. AMC's success continues with *The Walking Dead* (2010-), which became the highest-rated debut and finale (5.5 and 6.0 million, respectively). Most recently, the network has found success with the murder mystery *The Killing* (2011-). These critical and commercial successes have cemented AMC as the new breeding ground of quality television drama.

were questioned about the benefits of being broadcast on the recently esteemed network, actor Ted Danson answered that the relatively challenging programme, which incorporated temporal jumps and an unravelling mystery linked to just one case, may not have been broadcast on other networks. For Danson, FX "encourages [writers and actors] to be as bright as [they] can possibly be, and they encourage the audience to be as bright as they can possibly be" (*Damages* Paley 2008). Likewise, Matthew Weiner, creator of AMC's *Mad Men*, a show infamously rejected by HBO, believes that a show like *Mad Men* "requires extra effort to watch" and, thus, fits on an outlet like AMC (*Mad Men* Paley 2008). Audience devotion is rewarded not only on a personal, intellectual level, but imparts a level of social capital supposedly not extended to broadcast television groundlings.

Strategies considered part of the American 'quality TV' turn, have been employed to assert high-end calibre, primarily effecting hour-long drama series and serials. Jason Mittell points to the narrative complexity that distinguish these programs "from other hour-long drama and brought television increased cultural cachet" (Dunleavy 206). Increased narrative complexity occurs through generic mixing (tonal and narratalogical diversification by blending conceptual elements from different television genres), increased serialization, subsuming ongoing, evolving and overarching plots, and an incorporation of the 'flexi-narrative' that intersperses many plots within a one-hour drama. In addition to generic-mixing, of particular interest to this analysis is the rise of the 'series-serial,' successive episodic stories that are incorporated into a cumulative narrative (Dunleavy 223). Such narratalogical choices have the capacity to develop more accurate representations of modern male experiences. All of the programmes under analysis combine serial and episodic elements that "reward avid fans without alienating casual viewers" (Santo 29). These stylistic choices of the serial, for instance, has the capacity to undermine purported male prowess, as victories within specific episodes are tempered "serially from a sense of interminable loss and sadness arising essentially and quite simply from their continued

existence" (Shimpach 46).[3] These programmes encourage a detection/injection of subtext into presented narratives, stoking "fannish" appropriation (Shimpach 43) by incorporating a level of hyperdiegesis, "the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen... but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic" (Dunleavy 213). Critical engagement is encouraged among casual viewers, avid fans, and scholars. For each viewer, there is the possibility of different attractions, and divergent interpretations. It is in a network's best interest to promote active engagement; encouraging and/or courting passive viewers is seen as counterproductive to both narrative and viewer retainment. Despite extraordinary plot-lines, these programmes' appeal depends largely on a rapport between the audience and the protagonist, a resonance that "rests with identifying [the protagonist] as an everyman figure" (Polan in Santo 37).[4] In many ways, like gender, 'quality' is defined by what it is not, "quantified through contrasts with the conventionality and risk-adversity" of America's 'classic network' era" (Dunleavy 206).[5] Today, quality American drama is known for its conspicuous confrontation of palpable, often polemical, public concerns. These programmes incorporate real-life issues and much of their 'quality' stems from their resonance with critics and audiences.[6] 'Quality' has traditionally implied a broader variety of settings

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3 Such ongoing plot lines, for instance, centre around Tommy Gavin's survivor's guilt and Don Draper's recurrent efforts to veil his mysterious past As Shawn Shmipach explains:

4 While many of these dramas focus on white working-class experience, the coveted high-end TV viewer, statistically speaking, is in an upper earning bracket. Despite the potential difference in the viewer's collar colour, Alfredo Mirande's analysis of contemporary understandings of "macho" behaviour provides possible insight into the appeal and resonance of the working-class hero. According to his sociological analysis, conceptions of "macho" differ significantly according to socioeconomic status. "Men with more education, with a higher income, and in professional occupations were more likely to have a positive conception of the word," Mirande explains. "This is not to suggest that they are necessarily more... chauvinistic, but that they simply see the world more positively" (Mirande 36). Distanced from the direct consequences of hyper-masculine behaviour, men may be more prone to romanticize macho behaviour. About half (42 percent) of men interviewed who were professionals "associated the word "macho" with being principled or standing up for one's rights, whereas only 23 percent of non-professionals had a positive conception of the world" (Mirande 36). The former interpretation "associates being macho with a code of ethics that organizes and gives meaning to behaviour," direction lamentably lost in the current climate (Mirande 37).

5 Quality television is not a new concept, nor is it strictly relegated to the multichannel universe of TVIII. Some programs associated with the 'quality' are *Hill Street Blues, St. Elsewhere, Twin Peaks, NYPD Blue, Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and, of course, HBO programming such as *The Sopranos, Six Feet Under, Deadwood*, and *The Wire*.

6 For instance, *The Shield*, because of its willingness to ask questions regarding what society is willing to sacrifice

and more scripts that incorporate a multifaceted concentration on people's lives. With this disengagement from (or, through generic-mixing, the side-by-side inclusion with) domestic life, there is a sense that such narratives could subsume more variety of plots, more action and stronger stories (Thumin 136). In these dramas, concepts such as addiction, religion, homosexuality, changing domestic roles, bureaucracy, and other issues pertinent to a varied viewership. Because of television's relative ease of accessibility and proven popularity, the medium extends this discussion to a large group of people, many of whom, as we will discuss, transcend the role of benign observer and actively engage with the content at hand.[7]

An ongoing negotiation extended to the 'quality' TV viewer pertains to masculinity. Masculinity is constantly under scrutiny and readjustment in society, a continued transmogrification reflected on the small screen. A topic that continues to attract attention in the field of television studies is that of "gender roles and sex role stereotyping"; however, the topic of gender representation on gender on television remains "dominated by work seeking to expose or unmask the depiction of women on the small screen" (Feasey 1). These programmes' depictions of male interactions with labour, family, and shifting expectations of manhood in American society offer salient entry-points into an analysis of modern masculinity. Modern male-centred programming, Rebecca Feasey explains, has "the power and scope to foreground culturally accepted social relations, define sexual norms and provide 'common-sense' understandings about male identity for the contemporary audience" (Feasey 4). Additionally, these programmes can "present alternative and potentially subversive representations of family, friendship and masculinity" (Feasey 5). As mentioned, two strategic elements associated with white male-centred drama (as well as the broader meta-genre of "quality" television) contribute to realistic,

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for security, has been interpreted as an almost-allegorical examination of Western consequientialism following 9/11. Moreover, *Breaking Bad*, a reverse-bildungsroman following the moral decay of a man who turns to a life of producing methamphetamine to support his family when he is diagnosed with lung cancer, has been interpreted as a not-so-subtle critique of the American healthcare system.

7 The need to reject the limiting interpretation of what John Caldwell calls "distracted surrender gaze theory" of viewership will be explored further in the third chapter.

revealing, and revolutionizing representations of masculinity: increased seriality and genre-mixing. Through the (inter)actions of these men within both the public and private sphere, we are entreated to engage in an important dialogue. Public successes and domestic failures (or vice versa) are predicated primarily on how men navigate ideological norms. Afforded a thorough vantage and capable of tendering "unique perspectives, positioning, and offerings," viewers of these programmes are privy to more comprehensive representations of men, masculinity, and male authority (Buckley 167). Audiences enter a "cultural struggle" through an implicit alignment with male protagonists that have emerged in television dramas in the past decade, multifaceted figures who navigate, reaffirm and challenge traditional roles of masculinity. Steeped in the fraught complexity of contemporary masculinity, these characters confront salient gender and sexual issues, reveal tensions regarding the changing perception of what constitutes white American manhood, and mark an effort to reconceptualize masculinity in society.

This analysis focuses on performance of masculinity within these male-centred dramas, its destabilizing effects on the concept of white hegemonic masculinity, and the possibility that these performances **"**compel a reconsideration of the place and stability of the masculine and the feminine" (Butler 139). Attempting to understand the broader implications of televisual texts intimates to what extent such masculine performativity is imbricated in a wide range of social and economic practices (West 8). Instead of representing a manifold masculinity, the tensions revealed in these dramas are linked with the presence of several discourses of masculinity that each character has to navigate. Acknowledging the fluidity and malleability of masculinity poses a challenge to universal male subjectivity. As well, representation itself constitutes a challenge to hegemonic masculinity's grip on the popular imagination.[8] Thus, programmes that incorporate an exploration of both private and public

8 In this regard, an increased female presence in crime drama and/or an increased male presence in melodrama is more than a challenge to the classic gender/genre bifurcation of televisual content. Programs that b(l)end 'conventionally

male behaviour (a characteristic of the male-centred drama) contribute to a deeper, more comprehensive and fruitful examination of modern masculinity. In regards to male behaviour, the more rugged, individualistic definition of masculinity is usually displayed in the public sphere, while emotionality is primarily displayed in the home. Although, as I will discuss in the second chapter, parafamilial relations within the male workplace also encourages a level of communion and vulnerability that rivals emotional commitment expressed within the home. Like the programmes they inhabit, the men under examination are sites of negotiation, as well, their main struggle being their ongoing confrontation/negotiation with their own masculinity. Despite some proclivities to revel in traditional male behaviour, these programs ultimately suggest manoeuvrability within masculine identity.

Hegemonic masculinities, according to Robert Hanke, are constantly “refurbished, reempowered, renegotiated, and re-envisioned” within the public sphere and reinforced in the private lives of men and women (Hanke 193). Thus, to understand the configuration of masculine identity, context is key; it is important to note the 'relational' nature of gender and its subjection to historical trends, power structures, and social relations (Howson 57). Patriarchy, Hanke continues, “reforms masculinity to meet the next historical turn, to regain the pleasure of reinforcing the norm, to fit the social climate” (Hanke 193). Thus, understanding masculinity (its ideals, expectations, and antitheses) as a construction of (or, more likely, a reaction to) its historical and social context can provide valuable insight into the values and desires of a society. While this can be a fruitful means of investigation, it would be imprudent to universalize the notion of masculinity, as such a stance implies a shared, homogenous community among men, disregarding divergent physical, mental, and emotional realities, as well as dismissing disputatious individual and collective identities. (The destabilization of a shared notion of masculinity, as we will discuss, is a progressive and necessary action espoused by this

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feminine' and 'masculine' narratives should be considered sites of negotiation.

analysis). Disparate and variable, socioeconomic status and sexuality, for example, are two factors that can affect the formation of masculine identity.[9]

The construction of masculinity is a product of public discourses that work to inform public consciousness. Mass media, the 'representation industry', "manufactures motivated views about tastes," and because of the ubiquity of particular representations, "the views are considered common sense in private and public settings" (Lemelle 36).[10] The media plays a crucial role in informing middle-class consciousness regarding the 'correct' way to view the society, it's laws, shared values, and practices (Lemelle 36). Perhaps most importantly to the task at hand, through textual analysis we may be able to uncover the prevalence of opposing visions of masculinity. Through stylistic and narratalogical decisions, these programmes reify underlying tensions, fears, and desires within society. This can function to assert hegemonic principles, actively or passively bolstering the importance of maintaining the status quo. On closer inspection, these programmes challenge longstanding notions of race, gender, and male identity. As Anthony J. Lemelle points out, "People use representation to covertly portray and reproduce power relations of domination and privilege"; representations, however, can "also map resistance" (Lemelle 39). These cultural texts provide an understanding of the social and cultural environment in which they were sired. Therefore, particular attention should be afforded to how these texts affirm or challenge notions of masculinity, whether they work to disrupt white centrality or assert a unified notion of masculine identity.

These programs (explicitly and implicitly, subtextually and textually) explore prevailing tensions in modern American society pertaining to a changing identity. The purview of this analysis constricts to an analysis of white hegemonic masculinity and whether these programs challenge or

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9 Moreover, purported commonalities shared amongst males can waver in discussions of masculinity and race. For many, race functions as a qualifier, conjuring different expectations and invoking varying, sometimes variant, interpretations of what constitutes manhood when it is defined along the colour line.

10 The media's attempts to virilize the nation following 9/11 will be examined in the final chapter.

affirm enduring “common sense” notions attached to American masculinity. This analysis posits that both the industrial and artistic practices of modern post-network television production has facilitated an opportunity for a deeper analysis of American masculinity onscreen than previously afforded. The changing emphasis on production coupled with increased narrative complexity of the 'quality' label has presented challenges to business-as-usual depictions of onscreen masculinity, gravitating towards increased nuance and realism. The male centred-drama provides greater access into the personal and professional lives of male characters and a depth of interiority not regularly offered in traditional television dramas (Lotz 11-12).Varied representations of men operating in both the public and private sphere constitutes an evolution that reflects both a changing extratextual social order and the augmented needs of an industry attempting to attract a composite viewership. In both a changing social order and a modified marketplace, networks in search of a broader audience cannot rely on the resonance or marketability of traditional masculinity. For Lotz, the crises that afflict the men of male-centred dramas “ultimately result from conflicts borne internally by the character over his identity and the social expectations of him” (Lotz 11). Thus, it is important to ask if these programmes, and their male characters, work to codify hegemonic masculine normativity, or if they present a challenge to its ubiquity. Enduring questions regarding the obligations of men, their contributions to the labour market, and their role in the family unit, are afforded deep, thoughtful explorations within these narratives. theorists in men's studies have recently stressed the “fabrication” of masculine identity as “a discursive construct embedded in non-discursive practices” (West 11). If there is an underlying link that connects this analysis, it is the programmes' exploration of white heteronormative masculinity and the pressures associated with its maintenance. This initiative is predicated on recognizing the highly constructed nature of masculinity. Although its universality (and, thus invisibility) has traditionally afforded the white male subject reprieve from scrutiny, these programmes destabilize white masculinity's privilege as *the* naturally occurring norm by revealing the anxieties associated with its upkeep.

"It's no coincidence," Dave Thier proclaims, "that while the traditional masculine roles may be disappearing in reality, they've only become stronger on television" (Thier). As Mittell explains, the "larger cultural life" of television texts is of utmost importance, as "it is only in the historical context of production that and reception that genres have any cultural impact and coherence as categories" (124). As such, we need to understand the larger social processes by which the text is "activated as a cultural object" (Mittell 124). There is a sense that many people watch these programmes for a vicarious vision of undaunted masculine authority. As I will discuss further in the analysis, in times of uncertainty and anxiety, the white, heteronormative male (and his authoritative institutions and ideologies) serves as the rallying point for beleaguered men as well as the nation itself. Despite providing ample attention to more atavistic hypermasculine behaviour and/or a willingness to privilege the experiences of the white male heterosexual protagonist,[11] I argue that, rather than functioning as a thinly-veiled or gratuitous act of asserting white male heteronormatvity, these programmes work assiduously to foreground white masculine performativity, anxiety and failure, all stemming from the white male subject's inability to navigate his changing position and subjectivity in society. At the advent of the analysis, Like most people in contemporary society, the notion of masculinity is met with ambivalence. For every virtue associated with manliness, there is a tendency to accede to its antithetical ambitions: Self-reliance/selfishness, stoicism/emotional ignorance, heterosexual desire/libidinous preoccupations, etc. The male-centred drama has a marked tendency to explore both the pros and cons of masculine tenets, the dignity and the damage of adhering oneself to hegemonic masculinity.

In an age characterized by fear, the need for security and economic austerity, some have lamented the purported softening of men in America. Feminist movements, technological advances, political correctness, deindustrialization, and myriad other social and political advances have instigated a fear that men can no longer be "men." As we will discuss, masculinity has never been a stable,

11 I explore the implications of these decisions in depth within the second and third chapter, respectively.

definitive concept, nor has a collective, unified masculinity ever been actualized within America; it belongs exclusively in a romanticized conception of the past or it is a fixed (unobtainable) goal for the future. Rather than attempt to codify or inscribe hegemonic masculinity, the programmes suggest that such an endeavour is a fruitless folly. The invisibility and mystique of the subject threatened, rather than attempting to placate white male anxieties with pleasantries, affectations, and indulging the lingering "backlash" rhetoric associated with the Men's Movement or the post-9/11 political milieu,[12] these programmes suggest that culpability rests with the object under analysis: the white male protagonist. These programmes do not buy into the concept of masculine recovery, or at least its reactionary rhetoric. I argue that these programmes invert the critical gaze of the 'backlash', furtively espousing the need for white men to adapt to societal change. Through the analysis of these programmes, we can glean a rather powerful critique of white hegemonic masculinity, its purported utility, aptness, and immutability. In various walks of life, the programmes underscore the constructedness, flexibility/mutability, and performativity of orthodox white masculinity.

Chapter 1: The Male-centred Drama, Fatherhood, and Desire for Redefinition

12 Explored in depth in the second and third chapter respectively, both the politicized movement and the national tragedy fostered anxiety and led to the production of reductive visions that asserted white male authority and the universality of the white male subject.

In her influential sociological analysis, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, polemical journalist Susan Faludi addresses shared symptoms that beleaguer innumerable American men. An increasingly disenchanted group, these men endure a growing sense of purposelessness, uncertainty, and a loss of faith in societal institutions that once afforded personal identity and collective worth. The primary source of psychic trauma, Faludi maintains, stems from the absence of male support structures. To temper this malaise, Faludi notes, many men have asserted the importance of "reclaiming" ones manhood through male bonding, spiritual responsibility, and reclaiming a moral leadership role within the household. Such initiatives attempt to rectify a sense of domestic betrayal that has accompanied occupational and civic disloyalty throughout the second half of the twentieth-century. Hegemonic masculinity is the cultural expression of men's dominance over women. Its most important feature is the institution of heterosexual marriage (Connell 185-86). While the traditional marriage paradigm meant keeping women out of the public sphere, men, twinged by economic downturns and the "feminization" of society, have placed a renewed emphasis on their role within the household. The Men's Movement of the 1990s[13] excavated many of these tensions. Despite housing discursive groups, the Movement was linked primarily by their virtually-homogenous membership: white middle-class Juedo-Christian men, individuals who stood to lose the most from deindustrialization and social reform. Their once God-given grip on the inner-workings of the public sphere now seemingly tenuous, to maintain a sense of pride and, more importantly, purpose, the orders to wrest control of the domestic sphere from its current arbiters – wives and mothers – was dispensed with alacrity.[14] Reigning over the

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13 The movement housed several politically divergent groups, (including the National Organization of Men, Men's Right International, Men's Right Inc) that worked to draw attention to perceived injustices endured by men and organize men against "the feminist cabal that supposedly now rules Washington" (Kimmel 21). This victimization rhetoric will be discussed further in the second chapter.

14 Blame for social disadvantage and societal ills were placed on the absence of the father, and the erosion of paternal discipline and authority (Howson 129). Aggrieved, American men feel betrayed by the lack of opportunities afforded in the labour market. Being a white male does not equate financial security. However, despite vocal qualms, white men are still the power earners: "According to US statistical abstracts (2003), black and Hispanic men earn about 70% of white male counterparts, white women still earn three-quarters that of white men, while women of

domestic sphere allows men to "re-imagine themselves as pioneers on the home front," replacing traditional male work identity "without challenging the underlying structure of the American male paradigm" (Faludi).[15] Michael Kimmel explains the implications of the fatherhood movement and the push to bring men back to the home: "Reconnecting men to family life has become a politicized terrain filled with moral urgency, legalistic outrage, and social movement organization" (Kimmel 24).Through self-positioning as spiritual counsel of their households, it was believed that could men could reassert their power and forge new identities as spiritual pathfinders, affirming a (relatively soft) rugged individualist leadership role within the home. Depending on who you ask, tightening the reigns on the domestic sphere is a necessary reformation of masculinity, or a desperate attempt to indemnify waning relevance in a world increasingly cold to white male authority. Although seemingly progressive, this form of domestic manhood is accessible to disenfranchised men through the pathological division of sex at the expense of the female subject.[16]

In this analysis, the Judeo-Christian path to masculine purity espoused by the Men's Movement is incongruous with the programmes under scrutiny.[17] However, a parallel can be drawn between the men of the Movement and the fathers under analysis, particularly pertaining to the embrace of the pathfinder position. Functioning as an ideological rather than spiritual touchstone, these men believe in

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colour earn little more than half the median white male wage" (Rehling 27). Behind the public hurt, however, lies a deeper anxiety associated their perceived paternal abandonment (Howson 130).

15 For many men, the male subject within domestic melodrama is as an increasingly relatable figure, "as a generation of men struggle to challenge earlier sex role stereotyping and negotiate the emotional reserve of the hegemonic male" (Feasey 13). Alterations within the genre "can be seen to negotiate this hierarchic model of the male by blurring the boundaries between the public sphere and the domestic realm" (Feasey 13). Blurring the public and private sphere negotiates traditional representations of hegemonic masculinity and the dominant male role. An inclusion of domestic affairs acknowledges that "power [is] not confined to the public sphere and that it also operate[s] within the private sphere of love and emotional life" (Seidler 130). Much of the dramatic tension developed within these series stem from the convergence of both spheres. There is a need to judge men in private as well as in public terms. Such an omission devalues an influential and important realm of experience that has been (comparatively) neglected in the cultural imagination and in some traditional male-oriented television drama. The (inter)actions of a man in both his public and private life can reflect his own interpretation of manhood. His behaviour may indicate support for hegemonic tenets of masculinity, constitute a challenge to the dominant order, or, more likely, reveal ambivalence held towards both patriarchy and social progression.

16 Faludi sees such self-positioning as a compensatory tactic that situates men as domestic directors of purchasing and entertainment, which constitutes a challenge to traditional wifely duties..

17 However, the men in question are all either practising or lapsed Christians.

and espouse American masculinity, evident through their understandings of fatherhood. Although ostensibly secular, this adherence is grounded in the reverence of mythopoetic symbology and transcendence through ones compliance with scripture – sacred beliefs that have been imbued in the American psyche through such discursive works as religious sermons, The Declaration of Independence, bumper stickers, campaign speeches, novels, television programming, and innumerable other cultural objects.[18] These objects clearly define and aid in the delegation of gender norms, impart gendered responsibilities, and stoke aspirations. Gender aids in the maintenance of the institutional order. The institutional order, however, has shifted under the weight of economic reform and social advancement. The image of the male as father and provider, however, has remained noticeably static. Despite their own disconfirming experiences, for fathers, the navigation of the new world is predicated on an adherence to an enduring hegemonic masculinity, a well-tread path that dooms both father and son.

This chapter argues that the programmes *Rescue Me, The Riches*, and *Breaking Bad* reveal contemporary anxieties pertaining to the changing role of the father, concentrating on two types of tension affiliated with modern paternity. Examining *Rescue Me's* Tommy Gavin as father and conduit of hegemonic masculinity, the first tension pertains to the symbolic role of the father as harbinger and manufacturer of manliness, a position that appears increasingly under siege in the age of the 'soft' male. Lineage and labour are intimately linked for Tommy, a third-generation F.D.N.Y. (Fire Department of New York) firefighter. He acquires his identity in the public sphere (and, by extension, affirms his identity as a man) through his profession. However, both his biological and surrogate son prove incapable of carrying the torch, a break in the chain that alludes to anxieties regarding the viability of

18 To belabour the analogy, being born male is original sin, the desire to actualize traditional masculinity is the covenant, and labour functions as both a form of baptism and errand into the wilderness.

traditional masculinity that is punctuated through Gavin's profession as a fireman.[19] The second anxiety is linked with the fraught role of the father as provider, a more mercenary interpretation of fatherhood that is, nevertheless, charged with symbology. Both *The Riches*'s Wayne Malloy and *Breaking Bad*'s Walter White's understanding of themselves as a provider primarily in the fiscal sense proves a narrow and grievous interpretation. For both men, the unbridled ambition to provide for ones family, rather than being represented as an unequivocal virtue, is portrayed as a corrosive drive (predicated on moral compromise, skullduggery, and deceit) that places each of the protagonists' family in danger. Privileging money over emotion, this self-image comes at the expense of affection between father and progeny. This understanding has the capacity to limit male responsibilities to that of an ATM. In addition, both programmes undermine an integral component of American masculinity: the myth of the self-made man. Both men are incapable of adequately providing for their families until they have adopted new names and embraced new lifestyles, a rebirth that, as I will discuss, constitutes a regression. Wayne, an adept con man, usurps the identity of Doug Rich and assays to live the life of the deceased lawyer, taking his job, living in his house, paying his alimony, avoiding his old friends, etc. In a desperate bid to provide for his family after his demise, Walter, the 'soft' man, a failed chemist turned high school teacher, begins manufacturing and selling methamphetamine when diagnosed with lung cancer. In an attempt to divorce his family life from his new lifestyle, Walter adopts the pseudonym Heisenberg, beginning the climb from cook to kingpin. The duplicitousness of the men plays off contemporaneous disquietude pertaining to economic crises and uncertainties. However, they also address timeless discord, challenging notions of opportunity and advancement amalgamated into and articulated by American mythos. In the programmes, success is not attained through traditional channels. Gains are ill-gotten and empires are either stolen or built illicitly. Complex societal tensions manifest themselves within the struggles of the onscreen father, specifically his inabilities to procure

19 “Fireman” rather than “firefighter” is used consciously throughout this analysis.

the transmission of hegemonic masculinity, and his Sisyphean adherence to traditional masculinity and the American motif of the self-made man. The desire for self-actualization as an elusive and illusory hegemonic male rarely leads to pride and profit. On the contrary, these programmes suggest that such actions can hamper prosperity for both father and future generations.

Rescue Me's Tommy Gavin: Failed Masculine Authority/Authorship

A prevailing trope uncovered during the course of this analysis is the disablement of the son in the male-centred drama. This trend, I argue, indicates and punctuates a tension associated with the generational transmission of masculinity from father to son. The former usually wishes to impart a traditional form of masculinity, while the latter is unable or unwilling to ingeminate the actions, beliefs, and goals of the prior generation. A source of trauma and narrative thrust, the debasement of the son, underscored through deformity, lineal impurity, or death, proves burdensome to (or an expunction of) father-son relations.[20] Death and disability constitute a practical challenge to the transmission of hegemonic masculinity. However, if there was no tragedies or maladies, sons would more than likely endure the same struggles. The degradation, however, serves as a stark metaphoric reminder of the disconnect between father and son, a not-so-subtle device employed to intimate the irrevocable and widening schism between generations. The problematized representation of paternity and the fraying of father-son relations indicate both a desire and necessity to explore and alter traditional paradigms of fatherhood. Maintaining conventional understandings of fatherhood is presented not only as antiquated but afflicting. For Tommy Gavin, the self-destructive alcoholic firefighter and protagonist of FX's

20 For instance, *The Shield's* Vic Mackey's only son is diagnosed with autism, a discovery Vic uses to rationalize his morally dubious behaviour and unequivocal greed. *Nip/Tuck* infuses its story arcs with defective dads and troubled sons. The protagonists suffer the sins of their fathers; Sean's dad abandoned him as a child, while Christian's step-father sexually abused him. Sean's teenage son, Matt, is revealed to have been sired by Christian (2.08). Connor, Sean's biological son, is born with ectrodactyly, a bitter twist for a father who makes his living with his hands (4.03). In *Breaking Bad*, Walt's son, Walter Jr., has cerebral palsy. Perhaps the most interesting and playful challenge to hegemonic masculinity is represented through *The Riches'* Sam. The youngest son of Wayne and Dahlia Malloy, Sam engages in transvestism throughout the series. More comfortable in female attire and regularly engaging in 'feminine' acts, he openly challenges expectations of young male behaviour. Despite some complications, rather than assiduously working to engender 'male' traits, his actions are generally accepted by his parents and siblings.

Rescue Me, the death of his son is the culmination of his own inabilities as a father – a symbolic miscarriage that functions to remind the audience of Tommy's selfishness and willingness to put his profession before his progeny. Premiering in July, 2004, the series' narrative begins a few years following 9/11. A seasoned firefighter, venerated by his peers, renowned for his daring, chagrined by no fire, beholden to no woman, he is a living legend within the brotherhood of the FDNY. Suffering a similar discord as most men in this analysis, despite his workplace prowess, he endures a tumultuous personal life. Separated from his wife, battling alcoholism, and seeing ghosts that serve as admonishments of his own guilt, Tommy's life is in tatters. Perhaps the best description of Tommy is offered by the man himself. In defence of his mother's erratic behaviour, Tommy describes his father, "She was married to a guy who was a firefighter who was a raging alcoholic who would never admit it, and had three girlfriends on the side. All he thought about was drinking, and sex, and himself" (6:03). By the end of the sentence, Tommy is keenly aware that he has become his father.

Although we are not privy to an extensive amount of background regarding his domestic life, we see that the trauma of 9/11 has destroyed his personal life, or has at least exacerbated his rage, alcoholism, and self-destructive tendencies.[21] Fuelled by a mixture of genuine love and possessiveness, Tommy is compelled to be with his wife and kids. When Janet, Tommy's wife, entertains the idea of moving the kids away from the melodrama that has consumed her life and the lives of their children, Tommy lambasts his spouse, "You start a shit storm about my kids with me, you take 'em anywhere you want, I will hunt you down and I will find you. Four corners of the Earth, I will find you and I will take those kids back. That's not a threat, that's a goddamn promise, bitch" (1.02). One of Tommy's primary concerns, particularly in the first season, is providing his estranged wife with money for their children and various household problems. Configured as a nagging cash-vacuum dependent on

21 At times there is ambiguity regarding the effects of 9/11. Although it clearly impacts his life for the negative, there is a sense that he will use the tragedy as an excuse to justify his selfish and self-destructive behaviour.

Tommy's benefaction, by the end of the season, it is revealed that she uses part of the money to relocate herself and her children out of state, away from Tommy and his increasingly erratic behaviour. Much of the second season deals with the aftermath of Janet's escape, as Tommy attempts to find and recover his family. Nearing the end of the season, Tommy, the inveterate booze-hound, is sober (apart from prescription anti-depressants he steals from his wife's purse), his family has returned, and he is eking out a semblance of domestic normality. Of course, this being a show that has been characterized as "dark" by devotees and "misery porn" by detractors, things go awry. Distracted by a conversation with his dead cousin, Jimmy,[22] in which the two discuss the upcoming renewal of Tommy's wedding vows with his reunited wife, Connor is struck by a drunk driver and sustains mortal injuries (2.12).

The younger Gavin idolized his father, and Connor professed a keen interest in being a firefighter. This is alluded to several times throughout the series. His interest is made more explicit shortly before his death. After overhearing a conversation between his father in which Tommy counsels Damien through his decision to join the FDNY, he repeats, almost verbatim, his father's words. Relaying the information to Tommy and struck by the intensity of her son's resoluteness, Janet explains, "He tells me he's going to be a firefighter... He said it was in his blood and in his bones... Where do these kids come up with this stuff?" Tommy offers a possible answer, "that stupid Third Watch show" (2.11). Days after their son's death, Janet berates Tommy, underscoring Tommy's commitment to the job over commitment to family. "You save strangers... but you can't keep your eye on your own goddamn son when he rides his bike down the block" (2.13). The interlink between masculinity, heredity, and heroism play a major role in the Gavin family, as masculine, professional, and public identity is transferred through both labour and lineage. Tommy's grandfather, uncle, cousin, and father were all members of the FDNY. The death of the only son represents the termination of

22 Jimmy Keefe is Tommy's cousin and best friend who perished on 9/11. On the ghoul spectrum, Jimmy falls somewhere between Hamlet and Casper. He is a product of Gavin's guilt, but also his best friend and confidant.

tradition. This, of course, is problematic, as Tommy's identity as a provider and a man is predicated on the preservation of this trajectory. Its importance is reinforced when Tommy's cantankerous father chastises his grieving son following Connor's death. "You should be out drinking, and dancing, and banging young broads, hopefully knocking one up. We need another set of balls to keep the family tradition alive in the FDNY" (3.01). While the first statement is spoken with a note of encouragement, his tone alters to convey the sincerity of his statement, serving as both a rebuke and a command. Janet also endeavours to fill the void, mainly by filling another void with Tommy's brother, Johnny. She becomes pregnant with an unexpected child, deciding to keep it to replace Connor ("what has been lost, what *I've* lost") (3.04). The child may be the product of Tommy forcing himself on his wife, a disconcerting scene that raised rancour amongst viewers for seemingly validating the rape fantasy (3.03).[23] Given the child's phenotypic characteristics, however, it is more likely that the only son is the product of the ongoing affair between her and Johnny, muddying Tommy's claims of paternity when he becomes the de facto father following the death of his brother (4.01). Like his father and wife, Tommy's grief manifests itself partially through a desire to replace his son. The son of uncertain seed, being too young, is relegated to a cursory position within the household and the narrative. For Tommy, his successor will have to be a surrogate.

Damien is the son of Tommy's cousin and best friend, Jimmy Keefe. Jimmy died on 9/11, yet he continues to visit Tommy. Tommy encourages his godson to follow in his deceased father's footsteps, much to the chagrin of Damien's mother, Jimmy's widow, and Tommy's on-again-off-again lover, Sheila. Damien expresses interest in the profession, partially due to a dis/connection with his father. In

23 With a wink and a nudge, the controversy was later addressed in "Pussified" (4.04). During a couples therapy session, Tommy, in a dismissive tone, scoffs and refers to it as "the "rape" while gesticulating air quotes. Perhaps there is one progressive take-away. While most accounts of fictional sexual assault on television contribute to the believability of readily-identifiable rape myths, particularly the presentation of "real rape [as] violent and committed by a stranger," the scene intimates the reprehensibility of domestic violence, acquaintance rape, and spousal rape (Cuklanz 16). However, the showrunner's shoulder-shrugging flippancy towards the act downplays spousal rape as some kind of rape-lite, while affirming the right of the husband to exert control over the female body.

his own words, he believes it “may be a way to, you know, connect with my dad” (2.11). When Tommy warns Damien, “This is not a spur of the moment kind of a thing,” Damien goes on the defensive, “Look, I loved my dad, his job, what he did, what you do, it has an honour to it. No matter how screwed up your life might be, when you come home at night, part of you, you're satisfied, right? Like, you know that at some point during the day, if only for a few hours, you knew you were doing the right thing, right?” Tommy reminds him of the less glamorous realities associated with the job; “You get payed shit... the politicians have us by the balls 'cause we never go on strike... Yeah this country respected us after 9/11, they put the spotlight on us, but now, because this country has ADD, we're back to being glorified garbage men, garbage men with booze and alcohol problems, but garbage men nonetheless.” Despite the low pay, lack of respect, and the physical and psychological dangers of the profession, Tommy acquiesces. He confides, “There isn't a job on the whole goddamn planet that I'd rather do than this one... I came down here, truthfully, to talk you out of this, but, I can't do it.” Coming back to the importance of legacy, he continues, “The fire thing is in our blood, it's in our family's bones. My dad was a firefighter, his dad was a firefighter.” “I think he'd want nothing more than to see you pick up his badge and carry on,” Tommy tells his nephew. Proceeding to give Damien Jimmy's badge, Tommy states that only one person can accept the badge of a fallen firefighter, the son, “if and when he decides to come on.”

As discussed, masculinity can be a nebulous construct. However, the figure of the fireman solidifies the abstruseness associated with manhood. In the cultural canon, they are heroic, brave, noble, adhere to a code of ethics, and are defenders of the innocent. The programme is keenly aware of the figure's almost-mythic exaltation following 9/11, and works to humanize the figure. *Rescue Me* undertakes this task both indirectly (through characterization) and directly (in this case, an impassioned monologue). Addressing a group of graduating FDNY cadets, the ornery Tommy barks the following:

You want to know how big my balls are? My balls are bigger than two of your heads duct-

> taped together. I've been in the middle of shit that would make you piss your pants right now. Uptown, downtown, Harlem, Brooklyn. But there ain't no medals on my chest, assholes, 'cause I ain't no hero. I'm a fireman. We're not in the business of making heroes here. We're in the business of discovering cowards, 'cause that's what you are if you can't take the heat. You're a pussy, and there ain't no room for pussies in the FDNY... You pussies better pray you don't get assigned to my firehouse. Because I have seen it all. I knew sixty men who gave their lives at Ground Zero. Sixty. Four of them from my house... These four men were better human beings and better firefighters than any of you will ever be. (1.01).

Because of professional and personal experiences, Tommy is able to incorporate humanity into the profession; the men lost are both firefighters and "human beings." For Gavin, firefighters are not heroes, but men. Following 9/11, the public cannot deal with the dissonance generated when cracks in the veneer show. In the context of 9/11, the "square jawed fireman" and the weeping "little girl in pigtails" were the respective embodiments of two divergent states (Faludi *Terror* 6). The former represents strength in adversity, the latter innocent victimization. The fireman is not a man, but a symbol, a rallying point for national pride and a reminder of the importance of 'masculine fortitude. The public is presented with a homogenous hero. Such idolatry serves as an erasure to identity. However, it also serves as a release, not only from the mortal coil, but from the burden of masculine exceptionalism.

According to *Rescue Me* co-creator Peter Tolan, "Tommy's curse — which is a direct reflection of 9/11 — is that he survives. When he should be dead, he survives, and there's death all around him, which is what he is left to deal with" (Bryant). As mentioned, the show deals with Gavin's survivor guilt. I would suggest that his guilt is tinged with envy, as he is denied the symbolic fulfilment through the mantle of heroism and manhood that death bestows upon men who die in duty. Despite his own reservations pertaining to hero worship, Tommy places a tremendous amount of capital in the

profession. While Tommy seeks a son, Damien also seeks approval of an absent father. Tommy is not the only person living with the ghost of Jimmy. Fatherlessness is a defining problem for many Americans, and many men have been deprived one-to-one involvement with a personalized authority figure. While Connor cannot rely on his father to protect him from happenstance and the drunk-drivers of the world, Damien cannot rely on his father for guidance because of his physical absence. Damien, fatherless and starved for direction and validation, conflates the father and the fireman. Fading into ephemera, the fallen father's presence remains, its existence evident through our ubiquitous anxiety pertaining to the safeguarding and maintenance of *his* masculinity. Ever-present, yet never actualized, it resides in murky memories of an idealized past filled with ideal men. To put it simply, we are haunted by our father's notion of masculinity.

Within the Gavin clan, the graduation to adulthood is predicated on the attainment of the symbolic capital invested in the figure of the fireman. Although he despises it on a national level, this is a type of hero worship that Tommy understands, endorses, and enforces. There is a conflation of loyalty to family and the responsibility of reproducing masculinity, a convergence reached by many modern men. Because of the overwhelming need of society to prepare the next generation for the social order, males and females are groomed to fit different adult roles (Harris 9). As Ian Harris explains, “To learn a role it is not enough to acquiesce to routines immediately necessary for its outward performance. A young boy must be initiated into the various cognitive and affective layers of the norms appropriate to that role” (Harris 9). There is a belief that fatherhood masculinity can be transmitted to son through homosocial companionship (Howson 129). Damien's attempt to become a fireman is a not-so-subtle attempt to become his father, and, I argue, the promise of becoming a fireman equates an errand that ends in the attainment of masculinity. Masculinity, however, as David Eng articulates, is “a having that never was and a being that can never fully be” (Eng 165). Tommy, as discussed, is a man plagued with anxiety invoked by both workplace and domestic trauma. His survivor's guilt manifests itself through

the recurrence of pestering apparitions, fallen comrades, doomed victims of fires, and deceased family members. Failing to adequately mourn their loss and/or unwilling to let go, Tommy tarries in anguish and grief. The figure of the ghost, the ephemeral yet eternal presence, is particularly salient to the discussion of lineal masculinity.[24] Ghosts serve to remind Tommy of national tragedy and personal failure. In a discussion of Jacques Derrida 'hauntology,' a concept based on the notion that existence is predicated on our interaction with antecedence ("a wholly irrecuperable intrusion in our world, which is not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness we are responsible for preserving"), Fredric Jameson explains that "the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be" (Davis 373). To put it succinctly, in the context of *Rescue Me* and lineal masculinity, there is a sense that we continue to understand ourselves through an unrealistic interpretation of our fathers. For Gavin and many men, there is a stasis that the ghosts in his life underscores. Incorporeal or otherwise, fathers provide guidance; however they may also temper ambitions and dole out unsuitable consignments. The present and, by extension, the future is deferred, in part, to the past. For Damien in particular, transference of masculinity is as elegiac as it is triumphal. To borrow a phrase from Anne Douglas, forefathers are "striking mementos of past virtue, but they are fossilized, weakened, sentimentalized" (*Feminization* 196). Although countless men continue to search for father figures, we really want a figure of a father, that vague ideal we all desire to be. In other words, we want to become the ghost, an idea, and ideal. These spectres, vestiges from a time that never really existed, continue to haunt men. Our continued fear (of their disappointment) and veneration of the ghosts (through ingrained rallying-point symbology of the American male) is a regressive push towards an idealized past that voids the present of meaning. Incessant reproduction and adherence to

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24 The ghost imagery is used quite eloquently by Faludi. She captures the sense of loss and insatiable acquisitiveness of young men when she describes the effects of a generation of fathers who were, if not physically absent, emotionally distant: "The sons grew up with fathers who so often seemed spectral, there yet not there, 'heads' of households strangely disconnected from the familial body. The non-presence of paternal ghosts haunted" and, stalked by their presence, sons desperately attempted to "decode the mystery of their mute fathers" (Faludi 596).

models of traditional masculinity distracts present realities; rather than understanding ourselves as members of a progressing social order and adjusting accordingly, simulacrum dictates our actions. We ignore the very real economic and social mechanisms that also contribute to our existence. As discussed, the changing social and economic order has invoked the chagrin and vexation of many males. Digressing briefly from the phantasmagorical, practically speaking, it is imperative that old models and paragons be reexamined. For both Tommy and Damien, casting themselves as the shadows proves detrimental. Discomforted by uncertainty and the threat of our own effeteness, we don the uniforms and ectoplasm of our fathers. To fill the void, the ghosts becomes our companions and guides, members of an idealized past that lead us through an uncertain present, towards a brighter future. A brighter future in the shadows, however, is inherently self-contradictory.

After training, Damien is assigned to his uncle's firehouse. When the new recruit's commitment to his vocation wavers, Tommy is there to encourage his nephew's loyalty, usually through negative reinforcement (threats to his masculinity and “If Jimmy we're alive” assumptions about potential paternal disappointment). When seeing the impact of the profession on his uncle, Damien reveals his feelings to a dismissive and increasingly annoyed Tommy. Damien asks, ”Do I really want to go through that kind of disappointment, heartache and pain, day after day, after day.” Tommy, this being the only life he knows, responds, “That's not just this. That's anything; it's called life, asshole.” “No,” Damien retorts,

> That's called your life. Maybe I don't want that kind of life, all the angst and drama and bullshit. Look, I know I've got the brains and the balls to do the job, alright. My old man, he'd be proud. I know that, so, mission accomplished... Now I'm just thinking maybe I could make just a big a difference in the world doing something else... Off the top of my head, maybe something that doesn't involve me getting fried up in a fire... Penny [Damien's new girlfriend] wants me to do whatever makes me happy, unlike you. You just want me to

> do what you want me to do, or what you think my dad would want me to do, which is pretty much the same thing. And you know what, now I'm even more sure that I don't want to do it... You want to treat me like a son, try acting like a father. Back off and let me do what's best for me (6.07).

While Tommy operates under the assumption that he is fulfilling his dead cousin's wishes, it is within Damien's (and the viewers') cognitive grasp that he is attempting to configure his nephew as a replacement for Connor. Once enraptured by the allure of the profession and a sense of obligation, Damien is now disenchanted by the physical and emotional grind of the job. Moreover, he wishes to avoid the consignment of a similar fate to that of his father and uncle. Despite reservations, he ultimately decides to stay at the behest of his uncle. After making his first solo save (6:03), rescuing a baby from a fire, losing his virginity (6.07),and wholeheartedly committing to his responsibilities as a firefighter (6.09), his career meets an unceremonious end. During a tour, a table-saw crashes through the ceiling of a burning building and crushes Damien below, rendering him brain dead, mute, immobile, and completely dependent (6.09). Like several of the characters injured or killed in the programme, Damien operates as a reminder of the consequences of Tommy's decisions, another guilt-induced vision added to the pantheon of peeved poltergeists. At face, Damien functions as a cross between Cousin Oliver and a Red Shirt from Star Trek.[25] However, Damien's dissonance, although mined for dramatic thrust one too many times, reveals ambivalence towards traditional masculinity, a desire to break from tradition and an unwillingness to function in the world of his fathers. Although it is ultimately unexplored, the emergence of a novel masculinity within the family mirrors the increasing irrelevance of traditional masculinities in American society.[26] His desire to leave his profession and, by

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25 He is a new, young character, but he serves primarily as a reminder of the dangers of the job without actually injuring the lead character.

26 As discussed, the death of Tommy's son represents the denial of hegemonic masculinity's transmission from father to son. His son joins the pantheon of spectres, and Tommy endures hallucinatory visions of both his young son (3.01, 3.05,

extension, his father's shadow underscores the growing fissure between generations and his incapacitation highlights the failures of masculine transmission. Because he is not a ghost, he cannot be forgotten and his memory cannot be romanticized. A corporeal vessel, he is stripped of his humanity, but not extended the capital of the fallen hero. Between life and death, Damien operates as an illustration of his surrogate father's failure and a son's inability to cope in his father's shadow.

American Masculinity and the Male Provider in *The Riches* and *Breaking Bad*

As discussed in the analysis of *Rescue Me*, both an inability to adhere to and transmit hegemonic masculinity's tenets can be a source of consternation for modern men. Continuing to develop the depiction of the head of household as vexed vanguard of masculinity, this chapter provides an analysis of men as providers, the alignment of this role with masculine identity, and developing pressures associated with these responsibilities. Contemporary and persisting questions of what it means to be a man in America usually manifest themselves in a struggle to adapt to reconfigured gender roles within the home and persistent social pressures to function as breadwinners (Lotz 13). The commonplace belief remains, "a real man provides for his family. He is a breadwinner" (Kimmel 17). Fatherhood provides a sense of purpose and identity, a relatively concrete institution in which one can attenuate his own misgivings and anxieties pertaining to masculine potential.[27] Many of the problems affiliated with the modern man are linked to a loss of substantial and shared identity. In an increasingly forbidding socioeconomic climate, a focus on fatherhood offers "a racially innocent path of white male redemption," a steady source of cache, and a position that cannot be easily furloughed (Rehling 35).[28]

3.06, 3.10, 3.12), and visions of an adult Connor (5.08, 5.09, 6.05, 6.07). The incorporeal future Connor, like Damien, denies Tommy's interpretations of hegemonic masculinity, as well. In one hallucinatory visitation Connor is configured as a violent junkie (5.08); in another, he is a Wall Street broker (5.09), conflicting with the public servant firefighter image that his father had attempted to cultivate.

27 This is partially the result of changing power dynamics; groups that white males dominated in the traditional socioeconomic hierarchy, such as women and African Americans, have consolidated their influence. For many it seems that identity formation takes place in a zero-sum economy.

28 While the cash-flow stops, the cache-flow remains constant.

Contrarily, a disruption in the relationship between father and child could constitute yet another failure in a long-line of disappointments endured by modern men. The notion of providing for the family unit is intimately linked with expectations of normality and success as a man. In addition to imparting hegemonic masculinity, ideal men display a concerted effort to provide for their progeny. Turning towards Wayne Malloy and Walter White, as fathers, they struggle to provide an adequate emulative role for their sons. They are however, far from role models.

The fathers under discussion are nuanced figures, inundated with comparable struggles many male viewers navigate (child rearing, retaining financial solvency, maintaining a career, dealing with domestic issues, etc). Despite some pretty substantial character flaws, oversights, and poor decisions, particularity when their professional affairs interfere with their domestic duties, we understand that these men act under the (mis)apprehension that their actions will aid in the maintenance of their family unit. And, despite their best efforts, the 'less savoury aspects' of their work seeps into their personal lives (Dunleavy 228). We sympathize with their plight and know that the male's intentions are pure and the affection he shows towards his wife and kids are genuine. Such warmth, however, may not be expressed through emotional raptures or even simple body language. Quite contrarily, their devotion is often expressed in a rather mercenary way. As an audience, we accept that commitment in the public sphere is tantamount to (and a reinforcement of) an ardent dedication to the family unit. For men, there is a sense that “their own manhood [and by extension fatherhood] flowed out of their utility in society, not the other way around” (Howson 137). Beyond practical reasons, this is why unemployment and economic impotence can prove so difficult for men. This section focuses on two providers within vocations that invert paths to prosperity in the public sphere: a career attained through fraud and a lucrative career in the criminal underworld.[29] One of the key characteristics of the male-centred

29 In an attempt to normalize his criminal acts as part of a new career and to punctuate that Walt sees himself as a working stiff (albeit a brilliant working stiff), he regularly packs and brings a brown-bag lunch to the meth lab.

dramatic protagonist is his adeptness (or at least willingness to engage in) in duplicitous behaviour and compromise his moral integrity by engaging in chicanery and subterfuge.[30] Within these programmes, transgressions tend to snowball, decisions are made in the heat of the moment, and graves are dug deeper. As viewers, we understand that decisions are morally dubious, but they are not necessarily untenable. If we are to interpret these characters as direct responses to the sociopolitical climate in which they were sired, it suggests a creeping incertitude, doubt, and ambiguity in our representative heroes.[31] While the economy is a perennial subject of discussion for pundits, politicians, and journalists, its ubiquity is particularly inescapable these days. Continued post-industrialization, financial destitution, bailouts, and the sub-prime mortgage crisis have affected innumerable Americans and have yielded intense media coverage. The economy is, in many ways, the new crisis. External forces and foreign markets have contributed to the erosion of American economic preeminence abroad and has sparked additional xenophobic rhetoric. Despite the knee-jerk reaction of blaming foreign superpowers, the problems that plague the economy are seen largely as originating from within the national borders. This can be a destabilizing notion for those who place faith in the once-believed inviolable public and private institutions now indisposed under the weight of the current economic climate.

These men yearn for security, the sine qua non for most Americans. Wayne desires to establish a home and life for his family and deliver his wife and kids from their transient ways, particularly following the incarceration of Dahlia which divided the family for over two years. The escape, however, proves just as threatening and destabilizing as their life of crime (a continuation of the life of

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30 AMC's *Mad Men* also presents a similar, unnerving path to success, represented through the journey of protagonist and pinnacle of manliness, Don Draper. Don (born poor farm boy Dick Whitman) begins a journey from rags to riches through dubious and illicit means. Like Wayne from *The Riches*, he usurps another man's identity, taking the identity of his deceased commanding officer during the Korean War.

31 This will be discussed at length in the final chapter. I will discuss television's 'grey' character as symptomatic of increasing uncertainty in ideological institutions in post-9/11 America, and a distrust in public officials that characterizes postmodern American society.

crime peppered with the malaise of suburbia). Likewise, the damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don't dynamic rears its head in *Breaking Bad*. Walt initially wants financial security for his family; however, because of his rash decisions, he must act to protect them from reprimand incurred in his new life. What makes these men empathetical figures is that they are attempting to provide for their families. We understand these shortsighted decisions are motivated by good intentions. However, their decisions are based primarily on a corrupting mercenary motive, an understanding of their role as men that is historically linked to ones ability to function as a provider. Despite vast adjustments, a monochromatic vision of fatherhood continues to prevail amongst many men and women. This, one could speculate, may be the result of a generation of men and women reared by fathers who kept emotions at arm's-length, placing the emotional responsibilities on the female head of household.[32] In doing so, they bolstered this more materialistic definition of provider. The onus that these men (and men in general) place on themselves to provide for their families is not necessarily a corrupting drive. In a modernized capitalist society like America, it is, for better or worse, an integral component in the maintenance of the family unit. However, placing an emphasis on economics over emotion serve to undermine these men as fathers, husbands, and providers, as their mercenary motives serve to jeopardize the safety and security of the family unit.[33] In order to provide and be good men, Wayne and Walt do bad things. In doing so, they attempt to circumvent traditional barriers that preclude their (literal or figurative) entry into prosperous conditions promised to all, but extended to a privileged few. Their failures and (perhaps

32 Both men also exhibit a masculine understanding of the provider, even in their non-traditional careers. While they are both in on the con, Wayne attempts to relegate his wife Dahlia to the domestic sphere, an act that would aid the front, but underlies his perceptions of how a family should operate. Later in the series, Walt rebukes his wife's efforts to take a more active part in his criminal operations. While this is to protect his wife from both the occupational hazards of working alongside sociopaths as well as criminal prosecution, in his new profession he cultivates a mystique regarding himself that conflates the identity of man with the role of provider. Because fulfilling this conflation is the source of his newfound bravado and the justification for his continued illicit affairs, it stands to reason that he would attempt to keep his wife out.

33 Like most male-centred protagonists, to maintain a viable equilibrium and avoid being pulled asunder, these men "must manage the time and space of both... crises [in the public sphere] and interpersonal domestic emergencies" (Shimpach 37). "Their narrative worlds," Shimpach explains, "are intertwined with complex domestic issues, blurring public and private, domestic and professional" (Shimpach 37). However, their work in the public sphere often bears upon their private lives, and can bring the threat of violence into the home, "the contradictions of masculinity and masculine responsibility are foregrounded with heroes constantly – if implicitly- oscillating between saviour and threat" (Shimpach 37).

more telling) their successes entreat us to ask questions regarding personal motives and societal aspirations. There is a belief that money, financial security, and affluence is a solution to all problems. Initial quandaries may be temporarily assuaged; contrarily, they can also be exacerbated and new, avoidable problems may arise in the pursuit of ill-gotten gains. Maintaining their respective lies serves to hamper their initial plans, test their consciences, and, counter-productively, act as the catalyst for the dissolution of the family unit. A cause of generational disjuncture and male malaise, there is a belief that absent fathers fated their sons "to an image-based, shallow, commercial world" (Howson 131). If not trinkets and materialism, masculinity has always been associated with ideological check-marks, a culture of belief that instills its own complexes and presents its own dead-ends.

"The American Dream - we're going to steal it!": Wayne Malloy and Masculine Acquisitiveness

FX's *The Riches* unearths the hypocrisy, drudgery, and general malaise within the gated community of Eden Falls, a wittily-named picturesque microcosm of suburban enclaves across America. It follows the lives of two married con artists ('travellers') who have usurped the identities and careers of a recently-deceased couple. Their children, also adept grifters, pose as the progeny of the Riches. Through its short-run, the series mounted an effective critique of American suburban lifestyle and the compromises individuals must make within a socioeconomic system in order to fit in, attain success, and acquire favour. Moreover, *The Riches* explores the conflation of monetary wealth and personal value, engrained paradigms of masculinity that ultimately portray the current schematic of masculine appraisal as contrary to American ideals. When his family is expelled from the traveller's camp, and his son asks what the family will do, a pensive Wayne responds, "Life's a river, kid. You gotta go where it takes you" (1.01). This is the kind of vague, pseudo-inspirational tripe that keeps the motivational poster industry afloat. There is a sense that Wayne is trying to convince both his son and himself that everything will be alright. This is a running occurrence throughout the series, as Wayne spends as much time convincing himself that he is capable of being Doug Rich than making others

believe that he is the deceased lawyer. There is a hope that, somewhere along the line, the marks will become mates, the cons will become careers, and the lies will become lives. When one of their myriad plans falls through and their exposure appears imminent, his wife, Dahlia, the drug-addled voice of reason, suggests that they abscond. Wayne, however, protests, “It is not over. You have got to think big here” (1.13). Thinking big *is* Wayne's problem. The rhetoric of equality in American representational democracy espouses the extension of national membership to all citizens and “suggests that all individuals, despite their particular circumstances and material situations, have equal access to political economic, and cultural representation” (Eng 23). Although a worldly and practical conman, Wayne is beguiled by the nation's most ubiquitous and enduring scam, the promise of the elusive and illusory American Dream. As I will discuss in the final chapter, navigating/cultivating a changing sociopolitical landscape necessitates re-telling and re-imaginings of redolent, mobilizing narratives. America (and all nations, arguably) is based on national myth and mediated narratives of progress. Americans understand themselves and their position in the world through a deluge of symbols, myth, and rhetoric. Myths are didactic, represented as providing guidance as well as insight into who Americans are as a people. Based on values and identity rather than historical fact, they work largely through metaphor and cater to popular sentiments by exploiting emotional appeal. On a national level, the main purpose of mythology is to reorient the populous around a shared identity – or, in this instance, shared opportunity. Wayne's belief that he can “steal” the American dream suggests its attainability. His naiveté is also expressed when he believes he can bribe Pete, an old friend of Doug Rich, into silence. “Like Sammy said,” Wayne states with determination, “Money makes the world go 'round” An incredulous Dahlia responds, “Wayne, he's a little boy. There are things you want and things that are. You got to know the difference.” (2.01). Wayne is so driven by his aspirations that he needs to disregard this difference.

Cal, his oldest son, has no child-like delusions and objects to his father's affected worldview. He

represents a failure of transmission, a rejection of the ideology of the old guard. He eventually leaves Eden Falls, but before he does, Wayne attempts to explain his rationale for their new lives, “I will do anything to give you the chance I didn't have... This world, it's about power and money, and that's freedom.” A disgusted Cal responds, “I don't even know who you are, what you're becoming, whatever it is, I don't want anything to do with it. I'd rather be piss-poor with my dad than... richer with whoever it is you are” (2.03). Ultimately, Cal ends son ends up in the company of a mysterious traveller who has recently been released from prison. He serves as an implicit father figure for Wayne's wayward son. Believing his father a dupe, Cal confides in Quinn, “My dad's become a buffer; there's nothing worse,” Quinn, however, disagrees with this assertion. “Don't be fooled. Your dad is a pioneer... Wayne Malloy, like every other good man before him, is fighting to do right by his family... He's following his destiny, branching out, an example to our people, a king amongst travellers” (2.07).[34] When Cal falls asleep, the menacing Quinn calls Wayne. He attempts to broker a deal, using his missing son for leverage. “Before you go making any more rash business decisions, know one thing: I have your son.” Cancelled, the series ends on this cliff-hanger. The family unit has been compromised and the wayward son is now under the guidance of a malefic surrogate father.

To deal with the moral implications of his existence, Wayne develops a consequentialist approach to the truth. Wayne sums up the subterfuge his family must exercise in their new lives, “This is not lying. This is creative reasoning... It's all we did as travellers.” When Dahlia protests, “We never lied to friends,” Wayne explains, “Things are different here. If a lie can produce a better result, then we'll lie. If we want to stay here, if we want our kids to have this kind of life, go to school, learn to become somebody, then we got to maintain the lie” (1.12). Discussing the absence of the *real* Riches with Pete, *real* Doug's best friend, Dahlia comments on their disappearance, “No one knows about them, They are without a soul, without a name, without an identity,” a veiled intimation of her own

34 Despite being an adversary of Wayne, Quinn has a similar understanding of father-as-provider.

feelings regarding the loss of their own identities (1.13). Attempting to attenuate the tension, but also revealing his own motives, Wayne responds, “Look, wherever they are, you gotta believe they're happy there...I think for *Doug*, the difference between who he was and who he wanted to be was maybe more than he could bear” (1.13). Although existing in extraordinary circumstance, Wayne's desires are comparable to a generation of men who worked hard, made all the right moves, and incorporated a desire for “a house, a wife, a union job, a safe community, and public schools” into their lives (Fine 67). His desires transcend economic security and social standing, however. Wayne reifies acquisitiveness towards the current mercenary understanding and evaluation of masculinity. He wants to be a man. His internal dissonance and the loss of his identity underscore the sacrifices one has to make to reach the standards of orthodox masculinity. Moreover, his failure as a father, which leads his son to the counsel of another man, underscores the failure to inculcate this understanding of masculinity into his son, proving a denial of the transmission of lineal masculinity. Despite the reservations of his wife and children, Wayne's endgame, it appears, is a complete metamorphosis, a personal and generational gentrification, embedding his once off-the-grid family into the privileged social order. He wants a better life.[35] Some people are comfortable living under the stipulations of the social contract. However, the next generation may regret such blind devotions. His obsession reveals a critical engagement with longstanding traditions, ontological frameworks, as well as symbology and suggests a need to break from unattainable illusions, if not for ones own sake, then for the sake of the child.

“A man provides... because he's a man”: Walter White and the Limited Definition of the Male Provider

Contemporary men are frequently portrayed as physically and mentally 'soft', rendered

35 Dahlia recognizes this when she chastises her wayward son, Cal, claiming, “He’s just trying to give you a decent life” (1.04). A drunken Wayne speaks to his daughter who is incarcerated for possession of marijuana. “I never wanted any of this to happen. I love you so much. I love you more than all the world. All I want is for you to be able to do anything you want to do” (1.06). He also reveals his intentions to his wife, stating, “I wanted to make you this beautiful life. But it's not real” (1.10).

effete, seduced into abandoning traditional masculinity.[36] While the 1950s father was as an almost-omniscient being who possessed a firm grasp on the stewardship of his home-life, wife, and 2.5 children, there has been a marked shift in the representation of fatherhood on the small screen, a transmutation of popular paternal simulacra that accelerated in the 1980s and continues to this day. Of course, I refer to the figure of the feckless father, a perennial staple of comedies and any commercial involving home cookery. His employment has been particularly palpable in the sitcom genre, routinely characterizing the male head of household as a gormless oaf who has somehow duped a seemingly competent, beautiful woman into matrimony. While he ambles aimlessly through what we might generously call a life, she not only suffers her husband's piggishness and general incompetence, but loves him because of idiosyncrasies that most well-adjusted people wouldn't wish on their worst enemy. In the sitcom genre, this is played for laughs. Indulgence in traditional masculinity, in such scenarios, has been rendered "at best absurd and at worst something menacing" (Coward 91). The object of ridicule, such men are emotionally lacking as well as intellectually inferior. Because their actions are comical, however, these lummoxes are likeable and their foibles/crippling social malfeasance can be endearing. Ultimately, however, such men are portrayed as "pathetic, ridiculous, and inadequate" (Howson 135). In the sitcom, the male's intentions are pure, the affection he shows towards his wife and kids are genuine, and despite his shortcomings, love is often enough to hold the family together. They have also served to naturalize myths associated with white, working class family values" (Purvis 50). I argue that the male-centred drama works to undermine these same values and myths. In the male-centred drama, the feckless father skews more towards tragedy than comedy. His faults as a provider are a source of tension and, in many instances, the catalyst for

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36 Faludi explains that the ornamental culture of global consumerism, and "Winning had been elevated to the very apex of manhood while at the same time it was disconnected from meaningful social purpose" (186). This consumerist masculinity encouraged "a competitive individualism that has been robbed of craft or utility" (187).

misfortune, emotional trauma, and the dissolution of the family unit.

When *Breaking Bad's* Walter White discovers he has cancer, he snaps out of suburban drudgery and, in an attempt to provide for his family when he's dies, decides to produce and sell methamphetamine. Adopting the pseudonym of "Heisenberg," White rises from a hapless low-time drug-pusher, develops a reputation for his abilities as a "cook," and becomes a key player in a lucrative manufacturing ring. Originally emasculated and unable to secure his family's financial security, Walter becomes a powerful underground figure and, more importantly, an adequate provider for his family. To establish and/or adequately care for his family, Walt, like Wayne, has to disavow and/or compartmentalize his identity to attain/maintain a family and fulfil notions of masculinity. While Wayne follows the elusive American Dream within the confines of corporate America, White, unable to find success through respectable channels, harnesses his skills in a criminal capacity. The show mounts an implicit critique against America's shredded social net. If Walt could afford assurance and the proper treatment, he would probably not break the law.[37] His turn to crime is could very well be an allegorical exploration of the negative social consequences associated with a lack of opportunity in the workforce, as well. Unemployment contributes to hypermasculine behaviour, including the rise of criminal activity among disenfranchised men. Youth crime has been seen as a way to achieve manhood, a short-cut to masculinity. Countless men have "watched the edifice of everyday life, built on steady work and a regular wage crumble... such helplessness breeds rage and aggression and the boy's rage erupts on the streets" (Coward 145). Walt is an adult, which makes his decisions and his willingness to rationalize his criminal behaviour that much more reprehensible. As Tommy appears to use 9/11 to excuse his selfish behaviour, Walt uses the "need" for his criminal lifestyle to live out masculine behaviour

37 Because of past relations and pride, however, he continues to cook rather than accept payment for his treatment from his more successful friend and former colleague (1.05).

denied in his day-to-day life. Even after he has enough money, he uses the excuse of being a "provider" (discussed further in this section) to continue his illicit deeds. The only visible difference between Walt White and the mysterious, infamous Heisenberg is the addition of a black pork pie hat. When he puts it on, he becomes more aggressive, confident, and assertive. At the drop of a hat, our protagonist is able to change from mild-mannered Walter White to aggressive, turf-defending Heisenberg, cleverly underscoring the performativity of hypermasculine behaviour. Seduced by his newfound power, Walt is able to function antithetically to his milquetoast demeanour, escape suburban drudgery, and attain the capital he needs to provide for his family and save his own life.

Eventually, Walt reveals his illness to his increasingly suspicious wife, Skylar, who pushes him to seek treatment. However, when he discovers that seeking treatment will cost over $90,000, he protests. With no guarantee of success, a defiant Walt asks his encouraging wife, "Am I supposed to leave you with all that debt?" (1.04). He initially decides to reject treatment for the purposes of keeping his family out of debt and spending his remaining days in relative operable physical capabilities and comfort. "My entire life, it just seems I've never had a real say about any of it.. All I have left is how I choose to approach this... I choose not to do it" (1.05). For some male providers, money serves as a substitute for direct expressions of love and affection. This is particularly evident in Walt's privileging of money over the emotional contributions and support he provides his family. While dying may be considered a noble gesture, the ultimate act of male suffering for the family, this initial decision intimates a limited understanding of himself as a man, provider, and father.

Although the relationship of Walt and his son, Walt Jr., is peripheral to the main plot lines, their interactions reveal many of the tensions shared by modern fathers. In the beginning of

the series, Walt Jr. is at odds with his father.[38] His characterization develops around his apparent teenage angst and all that entails: the universally identifiable teenage posturing characterized by a desire for independence, a penchant for rebelliousness, and a large quantity of snark. To punctuate his desire to distance himself from his father, Walter Jr. adopts the pseudonym "Flynn," refusing to answer to his birth name, much to the chagrin of his father. This is a flagrant desire to break away from masculine transmission by literally denying the name of the father.[39] When Walt puts money above family, his son identities this supposedly selfless gesture as an affirmation of Walt's effeteness. An upset Walt Jr. tells his father to "Quit being such a pussy!" He makes an impassioned plea for his father to keep fighting. For a man with a family, there is no dignity in dying "like a man" and no glory to suffering in silence.[40] Rather than a noble act of martyrdom, his impending death is understood as emotional cowardice, underscoring the traditional division between father and his ability to see himself beyond a financial provider. He interprets money as more useful to his family than his presence in the household, suggesting a conflation of masculine domestic presence and economic viability. Such a negative presentation of manhood adumbrates that the model of mercenary masculinity is a detrimental, unreliable interpretation of masculinity. Despite their begrudging acceptance and his brother-in-law Hank's support of Walt's decision to "die like a man," Walt ultimately acquiesces and seeks treatment.

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38 Although never articulated verbally, by father or son, Walter Jr's resistance to his inherited namesake is apparent in the characterization of Walter Sr. At the beginning of the series, Walter is portrayed as milquetoast, feeble, and feckless, A brilliant man who once had immense potential, as a high school chemistry teacher, he is now stuck in a profession that fails to even remotely challenge his intellectual capacities. Additionally, he is forced to work in a car wash to make ends meet. Disrespected by his students, bullied by his boss, ridiculed by real men, he is a fifty-year-old, well-intentioned, but hapless man ambling through suburban drudgery.

39 Punctuating Walter's unsuitability as a father figure, Walter Jr. openly venerates his uncle, life-of-the-party, macho, DEA agent, Hank, who operates as a foil to the uptight, timid, emasculated Walter.

40 Silent suffering is still venerated as a form of manly virtue. Julie Birchill, describing her father's resoluteness during his slow death from asbestos poisoning, exclaims her father's virtues, but ends on a somewhat troubling note. "He left us no bad, or vaguely embarrassing memories. He left no sign that he was here at all. Nothing that is except a giant shadow that will fall forever across all the men I have ever and will ever know, making puking, mewling, moral pygmies of them all. That, then, was truly a man." He left no bad, but he left no good. The man's gift was a gap, an insurmountable void, a chasm no man can cross.

However, believing he is going to die, he still goes back to producing meth, spending what he believes to be the few remaining years of his life attempting to reach his financial aspirations at the expense of an increasingly suspicious and distant family.[41] In his new profession, cancer may not be the catalyst of a broken home.

Walt adheres to traditional codes of masculine behaviour that have been interpreted as both positive and necessary in the success and maintenance of the American social order. So long as the male head of household could provide for his family, he could proclaim himself a 'good father' and, thus, could justify his emotional absence (Howson 129). In some working class-cultures," Sediler explains, "men grow up to assume that being a 'good' husband involves being a good provider for your wife and children" (Seidler 96). Through work, these men affirm their male identities. The interlink between the role of provider is masterfully expressed by Gus. The financier of the operation, Gustavo "Gus" Fring, attempting to coax Walt back into cooking for his illicit enterprise, explains the function of a family man, providing insight into the tenacious grip the mercenary interpretation maintains on contemporary conceptions of masculinity. "When you have children," Gus begins, "you will always have family. They will always be your priority, your responsibility. And a man, a man provides. And he does it even when he is not appreciated, or respected, or even loved. He simply bears up and he does it, because he's a man" (3.05). Men provide, and this serves as a justification for his initial foray and continued tenure in the organization. A central myth of masculinity men inherit is the idea that they do not have needs of their own, "because if they are 'strong' they can get on by themselves" (Seidler 49). Reciprocity, what can be extracted from ones role as a father, is downplayed in this interpretation. Ones kin are configured as liabilities that must be managed in economic terms, rendering familial relationships as one-way mercenary transactions, obligations to be suffered and fulfilled.

41 The sum he decides he needs is $757,000 (2.01)

Conclusion: Paternal Revaluation

The Riches and *Breaking Bad* underscore contemporaneous male anxieties through parallel paths to riches. Both programmes, I argue, exhibit distrust towards the current socioeconomic structures that continue to regulate and define the success of man and his claims to masculinity. *The Riches* offers an implicit condemnation of contemporary valuation by depicting the bestowal of wealth and deference on a conman (a well-intentioned conman, but a conman nonetheless) who possesses an undying adherence to the American Dream. In regards to masculinity, both programmes entreat us to debate the male provider. Traditional masculine virtues such as chivalry, and nobility, provide nominal utility. Chicanery, subterfuge, sabotage, and cruelty are the keys to success (and the company Porsche). In both programmes, an obsession with what may be gained overshadows what is certainly lost. I do not suggest that the programmes endeavour to restore traditional masculinity to its imagined former glory. In fact, I argue that these programmes highlight the potentially malignant mercenary motives that have infiltrated American masculinity, arguably, since the separation of spheres in Europe and exacerbated by industrialization that further demarcated gender norms and responsibilities. Within both programmes, there is a shared recognition of the infeasibility of adhering to such mercenary understandings of fatherhood. Michael Kimmel articulates the benefits of disavowing this diminutive definition. When fatherhood transforms “from a political cause to a personal experience,” from an ideology “to a set of concrete practices,” the lives of men are dramatically improved (28). While it is important for men to be financial providers, there is also the need to balance ones masculine identity as father and husband and aspire to the actualization of an 'emotionally literate' and sensitive self (Howson 136).

The duplicitous provider forces us to reconsider what values we, as a society, (perhaps disproportionately) value in men. Moreover, it undermines the purported accessibility of the illusory American dream, affirms the effectiveness of a bastardized version of the self-made man mythos,

contributes to the discourse of the disfranchised white male, and challenges viewers to engender new paragons of masculine identity through the rather unsavoury depiction of the male provider. We see them as compromised heads of households, men who, through unfortunate circumstance or unchecked ambition, attempt to circumvent the traditional channels that are no longer accessible (or were illusory to begin with) to attain financial security and fulfil their interpretation of masculinity. Of course, these programmes cannot undo a national mythology based largely on capitalism, rugged individualism, and the mythic figure of the self-made man. However, this fiscal obsession is portrayed as detrimental to modern men, particularly in times of economic austerity. As discussed, modern socioeconomic conditions have contributed to a malaise amongst many men regarding their slackening station in American society, both on a public and private level. It is very difficult for many men to acquire a sense of adequacy, let alone any sense of excellence. Thus, this could be an opportune moment to reflect on and reevaluate notions of masculinity, shifting away from an emphasis on monetary prowess while stressing less tangible, and traditionally less celebrated, offerings. Conversely, for those men who need to work even harder to make ends meet, now is a crucial time to emphasize the significance of cultivating emotional bonds between themselves and their families. Thus, it is important for men to overcome emotional impediments, realizing that the position of provider actually entails a multifaceted level of support. As faith in the public sphere dwindles, this renewed focus could contribute to the adoption of both a more viable and reliable definition of masculinity and constitute a boon for men enduring the psychic trauma fostered by an inability to adhere to increasingly unfeasible interpretations of manhood.

Chapter 2 - Strangers in the House: The Angry White Male and "Others" in the Male Clubhouse

One of the easiest ways to glean patriarchy's tenacious grip on the social order is by examining male behaviour amongst other men. To a large extent, male interaction is predicated on a desire to gratify the expectations of other men. Office break rooms, factory floors, bars, and locker rooms continue to be stereotypical refuges of both homosocial bonhomie and unbridled misogyny.[42] The male clubhouse refers to semi-private space within the public sphere that affords a level of intimacy under the pretence of professional functionality. In some instances, these various male domains (the office, the firehouse, the police station, etc.) function as veritable museums of misogyny in which the casual sexism and homophobia displayed by its inhabitants would make Archie Bunker look like the joint president of NOW, GLAAD and the NAACP. Vehemently cherished and defended, the function of these spaces are rarely discussed in direct terms by those who exploit them. They act as implicit sanctuaries for the down-on-his-luck, recently "victimized" white male as well men who strive for a "nostalgic notion of masculinity" (Kimmel 21). Liberated from the constant policing that accompanies political correctness, the masculine "room of ones own" is "an all-male space where men can relax with other men," "small pockets of all-male purity in which they can, again, be men among men" (Kimmel 21, 24). Retreating to these spaces constitute "a project of reclamation, restoration, and retrieval" based on a loss of personal efficacy and collective power (Kimmel 21).[43] Admiration of the

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42 It is important to note, though, for every grunting, emotionally-stunted, high-fiving troglodyte sexually harassing his waitress at the aforementioned bar, there is a civilized group of men in the corner rationally discussing their feelings, providing thoughtful ruminations on personal issues, and strengthening fraternal bonds.

43 As Jason Seidler reminds us, "Within the West the way we perceive patriarchal power grows out of particular cultural histories and settlements through which an Enlightenment vision of reality has been shaped by a distinction between public and private spheres" (Seidler 93). To put it briefly, women have been relegated within the private sphere and our understanding of the female subject (and, traditionally, the TV viewer) has been predicated to a large extent on her abilities (and willingness) to operate within the home as caregiver to both her progeny and her male counterpart. Contrarily, a man's success has been determined through his capabilities within public sphere. The former favours emotionality, which men are encouraged to neglect in favour of more practical concerns. Interactions within the public space instil rationality and logic, faculties denied to women in the popular imagination.

defeminized zone is regularly expressed at the expense of those who are denied access.[44] Despite social progression and an increased feminine presence in the public sphere, for the strict division of spheres maintains. Such ultraconservative understandings and anxieties suggest a recognition that the private and public spheres are not just gendered spaces, but *gendering* spaces. Rather than understanding the public and private sphere as "naturally" demarcated spaces for the allotment of individuals based on biological determinants and gendered determinism, these spaces are recognized as mediated realms in which gender-specific characteristics are sired and cultivated. This chapter examines the continuum of white working-class men who, until recently in US history, have been vested with unchallenged privilege in the public sphere. While I will briefly discuss racial integration in the clubhouse, the primary threat to homosocial harmony in the public sphere stems from a fear of feminization. Women and homosexuals are seen as toxic, 'feminine' influences that threaten to undermine the efficacy of the clubhouse. Framed as defending the functionality of the national public sphere, this struggle to maintain constancy reifies a struggle to defend the functionality and purposefulness of white heterosexual male authority in America.

The male clubhouse is a spacialization of anxieties within white working class male culture that reflects its member's desire to define their whiteness and maleness against racialized and gendered others. Many white working class men exhibit a "desperate desire to blame their woes on these "others" (Fine 66). Government-imposed mechanisms such as affirmative action have also contributed to the spurious and hyperbolic notion that the white male has become "the new minority." These critiques lack a cognisance of the historical privilege of the white male subject, removing white men

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44 The desire for space could be seen as a reactionary stance, asserts Nicola Rehling, a "specifically white male grievance... in a postfeminist, multicultural, postindustrial America" (Rehling 29). "angst-ridden men, who consider themselves to be victims of feminism, affirmative action, immigrants, absent fathers, and government and federal authorities" (Rehling 23). Many men were "unable to understand that their problems were rooted in a downsized economy and/or unrealizable ideologies of American manhood, leading them to believe that they had lost ground to women, people of colour, and immigrants" (Rehling 23).

from history, and providing a means of justifying the denigration of ethnic individuals (Fine 72). In the public imagination, the firehouse and the police station are "relatively protected spaces of whiteness" that represent "the civic goodness of [white] public institutions" (Fine 75). Whiteness, particularly when it is vested with state-recognized authority, preserves the collective good of society. As such, the preservation of the public space is an attempt to maintain white hegemonic control. This appreciation of the anachronistic indicates a desire for "an America where white middle-class men were guaranteed privileges" (Rehling 31). People of colour operating in the public sphere, however, have the capacity to undermine this collective good (Fine 75). The white male subject's position as an ideological construct is maintained by exaggerating the threat of the "other" (Ono 35). Within the clubhouse, most ethnic-based prejudices are portrayed as an almost-charming anachronistic quirk (a playful admonishment that, in some regards, the character is woefully behind the times) and/or downplayed as a minor character flaw (particularly when stacked against other personality traits). The lead male protagonist, however, proves himself to be accepting of racial difference in one way or another. He is capable of maintaining civil discourse, engages in mutually accordant sexual relations, and/or maintains intimate personal (and/or working) friendships with individuals who would be categorized as ethnic minorities. To say the race issue is a non-issue, however would be fallacious.[45] In regards to the male clubhouse,

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45 The programmes *The Shield* and *Rescue Me* explore the tensions of integration in the workplace with the arrival of African American man (a traditional "signifier of race and a repository for white paranoia in popular representations") in the white male clubhouse (Rehling 34). In *The Shield*, the forced inclusion of Tavon, an African American detective, into The Strike Team ruffles the feathers of the white male members. Initially, this is attributed to the insular nature of the team and the importance of shared trust/omerta within the group. However, it could be argued that destabilizes Eurocentric normality the group (Lemelle 46). Although divorced from any illegal indiscretions, Tavon proves positive to the group's dynamic, and gains the trust and respect of each member, except Shane, the unscrupulous lackey and self-perceived successor of team leader Vic. A combination of envy and racism on Shane's part precludes a viable working relationship. Shane conforms to the "Eurocentric narrative of black history" that sees Africans in America as a pathological group whose dominance will ensure the formation of a stable racial hierarchy (Lemelle 43-44). As a new member of the group, Tavon may challenge white masculine dominance. The hierarchy undefined, Tavon requires enhanced domination. Feeling threatened by Tavon's inclusion in the group and Vic's now-divided attention, Shane instigates a physical altercation by casting a racial slur on his colleague ("You really think [Vic's] gonna push me aside for some darkie?"). The bout leads to severe injuries that ends Tavon's tenure with the Strike Team (3.04).

Rescue Me dealt with the race issue overtly in "Sensitivity" (2.05). During sensitivity training, the crew, in comic fashion, unleash a cacophony of racial epithets, much to the dismay of the course leader. Words like "spick," "mick,"

the infiltration of women and gay men does generate more rancour as well as screen time.[46]

In the construction of white working class male subjectivities, the clubhouse can be sites that engender negative attitudes towards women and gay men. Such reactions could be considered a continued vocalization of 'angry white male' discourse, a growing tension shared amongst white men regarding increased post-industrialization and myriad sociopolitical developments that threaten white male dominance in American society. In the current climate, these men "perceive themselves not only as having no space to call their own, but also in the wake of identity politics... as having no place from which to speak (except that of the oppressor)" (Rehling 29).[47] To overcome this flagrant position of power, white men are forced to adopt the rhetoric of minority groups. The resonance of the figure and the appeal of angry white male discourse "points to the difficulty of white heterosexual masculinity functioning as an unmarked, neutral category in the wake of widespread social change manipulated by the right to produce a rhetoric of white male victimization (Rehling 25). Rather than recenter white

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"guinea," and "chink" are thrown out by members of the crew in an effort to show that they are too thick-skinned to be offended by words, while undermining the necessity of the course. Franco, the only visible minority in the crew, even laments the fact that "spick" is the only epithet for Puerto Ricans, who "get shafted even when it comes to racism." After watching a low-budget video on workplace sensitivity, Tommy goes off the handle. Stuck in bureaucratic limbo, Tommy proclaims, "This is bullshit... This is just to cover the FDNY's ass...Next time I run into a burning building and refuse to bring out anybody who's not the same colour as me, that's when you can bring my angry, sober, pink Irish ass back up here." Like a racist uncle at a wedding reception who attempts to self-correct a bigoted barb that falls flat with "They have great food, though," or a slow-witted stand-up comic whose bungled interpretation of satire equates stereotyping with detached irony, Tommy's post-racial position fails to absolve him of misconduct. There is certainly an ethical quandary when a white man pokes fun at a group of individuals who, historically, have not been able to defend themselves.

The race-related hijinks continue on *Rescue Me*. The inclusion of Bartholomew "Black Shawn" Johnston, a recently arrived probation officer, disrupts the primarily-white dynamic of the firehouse. Courted and recruited by the firehouse solely for his basketball skills, Shawn's blackness is acknowledged primarily for comedic effect. This is most evident in his assumed name. One of the conditions of joining the crew is that his fellow firefighters would refer to him as Shawn. Despite there already being a Sean, both Lou and Franco, the men brokering the deal, immediately acquiesce. Within the firehouse, he is referred to as "Black Shawn," much to his chagrin. For the most part, the character is used to trigger race-related social gaffes among the white firefighters and produce/reveal an awkward tension when it comes to racial difference. This tongue-in-cheek ha-ha-race-difference-is-hilarious writing plateaus when Shawn begins dating Tommy's daughter, Colleen. Despite the initial poorly-hidden reservations of Tommy, Shawn proves himself to be a respectful and caring partner, while Colleen proves herself to be an abusive, reckless drunk. While the inclusion of Shawn in both the professional and private life of Tommy could prove problematic for someone as stodgy and resistant to change as Tommy has proven himself to be, for the most part, he moves beyond his initial discomfort. Shawn, proving himself to be a positive presence in Colleen's life, eventually ingratiates himself into the Gavin family.

46 An obvious and somewhat cynical reason for this may be because it is more acceptable (and, therefore, easier to watch and identify with) a casual misogynist than an overt racist.

47 White men "[i]n a remarkable reversal... transmuted into a self-proclaimed, marginalized, extra-ordinary group (Rehling 26).

masculinity's position at the top, expressing vulnerability would work to disprove the purported immutability of white male authority.[48]

One of the primary concerns associated with the male-centred drama is that the programmes merely display, rather than explore, modern macho behaviour. There is a fear that such programmes celebrate and sentimentalize hypermasculinity rather than critique the atavistic tendencies on display. In his analysis of masculine performance in the sitcom genre, "The Mock Macho," Robert Hanke discusses how sitcoms work to inscribe hegemonic masculinity. Hanke argues that pleasure is induced for the audience in the realization of masculinity as a gender performance. As viewers of the male-centred drama, we are privy to the pleasures of "acting" male, as well. We also regularly encounter the pitfalls and stupidity (particularly in the dramedy) of such an undertaking. While the line between parody and paradigm runs thin, the performance of masculinity usually involves boasting, posturing and braggadocios behaviour that can work to virilize the male subject, but ultimately serves to underscore both insecurity and artificiality. Such self-aggrandizement is also attributable to the self-proclaimed victims of progress who feel compelled to tout their irreplaceability in the public sphere despite mounting evidence to the contrary. Expressed desires (and subsequent actions undertaken) to "man up" reveals a need to recenter white masculinity, challenging its claims of unquestioned authority. Both the inscription of white male victimhood[49] and personal interactions within the male clubhouse intimate the perfomativity of white masculinity, rather than bolster its continued understanding as the invisible, veritable norm.

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48 The implications of this outing is examined in depth in the final chapter.

49 The victim rhetoric comes up repeatedly, particularly when examining the Men's Movement, as numerous white male groups have co-opted (and now understand themselves through) victim rhetoric. White men "are bereft of a discourse and place from which to speak" in a society that largely organizes itself through "the symbolic currency of identity politics" (Rehling 35). As such, white men who have been compromised by progress can only experience their loss as an unexplainable victimization (Rehling 35). In the postmodern world, David L. Altheide explains, "victim is a status and representation and not merely a person," as "moral entrepreneurs seek to promote new social definitions of right and wrong" (Altheide 67). White men are the only people with a vested interest in maintaining the current power structures (Fine 68). The programmes, through diverse conflicts and invading otherness within the workplace may reveal "a fear of engulfment by the feminine [that] intersects with fears of being overrun by otherness" (Rehling 33).

A show that vacillates between masculine celebration and condemnation is AMC's *Mad Men* (2007-). *Mad Men* explores the professional and private lives of employees of Sterling Cooper, an advertising firm on Madison Avenue in the 1960s. The personal lives of many of the characters mirrors the affectation of their profession, as the sheen of their respectable lifestyles often obscure buried pasts, morally questionable actions, and darker proclivities. *Mad Men* serves as an optimal entry point into an analysis of the male clubhouse, particularly in its portrayal of casual male chauvinism and the 1960s alpha male Don Draper. Draper "plays fast and loose with the truth in his professional life." Although he is the semblance of the ideal 1960s American male (a successful, hardworking, respected family man), he is also a rampant philanderer, borderline alcoholic who harbours emotional trauma beneath his reserved exterior. Despite this, "men want to be him and women ... well, they just want him" (Garret). It is uncertain whether Garret is referring to a desire amongst the characters, or if he is extending this assessment extra-textually to include *Mad Men*'s viewership. There is a willingness to present (and a desire to watch) what most would consider regressive behaviour, some of the enjoyment derived from the programme may stem from a vicarious glimpse into the lives of men who, on occasion, drink, carouse, and fight. Viewers are treated to a time before men "knew better," a state of chauvinist grace. Temporally out of line with the other programmes under analysis, the characters are not necessarily subject to the same amount of judgement extended to male protagonists in contemporary spaces. This temporal leap may be a pleasurable experience. The programme, through what appears an unflinching effort to resist sentimentalizing the past, wilfully avoids a nostalgic view of history. As John Slattery, the man who plays the amorous blowhard Roger Sterling, puts it, these characters are the people who watched the movies of the era, not the stars (Paley 2008). A laxity of political correctness, a three martini lunch, and the freedom to administer an occasional "innocent" ass-slap may be welcomed by many men. Segregation, the tyranny of the Feminine Mystique, and permissive sexism, however, would rankle most modern men. As Anthony J Lemelle articulates,

inequality invariably produces a master class, as well as institutions that not only maintain dominance, but facilitate the expansion of the dominant-group's power relations (Lemelle 41). If we are to perceive the offices of Sterling Cooper as a microcosm for the American nation in the 1960s (unchecked patriarchy, rampant misogyny, and segregation in a society that markets feelings and ideals manufactured by frauds and rich white men), the nostalgic tinge of the 'masculine' deeds and quaint fashions quickly fades in the cold, disruptive light of reality. I argue that we are supposed to view the male clubhouse in the context of the male-centred drama as the refuge of the dominant white masculine culture.[50]

In part, the reverence of the male clubhouse is based on the assumption that man's more atavistic, defining characteristics are being subdued, browbeaten out of men by mollycoddling mothers, stern wives, and persnickety bureaucrats who attempt to kibosh such behaviour. Thus, to circumvent further "pussification," it is imperative that men are granted the opportunity to indulge their "natural" male impulses, once again reconnecting ourselves with our colonial apotheosis.[51] As such, the debate regarding the demarcation of public and private space distinguished through gender reaches a new level of importance for those who subscribe to this notion of masculine decline. Of course, the emphasis on the importance of dividing public and private space is a longstanding enterprise, a reactionary appeal to traditionalists and a means of safeguarding America from further feminization. As a man (of sorts), I find the Robert Bly/Tim Allen "men be different from women" approach to sociology and gender theory to be a tad bit reductive and offensive. Moreover, such approximations of the male experience/condition can be counterproductive, as they are based on generalizations that do not necessarily reflect the realities of men or women they claim to represent. However, it is not difficult to

50 While the men may not reap the benefits of those in the dominant class, those who maintain the exclusivity of the clubhouse implicitly espouse the language of the dominant culture. Michael Kimmel explains the dissonance: Ones class position "may be the best predictor of both ideological orientations and actual behaviours, though the two may be contradictory or mutually reinforcing" (Kimmel 31).

51 This will be discussed in depth in the final chapter.

discern why some are willing to jump to such simplified conclusions. There are perceptible differences enmeshed in our social decorum, we are obsessed with the division of sexes – how we walk, talk, or throw a baseball can be scrutinized and relegated to a gendered category - and enduring notions of what constitute masculine and feminine behaviour in society continue to influence the construction of gendered simulacrum. Despite representing male benefits of the space, each programme shows an awareness of its malignant effects. These are made apparent through the representation of the excluded "other." To begin the analysis, I will focus on Laura Miles, the female recruit of *Rescue Me*'s Ladder 62. In the analysis, I will explore the ambivalent representation of her utility in the male-dominated firehouse. Moreover, I will examine how the female recruit elicits backlash rhetoric and how her presence disrupts an ability for her male colleagues' retreat into a highly mediated imagined past within the firehouse. Continuing the analysis of the excluded other, I launch an extended discussion of four gay, 'confused' and/or bisexual men in the male centred drama, *Mad Men*'s Salvatore Ramona, *Nip/Tuck*'s Dr. Christian Troy, *The Shield*'s Julien Lowe, and *Rescue Me*'s confused Mike Silletti.

Rescue Me's Laura Miles, Masculine Ontological Failure and the Push for Yesterday

As we will discuss deeper in the analysis, homosocial work environments and organizations can actually constitute a challenge to the configuration of conventional masculine personas and provide behavioural leeway, opportunities to redefine oneself with the changing times. Despite warmth within the community and the possibly of progression, the desire for the retrieval and resurrection of antiquated notions of masculinity within the male clubhouse suggests a palpable desirous/delirious lament for the days when men were men. The workplace, and the public sphere in general, is seen as a fraternal order. As is evident in this analysis, male-centred dramas that incorporate the public and private lives of men have a marked tendency to implicitly (if not explicitly) address a fear of feminine engulfment in the home and en even more acute anxiety pertaining to feminine encroachment in the public sphere. Practical mutually-beneficial reasons for equality are often overshadowed by enduring

anxieties. In all programmes, independent “ball-busting” wives, divorce, and relationship turmoil can deny access to domestic space (or worse, nag men into a more hands-on approach to domestic life). This sentiment was frequently echoed by male rights crusader and figurehead Robert Bly, who declared, “young men must liberate themselves from the sway of their emasculating mothers, use the wounds they have received, especially from their fathers, in order to access the wild man within and restore rule to male elders” (Bly in Rehling 24). Males perceive and position themselves as victims of encroaching bureaucracy and political correctness, revealing a sense of vexing entitlement.[52] The New York City firehouse serves as a counterpoint to the ethnic fragmentation of the urban New York, a multicultural Mecca, as well as female integration in the public sphere. White-centrality may be under threat in American society, but it appears secure in the firehouse.

Laura Miles, the new female firefighter recruit in the house, balks the standard. Brought on to replace their fallen comrade Billy, at first the new recruit is met with sophomoric silence, an attempt to “freeze her ass out” (1.08). However, because she is physically attractive, the plan falls through, as the men attempt to make amatory headway.[53] Eventually she proves her worth to the crew through more 'feminine' acts, including talking two gay men out of a tree[54] (1.09) and appealing to the sentiments of a large, angry black man who turns his ire towards the crew when he discovers his mother has died (1.11). However, on the job, she is mediocre at best. At worst, she is a hindrance to her coworkers and a threat to civilian safety. She routinely struggles at her job, fulfilling the lowered expectations of her comrades. Putting aside piddling botherations such as her lack of qualifications and the fact that she

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52 It is vexing in the sense that is a promise that cannot be fulfilled.

53 For the purposes of brevity, I cut a section regarding *Mad Men*'s Peggy Olson's excursion into the male-dominated world of advertising. However, one of the most interesting aspects of her initial foray is the positive relationship between her desexualization and her work performance. Unbeknownst to her, Peggy is pregnant throughout most of the first season. The more weight she puts on, the more desexualized she becomes, and the more effective she proves to be at her new profession. This is an interesting trajectory in regards to Laura, a woman who is never able to shake her attractiveness. In fact, as we will discuss, exercising her attractiveness becomes a political act. However, she continues to struggle with the ramifications of her own objectification.

54 That is not a typo.

may be a liability to herself, her coworkers, and the general public, Laura's greatest transgression proves to be that she is “sensitive.”

When she fails to cover her parameters in a fire, she is chastised by Lou, senior firefighter and full-fledged misogynist (2.04). In regards to a potential female presence, Lou has made his feelings known on a number of occasions, even before Laura's arrival. “Having a woman in the house – it's disruptive, it's destructive,” Lou claims. The vitriol flows as Lou continues, “These goddamn chicks – they can't even pass the physical. The bean counters downtown lower the standards so they can meet their bitch quota” (1.08).[55] During the remonstration, Lou calls Laura a “twat.” In her mind, Lou has crossed a line of propriety. Later, when she demands an apology, a dismissive Lou scoffs, refusing the request. In response, Laura files a formal complaint to HQ, to the indifference of Lou, and the nettled confusion of her comrades. The crew unequivocally sides with Lou. What's more, they chastise Laura for being so delicate. Sean informs Laura, “We call each other names all the time.” Franco adds, “It's part of being on the team.” Laura, unmoved by the purported sanctity and cohesive functions of a fraternal verbal drubbing, retorts, “Every woman I've ever met finds the word offensive.” “Now you work in a job with men,” Tommy responds, “a job highly populated by men that you chose to do, so you gotta cut the men you work with a little slack” (1.04). Tommy, the alcoholic, angst-ridden malcontent voice of male reason, attempts to elucidate his position. He explains, “You let Lou down. He called you a twat. Get over it. The real issue is – next time? In a fire? Will you be where you're supposed to be? Twat cwat, bitch, or twunt? The real issue? Do you job the right way and people call you names you like to be called” (2.05).

When it comes to the possibility of a capable female comrade in the firehouse, Tommy meets

55 The foreshadowing of a disruptive female presence in the house was quite heavy in the pilot episode. Lou, upon hearing the automated alarm system, says “Automated system. And they had to make it a woman's voice. Politically correct bullshit... That voice is the closest I'll ever get to working with a broad” (1.01). At that point, I turned to my housemate and said “I'll give it five episodes.” I was wrong. It took nine.

this challenge to dominant white masculinity with aplomb that eventually gives way to ambivalence. Tommy adopts a meritorious stance towards the profession. “This ain't about being a man or a woman,” he explains. “It's about doing the job... You got a woman better than the guys I got on my crew already? Bring her on. You got a martian or a cyborg or a Chinaman? Bring them on, too” (1.01). The suggestion of recruiting a martian and a cyborg may undermine his sincerity, but he uses hyperbole it to punctuate his acceptance of women, while placing skill over skin colour and sex.[56] However, his open mind constricts when he is actually confronted with a challenge to the all-male dynamic. To borrow the wording of Michael Kimmel, Tommy perceives the “entry” of women into the public sphere as an “invasion” (Kimmel 18). When his propensity for risk (and, by extension, his authority in the house and as a man) is challenged by Laura, Tommy flies into a rage and reveals previously subdued discomfort with women in the workplace. “Let me tell you something, sister,” he utters angrily. “You serve two purposes in this house, okay. You can give me a blowjob or you can make me a sandwich” (1.10). In his mind, the possibilities for Laura are limited to either a sexual conquest or a servile, domestic concubine. White identity and masculinity are configured through ownership of women (Eng 20). Granted rationality and saddled with the responsibility of protecting the feminine ilk, “men learnt to identify themselves as 'individual' or as 'persons' whose reason transcended gender and allowed them to speak within the universal voice of reason” (Seidler 94). Men were bestowed with reason, while women were deemed “'closer to nature' and so unable to reason dispassionately and objectively for themselves” (Seidler 100). Exclusion of women from public space has traditionally taken the form of chivalrous protectionism or, more likely today, defensive resistance (Kimmel 18). In order to maintain the racial and gendered hierarchy, it is integral that young white men are able to configure women as if they were in need of protection (Fine 66). Seduced by feminism, there is a belief that women have been

56 Contrarily, this rhetoric of meritocratic exclusivity can be inverted to maintain the oppression of disadvantaged groups and present a challenge to initiative such as affirmative actions programs.

coaxed from their families, homes, and, most importantly, their role as mothers (Aronson 45). Tommy, however, cannot configure Laura in such a manner. Closer to "one of the guys," she fails to fit his limited female paradigm. Riddled with internal dissonance and ego-bruised, Tommy's outburst puts Laura in her "rightful" place, outside of the firehouse, back into the private sphere, and back in time.

As Tommy's desire for dominance indicates, to be a man is to be "powerful in relation to women" and this power is manifested through sexual domination (Schmitt 50-51). Despite his reputation as a loathed Lothario, Tommy never gets that blow job (nor the sandwich) from Laura, making her one of the very few non-blood-related female characters in the series he does not conquer sexually. The representation of her sexuality provides a hint of progression. For Laura, I argue, her sexual expression is configured as a form of political defiance. After the crew checks her out while her back is turned, Laura offers the following unsolicited information: "Just in case you are wondering, I'm a 34C cup, my left tit is a little bigger than my right... my ass is as tight as a snare drum and still soft to the touch, and I don't believe in a full Brazilian bikini wax so my pussy is that of a normal, happy thirty-year-old" (1.09). Although sexually confident, power comes in resisting men. Laura, we are to believe, is "powerful enough to lure men, but at the same time, to resist them" (Coward 206). Deflecting the advances of fellow firefighter Sean, "I didn't bust my butt to get through probie school, then come here and eat shit on a daily basis so I could end up as your little girlfriend. That was never the goal, believe it or not. I want the guys here to see me as a firefighter, nothing more, nothing less" (1.11).[57] In the end, however, she begins seeing fellow firefighter Franco, perceiving the burgeoning relationship as an affirmation of feminine weakness, a standard that her partner does not have to endure. Because the expectations are that she will be seduced by a man, when she actually finds happiness in a mutually fulfilling relationship, it is understood as a fulfilment of her own inherent feminine failures. She explains her inner conflict,

57 Judging from Tommy's aforementioned outburst and the leering, it seems like an uphill battle.

> Every guy I met at the academy [said,] "You don't belong here, bitch. You're a girl." But I stuck with it and broke my back and toughened my hide and cried when nobody was looking. And I became a firefighter, goddamn it... I actually started doing the job, and what was my next course of action? Falling in love with a guy on my crew. Because he was hot and sweet I thought he needed me on some level, because I'm a girl. I came all this way and that's what I found out. My father was right – I'm just a girl, and I've got nobody to blame but myself (2.12).

Eventually, Laura transfers to another house, leaving behind Franco. For a show whose female characters usually runs a limited gamut from shrew to harpy, *Rescue Me* usually fails in its depiction of nuanced, complex women.[58] (Tommy's wife, Janet, and on-again-off-again mistress are particularly egregious examples of wasted potential). Laura, however, is one of the few nuanced and interesting female characters on the show. Her characterization, however, is difficult to discern. As discussed, she is a bit of a trailblazer, but she confirms the fears of the males in the household, failing to live up to the standards of a both a firefighter, ushered in through affirmative action, confirming the angry, disenfranchised white male's paranoiac fears. Her only redeemable quality is that she can communicate effectively with gay men in trees and incensed, obese, physically imposing malcontents. (You know, chick stuff.) Incapable of physical action, she is able to effectively communicate with people, a valued

58 A show like fellow FX drama *Damages*, for instance, challenges traditional gender-based generic consignment. The series' main protagonist, the dogged, adept, and icy attorney Patty Hewes (Glenn Close), may invert gendered expectations, as she operates within the masculine legal series drama and houses many of the 'masculine' characteristics that have been associated with popular male anti-heroes. According to Close, her character, "acting like men by grabbing power," makes her "wonderfully problematic" for audiences, many of whom still find the idea of taking orders from a woman to be "slightly abhorrent (Paley 2008). Additionally, a show with hypermasculine characters like *The Shield*, also had a number of strong, independent, competent women. Vic's primary adversary was Claudette Wymns, an African American female detective who would eventually become captain of the precinct. Considering the moral grey of Vic's character, Claudette's adeptness as a detective, and her commitment to curtailing corruption, it is more likely that viewers will view her as more than a foil to Vic. Additionally, unlike Laura, there appears no tokenism in the promotion. The programme also includes Officer Dani Soffer and Captain Monica Rawling (the latter also played by Close), two women who have solid ethics and contribute positively to the force.

'feminine' trait.[59] She is, however, *too* feminine for the all-male jocular bonhomie and their brotherly language of vicious character assaults.[60] Here presence, however, underscores much of the malignant tension associated with female entry in the public sphere.

After a botched sensitivity training seminar administered to remediate her formal complaint, Laura apologizes to Lou, who, in a moment of vulnerability, reveals a malaise that has infiltrated his work-life:

> It's like my life jumped the tracks, and I'm running on someone else's tracks. You're younger than me, Laura. You have options, possibilities. If this firefighting gig doesn't work out, you can get married, bake cakes, open a dress shop. I got no future. All I have is today, which right now feels like a yesterday in the making. My job's all I got. It's all I am. Don't make me change how I do it, Laura. One more change and I think I'm done (2.05).

Laura's presence in the household is a reminder of Lou's growing irrelevancy and mutability in the public sphere. Lou identifies himself through his profession ("It's all I am.") Lou, like other beleaguered males, searches for surety in an idealized simpler past, "a bygone era in which everyone knew their place" (Kimmel 16). Unlike most men, however, he has the opportunity to live out the fantasy every day. Given the disproportionate amount of white men, the profession continues to be viewed as a bastion for dominant white masculinity, a space that remains immune to the affectations and empty promises of weaker masculinities, as well as resistant to the feminizing effects of progress. When he denigrates Laura with the sexist slur, Lou adopts the "backlash" rhetoric and unleashes the full force of phallologocentrism in an attempt to assert both his dominance and her implicit subservience. He reveals

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59 While many have been reticent regarding the purported feminization of the public sphere and the softening of the American male, others have espoused the benefits of men confronting their emotions. While "feminism involved a challenge to male power, it also offered opportunities for men prepared to revision their masculinities" (Seidler 129).Intimacy can be threatening to male identities, partly because emotions have already been defined as 'feminine'. Since men grow up to experience their emotional needs as signs of weakness and thus a threat to their male identities, they can find it difficult to recognize their own needs and desires" (Seidler 96)

60 In this sense, she fails as both a firefighter and a *fireman*.

himself to be one of the many modern men who are “said to be angry, discontent, constantly disappointed and betrayed by the workings of society” (Feasey 41). While perturbed by Lou's actions, we can see that his constant woman-bashing and braggadocios behaviour is undercut by his growing fears of irrelevancy, a fact that changing social and political practices, as well as Laura's presence in the firehouse, conveys every day. Fearing “one more change” could kill him, he asks Laura to rein in her objections. Viewers, however, will probably glean that, rather than Laura accepting the old ways, he needs to adapt to a new understanding of himself within society. For self-preservation, Lou has to adapt, lest he be trampled under the weight of his own insecurity. White working-class masculinity, in this sense, is a white elephant. Its upkeep and constant defence engenders more emotional trauma than a willingness to reconsider its inherent constructedness and (on a more positive note) its flexibility.

Homosexuality in the Male-centred Drama: The Unrecognized Other's Challenge to Masculinity

Within the fraternal order of the workplace rests a desire to praise homosociality while vociferously shunning any hint of the homoerotic. Homosexuality has traditionally been associated with a loss of manhood. This notion of dominant masculinity maintains, particularly the assumption that “everyone who calls himself a man is by definition sexually attracted to women” (Carrillo 351). In addition, David Eng explains, the whiteness's invisibility and state of grace is achieved through its “complicit intersection with a system of compulsory heterosexuality” (Eng 32).These programmes, through their representations of gay, bi-sexual, or sexually confused/curious men, challenge such narrow conceptions of sexuality, masculinity, and possible male identities. There is a potential for men to pass between “an acceptable white male heterosexuality and an abjected white male homosexuality” (Eng 143). The practical social aspect is that you are offered entry into the inner sanctum. The ideological implications of this passing are significant, as well. The masculine gay man has the capacity to topple the symbolic order, as he “suggests a fluidity of sexual identification and desire,” while indicating an “unreliability of sex and sexual practice as indicators of a psychic truth or an

unwavering sexual disposition" (Eng 148). This understanding indicates "the inevitable failure of the symbolic norms and prohibitions to command faithful versions of heterosexuality and whiteness that they cannot ultimately produce, enforce, or guarantee" (Eng 148). Still perceived as an obstacle to public function and an affront to the ideological institution of masculinity, the male-centred drama affords thoughtful rumination on the figure and his ideological potential. Gay men, particularly masculine gay men, challenge the distinction between "homosocial" and "homosexual." The line that separates the two can be unnervingly thin for some men. *Mad Men* portrayed a typical era-appropriate (in the sense that it was an inappropriate reaction *of the times*) repression (and dismissal) of homosexuality. Nip Tuck's Dr. Christian Troy's exploration of his potential feelings for his partner and best friend reveals a spectrum of sexuality. Finally, *The Shield* and *Rescue Me*, with their representation of a closeted and 'confused' recruit, respectively, reveal ongoing tensions of homosexuality within male-dominated workplaces as well as provide representations of masculine gay men who balk the suggestion that homosexuality equates a disturbance of positive homosocial bonding within the male clubhouse.

Mad Men: Salvatore "Sal" Romano

Salvatore "Sal" Ramona, over the course of the character's tenure on the series, reveals the struggles and discrimination a gay man in 1960s could have endured if outed. His homosexuality is alluded to initially by his more ostensible 'feminine' body language. While the audience may be able to pick up on the various clues, his workmates do not suspect he may be hiding something (except Don when he sees Sal in a compromising position with a bellhop while on a business trip) (3.01). His ability to pass may be due to the fact that, given the relatively harsh climate of oppression and the lack of a strong gay culture, people are generally ignorant of how a gay person would act, informed by stereotypes of how a homosexual *should* act. Within the series, homosexuality is typically met with confusion, nervousness, and/or ridicule. Sal passes because he, well, looks the part of the 1960s male.

Not to harp one of the show's primary thematic elements, but Sal *sells* himself as a straight man. He is a burly man in a suit, he has a wife, and, at times, he can be a bit of a preening chauvinist. Ironically, as a gay man, he proves himself to be more faithful to his wife than most of the men on the show. His sexuality is explored during two eventful dinners. In coded terms, and much to Sal's discomfort, his potential homosexuality is addressed during a business outing with Elliot Lawrence, an employee of Sterling Cooper client Belle Jolie. The two men hit it off and converse over dinner. The mood turns, however, when Elliot proceeds to drink from Sal's glass, an overture that flabbergasts Sal. Showing discomfort and reticence at Elliot's suggestion to "Think about it," Sal responds firmly, "I have thought about it. I know what I want to do"(1.08). Upon further coaxing, Sal quickly exits the restaurant. Another revealing dinner occurs with Sal, Ken Cosgrove, and Sal's wife, Kittie (2.07). Increasingly enamoured by Ken, accountant and aspiring writer, Sal monopolizes the conversation, repeatedly shutting down his wife's interjections to hear more from Ken. The scene is configured as an awkward date in which Ken does not know he is being doted over by Sal. Kittie, however, is painfully aware that she is the third-wheel. We see the effect on Kittie, who is disquieted by her husband's neglectful and rude manner. "Do you even see me here?" she asks. "I'm sorry," an apologetic Sal replies, "We were just talking about work." Disquieted, she protests, "I was just trying to include myself. A lot of people find me very interesting, you know." Sal, however, does not, at least not in *that* way. This, obviously, is a cause of consternation for both husband and wife.

Ultimately, Sal is dismissed for not reciprocating the advances of a drunk, sexually forward client of Sterling Cooper (3.09). When he gives Don the details, the suspicious ad man sardonically responds, "You must have been really shocked... But nothing happened, because nothing *could* have happened, because you're *married*... Who do you think you're talking to?" Incredulous, Sal asks if he should have just willingly acquiesced to the lecherous client, and would it have made a difference if the client was a woman. An acerbic Don responds, "That would depend on what kind of girl it was and

what I knew about her. You people." Sal, crestfallen, responds, "I didn't do anything but turn him down. He's a bully." Don, however, dismisses Sal with a handshake."I think you know that this is the way it has to be," he says. Commenting on Sal's dismissal, *Mad Men* creator Matthew Wiener said, "[Sal] has been an indelible character since the pilot. But I felt it was an expression of the times that he couldn't work there anymore" ("Sal Leaving"). Revealing the cruelty extended to outed gay men of the era, Don's dismissal is "the ultimate case of sexual harassment."

Nip/Tuck: Christian Troy

Nip/Tuck follows the personal and professional lives of Dr. Christian Troy and Dr. Sean McNamara, two plastic surgeons operating out of Miami, Florida (later Los Angeles). Described as a "heterosexual love story" by its creator Ryan Murphy, the programme explores the fraternal relationship between the two doctors, men who share seemingly everything – a business, an operating room, a son (it is revealed that Christian sired Matt McNamara, the son that an oblivious Sean raised as his own),[61] former lovers, even a prostitute during a three-way in which the two doctors attempt to display their sexual prowess.[62] At times, they also live together, sharing the same condo. They are best friends. There is a sense that, no matter how screwed up their lives become (and *Nip/Tuck* pushes this to the nth degree), they will stay together, even if everything else in their lives fall apart.[63] There are times when their homosocial behaviour borders on the homoerotic, but there is usually a clear distinction between homosocial and homosexual behaviour. There was, however, grey area,[64] and that was explored later in the series. *Nip/Tuck* actually dedicated a large story arc to Christian Troy, the womanizing, playboy surgeon, and his wavering sexuality. In a therapy session in which he discusses

61 Sean's fraternal affection for Christian is made explicit when he finds out Christian had slept with his wife, Julia. After punching him in the face, Sean proclaims, "I loved you most of all," positioning him above his wife (and possibly son).

62 It should be noted that the two men don't have any sexual interaction during this encounter.

63 They do, however, go their separate ways at the end of the series. At that point, though, the writing was so ridiculously mind-mangling and out of step with the promising early days that they could have revealed Sean was a robot from another dimension and I would probably be just as satisfied with that series finale.

64 A noticeable misrecognition occurs when the doctors plan for Christian's wedding While testing cakes, the party planner falsely identifies the two for a couple, and the two men play it up for a rather amusing scene (3.10).

his deepening intimacy issues, the subject eventually gravitates towards Christian's partner, Sean. When the therapist refers to Sean as the man who has everything Christian desires, the agitated doctor responds, “He's my best friend, he doesn't demand anything in return, like every other goddamn woman I've ever been with. I don't have to take care of him, I don't have to take care of his fragile little ego.” His therapist responds calmly to this outburst, “So you do have intimacy in your life, after all... Every consider the possibility that you're in love with your partner?” (4.01). The tension elicited from this query, which goes through the bulk of the fourth season, reveals itself quite profoundly in “Blu Mondae” (4.02).[65] Although the saga of sexual confusion is fodder for lighthearted fare (discomforting testicle innuendo, homoerotic dreams of a getaway at a gay spa, Christian's purchase of a phallic statue that everyone else sees as a giant dong, etc.), Christian's anxiety is the catalyst for some rather unsavoury behaviour in this particular episode.

Fearing his own latent homosexual tendencies after his therapist strongly suggests that he is in love with Sean, Christian attempts to rescue Mitchell, a gay-for-pay patient, from the clutches of Arthur, an overbearing, predatory homosexual. The foppish sugar daddy is portrayed as materialistic, ostentatious and vain. He is, after all, attempting to literally mould the younger man in his image through reconstructive surgery.[66] When complimented by Arthur, an uncomfortable Christian responds, “I don't play for your team.” “People can change,” Arthur responds, using Mitchell as an example. Positioned as an inherently malefic figure, Arthur, caring not for Mitchell's true desires, has flitted into the man's life and whisked him away from a life of heteronormativity; his actions have dissolved the marriage between Mitchell and his high school sweetheart (a “backwards, backwoods marriage,” according to Arthur), imprisoning the young man in a life of leisure, unwanted medical surgery, and

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65 The show has taken flak for its representation of gay characters. The three primary antagonists of season two, three and four were either transgendered or bisexual. However, one of the few, if not only, noble individuals in the show is the doctors' anaesthesiologist, Liz, a lesbian.

66 This would appear to be an homage to (or rip-off of) Liberace's rumoured private life.

sexual favours dispensed under duress. The Ghost of Gay Panic Present and Future before him, Christian concludes the joint interview with a statement fraught with duality, stating that he and the male concubine should discuss “options”.

At a private consultation, Christian touts heterosexuality, telling Mitchell that “Straight's a hell of a lot easier, if you have a choice... You don't need to do this shit to satisfy some rich old queen... You should hang with me sometime. Let me reintroduce you to the other side, who you really are.” Christian takes it upon himself to liberate the young man by attempting to “turn” him. He does so by reacquainting Mitchell with the downright awesomeness of life in the heterosexual lane - strip clubs, partying, prostitutes – all the things heterosexuals do on any given weeknight. At the strip club, Christian procures the services of an exotic dancer/prostitute. “I want you to remind him what he's been missing... This is going to take a little more than a lap dance,” he informs the talent. Accepting the challenge, she responds, “You must really want this guy to be straight,” to which Christian replies, “He is straight. He just doesn't know it yet.” Christian and Mitchell then partake in simultaneous lap dances and treat viewers to some of the most awkward eye-contact ever committed to film. Ignoring the woman tripping the light fantastic on his crotch, Christian is more interested in what's going on in Mitchell's head, pants.

All of the gyrating pays off. Mitchell proclaims that he is getting a “woody,” much to the delight of Christian. Believing himself to be more adept at conversions than the Jesuits and the 1994 Miami Dolphins combined, the doctor elicits a look of smug self-satisfaction previously reserved only for Mentos commercials. The look says, “Heterosexuality: 1 Homosexuality: 0.” Unfortunately for Christian, there isn't enough high-fiving, neat vodkas, or strippers to un-gay his patient. Operating under the misapprehension that he has somehow cured the man, and, by extension, alleviating fears of his own potential gayness, everything – in typical *Nip/Tuck* fashion - falls apart in Act III. Upon discovering Mitchell's dalliances, Arthur kicks him out and cuts him off. The gravy train derailed,

Christian extends an offer to pay for Mitchell's accommodations at a hotel and gives him $500 of walking-around money. Grateful, Mitchell enquires if he may use Christian's washroom before he leaves. Mistaking pity for attraction and aligning Christian with his former keeper, Mitchell remerges shortly from the bathroom, completely nude, and proclaims, “I like to work for my money.” His hard work undone, a belligerent Christian responds, “I told you, asshole, I'm not gay. Get your clothes and get the hell out of here.” “Gay, straight, bi-,” Mitchell begins, “Who gives a shit about labels?” Christian, as we have seen throughout the episode, cares very much about labels. Taking umbrage with his overtures, the doctor clocks Mitchell, sending him to the floor, and proceeds to throw him out, threatening to “break his skull.” At the end of the episode, Christian, back at the strip club, tarries in uncertainty while receiving an unsatisfying private dance from a talkative stripper.

Subtlety, arguably, has never been in *Nip/Tuck*'s wheelhouse. Despite the sometimes clunky use of allegorical patients to thrust plot points, this episode's auxiliary characters underscore Christian's own inner turmoil quite well. The exploration of Christian's possible homosexuality was kind of remarkable, as audiences were left to wonder whether the protagonist of one of the most popular television programmes on cable could actually be a homosexual. Although he ultimately snaps out of his homoerotic haze, concluding that his feelings for Sean are based on true platonic love that has been muddled by his own intimacy issues (4.12). He doesn't have “*those* kinds of feelings” for Sean, he explains. “I never really thought I was gay... I have intimacy issues, you know, with anybody in my life that I love. I get confused, and I find it really hard to express myself. That sounded really gay, didn't it? “Seriously,” Christian continues, “I love you.” As with the bulk of characters in the shows under analysis, the characters of *Nip/Tuck* seem to affirm a biological understanding of sexual orientation. If you are gay, you are gay. Similarly, if you are straight, it is believed that you cannot change, either. Christian never really becomes “gay,” but he does meander a bit before returning to his previous orientation having learned a little more about himself. Not only does it show the hollowness of

Christian's hypermasculine lifestyle, it undermines the notion that hyper-masculine acts can reset someone to their "natural" state, and even challenges the possibility of a natural state.

The Shield: Julien Lowe

Julian Lowe is a probationary officer introduced at the advent of FX's *The Shield*. Early in the show, it is revealed that he is a closeted homosexual.[67] He is also a devout Christian. As such, his inclinations are met with a great deal of shame and self-loathing. Acting as an almost counterpoint to Vic – a man too corrupt for the job – Julien, at times, proves himself to be too moral. Entering into the primarily male environment, his training officer is Dani Sofer, an experienced female officer and competent instructor. He is, however, unofficially initiated by fellow male officers. Despite moral and sexual-based reservations, comradery is extended by his fellow officers through a "B and B" (beer and oral sex from a woman named Betty). After assisting an innocent (of that crime, anyway) man, Tomas, and clearing his name, the officer and the former suspect begin an extended affair. Tomas becomes obsessive, attempting to communicate with Julien at work, much to the officer's chagrin (1.05). Upon a meeting later in private, Julien reveals his reservations, claiming that he is doing a bad thing. To punctuate his commitment to the scripture and the immorality of his actions, he asks Tomas if he has ever read The Bible. His protestations, however, prove feckless, and the men ultimately embrace. Their relationship ultimately dissolves when Vic catches the two in a compromising position. In exchange for not testifying against the Vic-led Strike Team regarding the theft of a large sum of cocaine, the senior officer will keep Julien's secret (1.08). Struggling to maintain his composure, Julien characterizes his homosexuality as a separate malignant entity, "It's this thing inside me. I push it down; it goes away, and then comes back stronger. I shove it back down until I don't have the strength to push anymore. I

67 Although he is a black man, the inclusion of Julian explores the. Moreover, he is a positive representation of both an ethnic minority and a gay man in the male-centred drama. Heterosexuality is linked with national health and security. Homosexuality, on the other hand, is linked to the threat of communism and racialized other (Eng 148). As both an effective public servant and a gay, black man, Julien denies such conclusions.

am so weak. I hate this thing inside me. I push away everyone. I am so alone." In the Freudian interpretation, “the turning back of homosexual desire as conscience and guilt” is necessary in the construction of and legitimization of heterosexual identity, which is contingent on this sublimation of homosexual desire (Eng 11).

Still very much vexed by his homosexual desires, Julien exhibits recurrent disturbing behaviour, visible in two specific scenes, one in which he attacks a transsexual, an act of aggression and projection, and another in which the guilt-ridden, suicidal officer wilfully endangers his own life. In “Dragonchasers” (1.10), Dani is attacked and bitten by HIV infected transsexual, Frank Gilmore. Infected while in prison, Gilmore is hell-bent on spreading the virus purely out of spite. Although a victim, Gilmore proves himself to be unstable, vile, and malicious. Given the opportunity to beat Gilmore, under the pretences of avenging Dani (who has not contracted the virus), Julien takes the opportunity to administer a beat down. In a furor of projection and displacement, he pummels Gilmore mercilessly with his baton while two other officers pin Gilmore down with a blanket. In “Carnivores” (1.11), Julien, still in denial and reeling from internal dissonance, continues his training with Dani. After cornering an armed suspect, Julien, surreptitiously without his vest and without backup, inches slowly towards an agitated, armed suspect. Claiming that he will shoot, Julien coaxes the young man to pull the trigger. Increasingly nervous, the young man shouts, “Do you want to die?” Trembling, Julien commands the young man to shoot, but the suspect doesn't budge. Julien retrieves the weapon and diffuses the situation. While other officer's commend Julien's work, Dani takes umbrage with her protégé’s reckless behaviour. When Dani advises him to accept his homosexuality and who he is, a distraught Julien intimates, “I would rather die than be gay. This is killing me.”

Julien ultimately undergoes sexual reorientation therapy at the behest of his pastor. Despite the reservations of Dani, he marries Vanessa, a single mom and fellow church-goer who believes that Julien, through the Lord's guidance, has been cured (2.07). Despite his belaboured return to 'normality,'

Julien is ultimately outed in front of his co-workers when Tomas is once again arrested (2.12). Feeling jilted when Julien turns down his pleas for assistance, Tomas, upon being transferred, to a holding cell in the Barn, takes the opportunity to expose Julien. “That's right, I was his lover,” he yells. “We did everything! Everything!... You can't even admit who you are!” Then, taking advantage of FX's permissive Standards Department, Tomas shouts, “Your dick in my ass means your gay! My dick in your mouth means you're really gay!” Outed in front of the entire precinct, Julien is shattered. It gets worse, however, as the news riles some of his fellow officers who now feel betrayed. The victim of gay bashing, Julien is subjected of his own “blanket party” administered by the same homophobic officers who aided in the assault of Frank Gilmore. Julian's outing is perceived as a particularly egregious betrayal by his unsuspecting coworkers, I suggest, because of the denial of their formulaic conceptions of gay men. Gay men became the “other” upon which heterosexual men are structured and valued” (Anderson 24). Julian proves too similar to differentiate from the rest, which raises the ire of his colleagues. Those targeted by stereotypes are often punished when they do not conform to their subscribed roles (Lemelle 54). Thus, a symbolic conflation of the masculine cop and his effeminate victim occurs when his colleagues administer the same punishment to Julian. His fears confirmed – aligned with Gilmore and detested by his officers – Julien is found badly beaten by his step-son.

After his sexual reorientation therapy, Julien never 'relapses' in the series' run.[68] Although, there are websites that miss the point and use this dramatization to espouse the success of religious-based sexual reorientation, most viewers would perceive this course of action to be troubling, even dishonest and potentially damaging. Julian is an effective officer and a principled, idealistic man; motivated by pure intentions, he resists corruption, and he has qualities that most of the public would appreciate in a law enforcement officer. Because of his own personal struggles and inner conflicts, he is also a figure

68 (However, a glance at two men holding hands in the finale, alludes to a future in which Julien may come to terms with his identity (7.13)

of repression, denial, and shame. To survive within the confines of his work environment (and to reconcile his deeply held religious beliefs), he attempts to find reprieve in the customs of heteronormativity, despite the incredulity of his former partner and future wife. His effectiveness is limited by this personal strife, as it leads him to make reckless career (beating a suspect) and life (not wearing a bulletproof vest) decisions. Moreover, although he is an effective apparatus off state authority, his willingness to imbricate his wife and step-son and his acquisitiveness of heteronormativity reveals the potential damage such repression breeds in the private sphere.

Rescue Me: Mike "The Probie" Silletti

It is revealed in the third season of *Rescue Me* that Mike, the gullible, intellectually-lagging probationary firefighter, has had several sexual encounters with his roommate, Chris. When Mike no longer wishes to continue their trysts, a scorned Chris tells Mike's dimwitted coworkers Sean that Mike "plays for the other team" Taking this literally as "Mike has transferred to an opposing house's softball team," Sean confronts Mike with the information he has received. Aloof with the specifics and mentioning Chris as the source, Mike, thinking the worst, panics and outs himself. Eventually, fellow crew members walk in and become privy to the conversation. When fellow firefighter Franco walks in and is told that Mike is gay, he flippantly responds, "Yeah, tell me something I don't know." This, of course, serves as a testament to their frequent usage of homophobic slurs. When this is met with silence, he asks, "Oh, you mean *gay* gay?"

At a house meeting/inquisition, Mike shares how he and Chris became more than roommates. Mike attempts to explain, "I don't know how to describe the way I was feeling. He was a nice guy, and we started talking, and I... was lonely, or something..and I moved into his place and then it got weird... He was into me in *that* way... It freaked me out at first, but I knew it wasn't right for me." Despite this revelation, Mike is staunch in his heterosexuality. He understands his same-sex encounters through the framework of heterosexual relations. Adamant that he only received oral sex and never gave it, Mike

clings to his heterosexuality through his ability to penetrate. Chris, because of his willingness to service Mike, is undoubtedly gay. Mike, because he is the dominant, assertive/insertive figure, and, therefore, more of a man, identifies as heterosexual, adopting the role of a man who is having sex with a homosexual. Exposed, the attempt to "straighten" his homosexual encounters is an attempt to wrest control of his identity and reinforce his masculinity by returning himself to a normative heterosexuality. In a sentence that could be described as Homophobia's Greatest Hits, Sean boorishly responds to Mike's disclosure, "I don't want to know about your new boyfriends, or your new clothes, or nights out at the disco, or Liza Minelli, or ass toys." When an exasperated Mike exclaims that he wants to transfer from the house, Tommy makes an impromptu speech. Once again, he takes a meritocratic stance towards the profession and inclusion within the household. "For better or worse," Tommy begins," I think we all consider ourselves kind of a family here. Whether Mike's a fag, sorry Mike... I think that, as a firefighter, Mike has been pulling his weight... I trust the kid...I feel like.. if I'm stuck somewhere, he's got me covered" (3.09).[69]

A more enlightened (or at least tolerant) understanding of exploring the sexuality spectrum reveals itself in comic scenarios. Later, Sean laments the disadvantageous position he is in being heterosexual in a crowded bar. "This is what I'm saying," he complains, "she's with a guy, but you can go over there and hit on both of them. This is why it's unfair." An enlightened and animated Mike

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69 Tommy also reveals his positive feelings towards homosexuality earlier in the series during a conversation with his dead cousin Jimmy. He claims, "Nothing wrong with being gay... I used to think gay guys had it made... First of all, you both like to have lots of sex. Second of all, if you're into sports, you can go to hockey games, football, baseball. It's all blowjobs and ballgames" (1.02). The speech reveals a level of tolerance and shows that Tommy understands that not all men are effeminate "faggy" waifs, but also 'manly' men, suggesting a broader spectrum of possible masculinities than traditionally recognized. In the same episode, however, the men of the firehouse reveal their discomfort when a gay fireman begins outing men who died on 9/11. Moreover, Chief Jerry's curiosity regarding the metrosexual, although leading to one of the best lines in the series ("What in the sweet chocolate Christ is a metrosexual?") also reveals his deep-seated homophobia. When the crew struggles to explain its nuances, he bans the word. His acute discomfort with homosexuality, we find out later, may stem from the fact that his son, Peter, a masculine fireman of the Boston Fire Department, is gay. Moving outside of the clubhouse, Jerry's relationship with his estranged gay son appears a realistic portrayal of dealing with homosexuality on the show. It is also the most positive. Their reconciliation eventually culminates with Jerry serving as best man at his son's wedding (4.03). Beyond all the "fags," "pussies," and "queers" bandied about by the characters, the show does provide a rather positive approach to and interpretations of male sexuality and identity .

moves towards the bar. Sean enquires, “Where you going?” “I'm going to swing both ways, bro!” Mike responds. When he returns, Mike reveals, “They're brother and sister. She's straight and he's gay. I got both their digits, bro. I hit the jackpot!” Despite the continued carping of his coworkers, Mike becomes more willing to explore his sexuality, and identifies as bisexual when he is propositioned for a threesome with the aforementioned siblings (3.13). Eventually, his sexuality is 'reset' during the three-way. In the middle of the act, Mike begins to have reservations. “I don't think I'm bi anymore,” he reveals. The next day, when news of his dalliance are relayed to the rest of the house by Sean, the jokes, expectantly, fly. Mike, frustrated, attempts to exit, but Lou, superior officer and resident quipster, steps in to defend Mike. Addressing a sceptical Mike, Lou claims, “I want to defend your right to bang Hansel and Gretel and not be judged too harshly by your peers.” He begins, “What's with the double-standard, gentlemen? A chick who bangs guys decides to have a lesbian experience, should she be pissed on for that?” Moving past the urophilia jokes, Tommy adds, “We don't judge women when they experiment sexually.” Franco adds, “We encourage it.” Pointing out the hypocrisy, Lou continues, “When a guy decides to change things up... he becomes an object of ridicule... And in conclusion, gentlemen, I say we should not bust Michael’s balls, we should applaud Michael’s balls for having the courage to lead the charge against this terrible injustice.” Despite the ending of the scene (a gay joke at Mike's expense), there is a sense that these men are more enlightened than they act, despite their willingness to engage in cruel, sophomoric hazing. Mike may not be as nuanced a character as Sal, Christian or Julien. However, as we will discuss further, Mike constitutes a major challenge to the purported belief that homosexual tendencies weaken the efficacy of homosocial institutions.

Conclusion

Acknowledging the good with the bad, the three FX shows all have a tendency to play up to stereotypes. The auxiliary gay men in question can be off-putting, manipulative, and deceitful, bordering on Gay Panic incarnate – the mincing aristocrat and the violent HIV-infected transsexual, in

particular. However, the major characters who encounter the “problem” of homosexuality deny pejorative labels. There is manoeuvrability within these characterizations; a gay man can be proficient at his profession, noble and caring. Additionally, and perhaps most challenging to traditional paragons, a gay man can be, well, manly. Christian's a womanizer, Julien is a cop, both Mike and Chris, who would sometimes partake in oral sex while watching televised sports, are the semblance of 'straight' macho men. Being masculine allows men to maintain the status of 'regular' men, prevents others from questioning their manhood and avoid being stigmatized for potential differences (Carrillo 354). The ways in which the characters initially deal with their sexuality is troubling. For Christian and Mike, the two attempt to reassert their manhood and straightness through hypermasculine activities. However, this proves problematic. Eventually, both men come to terms with their sexuality. Christian confronts his feelings, showing a level of emotional maturity previously lacking in the character. Mike, who slowly becomes willing to explore his bisexuality, is 'reset' after group sex with a brother sister combo. Attempting to pray the gay away (a counter-solution to Christian's attempt to straighten Mitchell through the hyper-masculine delights of the secular world), Julien turns to the structure and order of religion to alleviate his urges and bury an unwanted identity.

As mentioned, masculinity, in many ways, works as a safety net, and, in some instances, the men in question indulge in macho behaviour to compensate for (or outright mask) homosexual tendencies. However, their 'manly' acts are never seen as a front. In all instances, these men are not portrayed as 'typical' gay men; they are physically strong, masculine men who operate under the guise of straight males. They are all capable of performing 'male' professions, whether it be politicking in the office, chasing down a suspect, or pulling someone from a fire. Such competence and success within their respective domains challenges the spurious notion that homosexuality is toxic presence in the male clubhouse. Moreover, it challenges simplified depictions of homosexuals, reminding viewers that masculine men can be gay men. The audience is privy to the tribulations they endure because of

homophobia, a hostile discriminatory practice. Ultimately, they are portrayed as sympathetic (and in some cases, tragic) figures. Their need to closet themselves is revealed to be much more damaging to their private lives than the public realm. Excelling in their respective professions, they are card-carrying members of the clubhouse. The tragedy is not their sexual orientation or that they pose any real threat to the sanctity of the male clubhouse, but that, as gay men, they are either actively refused admittance into the male community (the locus of power and influence) or shamed into conforming to conventionality. Despite the personal toll, this acquiescence occurs, in part, to gain acceptance from their peers, the vanguards of the male clubhouse and the self-appointed arbiters of masculinity. This traditional, heterosexual masculinity, because of its inflexibility, is understood as the damaging presence. In this way, these programs are quite progressive, as they implicitly support the dismantling of reductive male paradigms that exclude men from contributing to the dynamic of the male clubhouse.

In regards to potentially progressive representation of the male clubhouse, there is a hint of increased inclusivity. In *Rescue Me* and *The Shield*, the men are initially accepted by the men we, as viewers, are expected to align ourselves with the most, the primary protagonists. Tommy's speech places an emphasis on Mike's position within the firehouse; his workplace capacities negate any reservations associated with “faggy” behaviour. Moreover, he positions Mike as a valuable member of the 'family' unit, suggesting a level of emotional attachment that transcends his functions as a public servant. After bending Julien's conscience, Vic attempts to comfort Julien following his breakdown. “You were there for me. I'll be there for you,” Vic states. His attempts to make nice with Julien, however, are rebuked by the officer who perceives Vic as a corrupting, iniquitous influence. To his credit, though, Vic never mentions Julien's homosexuality to anyone, nor does he lord the information over the new recruit. He may be a corrupt, lying, philandering, murder, but Vic Mackey is no homophobe. Like Tommy, Vic appears to judge a man solely on individual merit, determined primarily by his utility within the work environment. This meritocratic stance is a rather enlightened vantage for

seeming traditionalists, and their approaches prove contrary to the rather boorish, knee-jerk reactions of their co-workers, who articulate their discomfort with slurs and violence.

Although they may suggest a tendency to indulge in stereotypes (particularly in the characterization of foils), the programmes also mount a considerable challenge to both an essentialist notion of male homosexuality and masculinity. Signs of effeminacy were seen as a means of determining homosexuality, a method of evaluation associated with a longstanding tradition of measuring male homosexuality against an essentialist notion of manhood (Carillo 353). These men, however, do not function as points of reference to define heterosexuality against. They pass as 'regular' men. For each man, through their professions, physical prowess, and infiltration of the male clubhouse, they are able to prove their manliness; this manliness, which can border on macho, is implicitly divorced from sexual proclivities. These are 'regular' men who happen to be attracted to other men.[70] Moreover, being a man requires the vanquishing of trifling fears. The protagonists don't panic in the face of fire or flying bullets. They don't gay panic, either. It takes a real man to come out as a homosexual. Maintaining normality requires the maintenance of masculine expectations. However, remaining closeted is portrayed as emotional cowardice and detrimental to the private lives of the men and their loved ones, while expunging these men from the male club house is another form of cowardice portrayed as damaging to the dynamic of the male clubhouse and, by extension, the public sphere. Maintenance of the gender order relies not only on the subjugation of women, but the disavowal of male experience. In the representation of women and gay men, the programmes highlight the negative effects that attempted segregation has on the psyche of those outside the clubhouse (or those who are already in). The efforts of those attempting to diligently stand guard at the entrance of

70 This suggests that, so long as men adhere to gender norms and perform masculine acts, they will be met with less scrutiny. In this the “blowjobs” are fine, so long as they go to the “ball games.” In this interpretation, gay men are inherently more acceptable in the clubhouse. There is a belief that Laura, for instance, is inherently feminine, marked by her body. On the other hand, someone like Mike can prove himself through physically demanding labour and other means of acting out his masculinity.

the clubhouse are in vain, as many of the classic signifiers of masculinity are performance-based. This highlights the futility of attempting to prevent entrance, as well as the constructedness of masculinity itself.

In her discussion of the Men's Movement of the 1990s, Susan Faludi asserts that there is an undeniable yearning amongst many disenchanted and disenfranchised men who, in their adult years, crave meaningful relationships with other males. For these men, their shared pathos is linked with wayward or abusive male authority figures. Encouraged homosocial bonding serves the dual function of fostering mutually emotionally-beneficial relationships and encourages male reciprocity that has been denied through the neglect of the coveted father-son relationship.[71] As discussed, the male clubhouse can work to present "others" in a potentially progressive light. However, it can be the breeding ground of sexism and homophobia. The televisual male clubhouse, while acknowledging this unsavoury possibility, also reflects a more comprehensive and positive image of male friendship. Christine Gledhill's hypothesizes that masculine actions indicate "unexpressed and often unexpressable male emotion, which needs a melodramatic climax to break out" (Feasey 10). "[T]he most dramatic transformation" according to Rebecca Feasey, is the challenge to "hegemonic masculinity that arises from seeing men express (albeit in a somewhat spectacular manner) their innermost thoughts and feelings" (Feasey 10). There is genuine care and affection demonstrated. However, for many onscreen men, it is easier to throw a punch, grab an adversary by the collar, or physically intimidate their way

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71 Feasey notes that, despite reservations pertaining to intimacy, "heterosexual men do seem to value [male] friendships, to the point where they will prioritize homosociality and homosocial bonding, with male friendships taking priority over male-female relations" (Feasey 24). There are two families in *Rescue Me*, for instance: Tommy's fraught home life he consistently struggles to maintain, and the homosocial dynamic of his crew cultivated throughout his career. Despite his inabilities at home, he finds support amongst his colleagues and solace amongst the maelstrom of his profession. While the first two seasons deal primarily with Tommy's struggle to reunite his family, the third season deals with the possible dissolution of his second family, the crew. Despite considering early retirement and a life of financial and physical security with Sheila, Tommy ultimately decides not to file his papers when he realizes that his crew will remain intact, much to Sheila's chagrin (3:13). "You don't need to work, you don't got to stay," Sheila protests, but Tommy does not respond. Domestic life has been a minefield for Tommy, who finds more success and security with his surrogate family.

out of a tough spot than to parse their feelings with another man. A conversation between men can begin with "Trouble with the vag [girlfriend]?" and end with a show of emotional support and, in this instance, counsel ("I've seen the way this girl looks at you. She loves you. All you got to do is man up and ask [for her hand in marriage]. She'll say yes" (*Rescue Me* 7.01). Despite a marked tendency among many men to posture and entertain more atavistic behaviour, the semi-private, semi-public setting of the male clubhouse facilitates an opportunity for an exploration of emotional heft that has been largely neglected in televisual representations of male friendship. Workplace problems and domestic complaints continue to infiltrate male discussions onscreen, but there is also a willingness among men to engage in discussions that encompass more personal territory, including fear of inadequacy as a provider, impotence, sexuality, and addiction. There is a palpable level of trust, affection, and interdependency on display, whether or not the men would willingly admit such closeness. In fact, as this chapter indicates, homosocial para-familial relations provide emotionality and support structures that the men may otherwise lack in their lives.

While there have been important and influential outliers, it can be said with a degree of certainty that the representative male protagonist of contemporary drama, because of new institutional and creative directions, has been imbued with not only more flaws[72], but more emotionality than previously offered in common televisual male representations of yesteryear. Because of both their domination by men and their inherent semi-private, semi-public designation, these areas can encourage behaviour that transcends professional behaviour and facilitate the cultivation of homosocial para-familial relations. Rather than being born of mere circumstance, ones membership in these surrogate families is sired through shared trust, respect and commitment to the physical and emotional well-being of the other members. This is of particular importance to these men who, for various reasons, have

72 As I will discuss in the following chapter these character flaws, particularly the character's propensity for hypermasculine behaviour and their moral 'grey' are also integral in the establishment of a progressive critique of white masculinity.

difficulty maintaining their own households .[73] As we have discussed, attempting to expel "others" presents more problems than inclusivity. There is a need to the focus on the internal "androgynous" qualities of 'macho' ("true bravery or valour, courage, generosity, stoicism, heroism, and ferocity") that aid in the maintenance of the public sphere (Mirande 38).[74] A homogenous work environment may not be the sum of such efforts. This may irritate some men, but, as these programmes suggest, a more inclusive stance allows the maintenance of the positive relations that men desperately desire.

Chapter 3 - Conclusion: The Male-Centred Drama's as a Critique of Male-centredness

To conclude this analysis, I provide rumination on the representation of white male masculinity in *The Shield* and discuss how FX and AMC's male-centred dramas not only reify male-specific grievances, but present a challenge to orthodox masculinity by undermining the sanctity, aptness, and utility of white male masculinity in the public sphere. While there is a fear that male-centred programmes indulge "backlash" rhetoric, I argue that the programmes suggest a more progressive understanding of modern maleness. Nebulous constructs, male exceptionalism, and unrealistic expectations are revealed to be just as damaging to men as women and minorities. In a programme like *The Shield*, this is particularly evident. Vic Mackey, our protagonist, is pitted against an array of multiethnic enemies, namely drug dealers and gangbangers. Within his precinct, however, women and individuals of colour are seen as both effective while possessing a strong moral centre. Their ethics are

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73 Assuming "the serial allure... these ongoing tensions pair the recognizably 'ordinary' domestic problems of sustaining a marriage, children, and career" with the pressures elicited from occupational responsibilities and politics (Dunleavy 227). Juxtaposing and interweaving the two 'families" narratives "enable such an effective fusion of the generic mix...[and] [a]llowing [the program] to evade the narrative closure" that are typical in the aforementioned genres"; in these programmes, a "complex blurring of operational and moral boundaries between ostensible 'business' and 'domestic' spheres of action" occurs (Dunleavy 228). The chief tension that runs through these programs stems from linking the two families.

74 True "macho' masculine behaviour "is characterized by true bravery or valour, courage, generosity, stoicism, heroism, and ferocity; the negative macho simply uses the appearance of semblance of these traits to mask cowardice and fear" (Mirande 38). "It is... important to note that to a great extent, the positive internal qualities associated with the positive macho are not the exclusive domain of men but extend to either gender... Thus... the positive conception of isolated here sees being macho as an internal, androgynous quality" (Mirande 38).

particularly laudable in relation to the white male Strike Team, a corrupt anti-gang task-force led by Vic. The detective's actions amount to a cautionary tale of unchecked power, avarice, and unbridled bravado. When it comes to white masculinity, it is beneficial to think of it as "a response or a function," rather than a concrete entity (DiPiero 231). Vic's 'masculine' responses (articulated through his propensity for physical violence and a need to dominate on the streets) constitute his greatest challenge to self-preservation. While women and ethnic minorities within the police force may attempt to take him down, we understand that it is Vic who places himself in the line of scrutiny. To put it simply, he is his own worst enemy. This is an important distinction when it comes to the programme's critique of masculinity, as it suggests turning the critical eye inward, rather than espousing the woes of the white man as stemming from the supposed gains of everyone else. The majority of male protagonists in modern television dramas (and all of the men under scrutiny in this analysis) continue represent an enduring form of white masculinity. Whiteness, according to David Eng, is understood "in its refusal to be named and its refusal to be marked," representing itself as the universal status, "a ubiquitous norm from which all else and all others are viewed as a regrettable deviation" (138). Whiteness can never be co-opted or alienated, but its authority and invisibility can be challenged. Through generic mixing and the increased employment of the morally 'grey' protagonist, the male-centred drama provides an opportunity in which the representation of white masculinity (previously in a state of invisible grace), can be identified and critiqued. Additionally, these programmes intimate an inability and/or unwillingness to conform to the tenets of dominant white masculinity by presenting a confused, troubled, disconcerted white masculine representative as well as the physical and emotional ramifications of hypermasculine indulgence. To facilitate this discussion, I examine *The Shield*'s Vic Mackey in the post-9/11 context, a period in which white masculinity was reasserted through redolent myths and binary frameworks. A period in which the dominant authority should have been critiqued the most, *The Shield* provides the opportunity for a much-needed collective critique of white masculinity.

The Shield's Vic Mackey, White Masculinity, and the Antihero's Challenge to White Male Authority

Even today, there remains a limited vision of what constitutes heroism on television. Despite an augmented scope of possibilities for the representation and subjectivity of male protagonists, the "us" these men represent usually aligns with the universal white male subject. Programming continues to privilege the perception of a single character, "[t]he apparently hetero, white, male" (Shimpach 31). High-end dramas remains preoccupied with exploring white, middle-class male experiences and anxieties (Santo 34) As expected, the prevailing image of men in the mainstream is one "still of white men and white male beauty" (Fung 545). Vic, for instance, is considered macho, a 'white' interpretation of the term that connotes "strength, virility, masculinity and sex appeal" (Mirande 29).[75] Hazarding an explanation for the ubiquity of the white male protagonist, I recognize that it could, in part, be a matter of economics. Decisions at the production level are informed by both economic and cultural interests. The 18-49 year old male remains the paragon of ideal viewership. A non-white, non-male lead could be deemed economically risky (trumping the cache of the artistically "risqué"). Thus, we continue to vicariously experience the life of the white man and his navigation through his narrative world.[76] Because the programmes entreat us to empathize with the white male protagonist's plight and identify with his aspirations, there is always the threat of reaffirming status-quo depictions of race and propagating power structures that favour white masculine ascendency. (The white male gaze is, after all, a vantage historically predicated on looking down on the gendered and racialized "other.") Through the continued privileging of authoritative white masculinity, *The Shield* can implicitly act as a merchant of white masculinity.

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75 When applied to non-white males, hypermasculinity "remains imbued with such negative attributes as male dominance, patriarchy, authoritarianism, and spousal abuse" (Mirande 29). As we can glean from the racial bifurcation of 'macho,' the symbolic order "projects the burden of racial difference onto those bodies outside a universalizing discourse of whiteness" (Eng 142). White masculinity remains relatively unburdened by pernicious stereotypes.

76 In his discussion of the Asian male in gay male porn, Richard Fung comments on the genre's limited engagement with the spectrum of erotic desire. Fung explores how pornography "can be an active agent in representing and producing a race-sex status quo" (Fung 550). The same can be said for more mainstream content, which, less overtly, but all-too-often, caters to, peddles, and internalizes a uniform type of desire.

There is longstanding notion that American identity has been sustained and regenerated through conflict with a racialized "other."[77] The white Anglo male served as the epitome of rugged individualism and the protagonist in the unfolding narrative of national progress. In such stories, ethnic minorities and women were largely relegated to ancillary positions. Native populations were presented as savage, assailable stepping stones to civilization. White European masculinities, Jason Seidler explains, were marked by modernity. Those colonized racial others could "only make a transition from 'nature' to 'culture' [by] accepting subordination" (136).[78] Sharply contrasting mythical male figures, womenfolk occupied the position of victims, individuals who needed to be defended and (in some cases) retrieved from the aforementioned savages. This imperial imagination infiltrated Hollywood through heroic characters "whose narrative trajectories propelled them into renewed identities as they encountered expansive new spaces" while the (white male) action hero fulfilled the role of universal subject (Shimpach 34).

Conflict with the ethnic "other" is particularly palpable in *The Shield*. Ostensibly ingratiated into the nation, racial "others" remain "perpetual foreigners and as ever-present threats to the nation" (Ono 44). Thus, "others" are onerous and must be mediated. Like most urban meccas in America, Farmington, the area in which Vic patrols, is a hotbed of multiculturalism. Much of Mackey's occupation pertains to policing and mediating disputes between the myriad ethnic gangs that inhabit

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77 In tandem with rugged self-reliance, this conflict has been promoted as an accelerant of European erasure that ensured the emergence of a unique identity. This line of reasoning is most notably articulated in Frederick Jackson Turner's *Frontier Thesis*. The frontier, Turner maintained, was the line of most rapid Americanization.

78 In the face of war and on a march of conquest, public discourses have historically contributed to the cultivation of a belief that Americans possess a divine right and responsibility to reign over those "incapable" of governing themselves. For example, in 1900 Senator Albert J. Beveridge gave a speech in Senate, providing a justification for the annexation of the Philippines. In the haughty address, the senator stated that God "made us ["the English speaking and Teutonic peoples"] master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigned. He has given us the spirit of progress to overwhelm the forces of reaction throughout the earth. He has made us adept in governing so that we may administer government among savages and senile people" (Bellah 38). Of course, cultural sensitivity has risen significantly over the past century and such transparent racism will invariably receive censure in the mainstream; however, there are still underlying tenets of this attitude that maintain. US citizens remain the "chosen people," even in secular American culture. An unceasing desire to prove the sacred qualities of the nation imbues the national focus and obligates action in an attempt to actualize ideals.

Farmington.[79] Mackey undergoes a modern permutation of the "lone white male in the wilderness" motif. It can be argued that his white heroic status is confirmed through a trajectory of remasculization within America's new "inexhaustible wilderness," the urban jungle (Kaplan 6). The filmic and televisual representation of metropolitan America can skew quite dark (both racially and tonally).[80] Today there is an increased tendency to portray the white male protagonist as out of his element, in many instances "pitted against an array of multicultural, multiracial, gendered and sexual others" in an area that has become "hostile, unreadable, and occupied by others" (Rehling 30, 32). Such urban chaos intimates a "the city was changing hands without changing names" (Douglas 1998, 84). The programme elicits identification by screening commonly experienced urban frustrations and provides an affirmation of white male prowess through the white man's mastery of the untamed, non-white environment, recovered spaces of white male disenfranchisement. Mackey's vigilance in this modern wilderness constitutes a constant, if indirect, defence of white masculine presence and purpose.

The nationalist *bildung* constructs a "narrative of masculine, Anglo-Saxon, and capitalist America" that functions as a model, as well as a "source of guidance," for other nations around the globe (Kim 45).[81] 9/11 was an event that dovetailed enduring anxieties with modern masculinity and domestic security. Requiring a "temporal rollback to a fictive time of pure, patriarchal, Anglo-Saxon hegemony," America's restorative future teleology "resides in the past, and an invented past at that" (Kim 50). For citizens, detecting familiar patterns and parallels had the capacity to mitigate fears of uncertainty by providing a sense of surefootedness within fledgling (yet familiar) narratives. To the benefit of the state, mythic alignment has the capacity to mollify the masses while offering justification

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79 The crux of *24*'s dramatic arc, for instance, relies substantially on the threat of extraneous forces infiltrating the nation and disrupting American stability. While Bauer has been assigned the role of defending the nation from a menacing foreign other, Mackey works with the threat of the "other" within the nation.

80 The angry white male magnum opus/wet dream *Falling Down* (1993) comes to mind.

81 Legacies of colonialism and current neo-imperialistic discourses have produced privilege certain imaginings of "other" masculinities, while simultaneously reinscribing "normative, hierarchical, and exclusionary forms of cultural identity" (Lee 64).

for future endeavours based on transmissible thought patterns, touchstones of historical experience, and an absolution of culpability within the confines of shared memory. Superficially, Vic is similar to bygone heroes.[82] In this regard, he poses no overt threat to white male hegemony on television or the prevailing politics of representation.[83] The white male's almost-guaranteed presence does not assure sanctification, however. Although the phenotypic qualities of the figure maintains, characterization constitutes the real challenge to portrayals of orthodox masculine authority. Put simply, exploring the darker proclivities of the cop character reveals *more* about the white male protagonist. Additionally, such characterizations, I argue, reveal more about ourselves – our own anxieties, distrusts, and fears.

Vic, an apparatus of state control and implicit representative of white male authority, blurs the monolithic vision of innocence and virtue ascribed to the nation and its guardians. *The Shield* is a particularly salient object of study in the post-9/11 context, a program that encourages the observation of linkages between textual content and a broader social and cultural milieu. We are entreated to examine Vic as an allegorical figure of national policy working on a regional level. His consequentialist outlook, willingness to violate civil liberties, and general above-the-law demeanour may prove painfully familiar. While foregrounding the white male can serve as an opportunity to bolster the significance, strength, and rectitude of masculine authority, it can also provide the opportunity to mine the depths of moral compromise infecting the male order and the mechanisms that covertly espouse such degradation.

As mentioned, FX's transition from dodgy cable outlet to vanguard of 'quality' programming did not occur overnight. The catalyst appears to have been the success of the network's flagship

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82 If we were going by whiteness alone, you could slap a tri-corner hat on our hero, take away his Beretta and give him a musket, replace Mexicans with Native Americans, and substitute bricks of cocaine with bricks of tea, and we could have a crime procedural in Colonial America. The point: tough white men are the borderline-homogenous heroes of American lore, a tradition that translates to television fare, as well.

83 In this scenario, “history and generic expectations associated with the action genre have meshed will with industry practices that... persist in conflating universal appeal to “mainstream” audience with a transcendent white masculinity” (Shimpach 32).

program, *The Shield*. Debuting on March 12, 2002, the network's first original drama series was met with critical praise and keen interest among viewers. Acknowledged for its cinema verite visual style and realistic (or at least unglamorous and gritty) depiction of law enforcement that broadcast networks eschew (particularly because of the hyper-violence, coarse language, and nudity regularly displayed in the programme), *The Shield* set the bar at FX for quality and ratings. *The Shield* challenged conventional representations of public servants, augmenting the groundbreaking work of earlier programs such as *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993-99) and *NYPD Blue* (1993-2005). According to David Simon, journalist, critical darling, and creator of HBO's *The Wire*, Americans "are bored with good and evil," renouncing the binary distinction. "[F]ew in this world," Simon astutely recognizes, "are anything but a confused and corrupted combination of personal motivations" (Garret). This revelation reifies through our understanding of public figures, as the sheen once extended to politicians, business leaders, sports heroes, and celebrities tarnishes under the glare of corruption, corporate scandal, steroids, and sex tapes. "There are no more heroes, only — at best — antiheroes," Garret concludes.[84] Garret suggests that the world isn't as black and white as it used to be and the meteoric rise of the conflicted, morally dubious protagonist in television reflects substantive cultural change. He

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84 I use the term antihero, aware that it may be an imperfect term. Put succinctly, an antihero is an individual that lacks characteristics traditionally associated with protagonists, particularly chivalric attributes and an attitude marked by purpose. I suggest that the label of antihero and its base definition does not apply to the men under analysis. Despite unsavoury indulgences and decisions, the characters perform acts associated with heroism and, by extension, positive, traditional masculinity. Moreover, the devotion to the family usually produces the good person/bad things or bad person/good things classification quandary. Being capable of "good" and "evil"does not equate a paradoxical state of being, nor does it render an individual a good *or* bad person. It just makes someone a person. Moreover, it would be imprudent to bandy about weighty qualifiers such as "good" and "evil" while attempting to situate masculinity as a responsive performance rather than a definite, inherent quality/curse . Of course, this is not to say that the men are incapable of performing morally repugnant acts. Within the programmes, each protagonist partakes in morally dubious activities that are, at times, seemingly untenable. For instance, two men are murderers, three commit adultery on multiple occasions, and all have vices that jeopardize their lives, careers, and family. For the men in the analysis, however, their actions prove to be situational responses to circumstance, opportunity, and threat, rather than guided by inherent malevolence or goodwill. Much of the dramatic tension elicited in the programmes centres around the men's confrontation with and responses to their own masculinity. Motive is a very important component to the characterization of the male-centred dramatic protagonist. Such subtlety is usually extended to the depiction of their adversaries, as well, which delivers us from enduring the formulaic behaviour of caricatures. Male protagonists may demonstrate "conflicting constructions" of masculinity at work within the broader culture (Shimpach 39). However, without an impressed understanding of situational motivation, the analysis would provide little, if any, insight into modern masculinity.

perceives television drama as a "barometer... of the age that give birth to it" (Garret). These characters are symptomatic of increasing uncertainty in not only public officials, but the ideological institutions they represent that give meaning and structure to our lives, highlighting a lack of shared meaning that characterizes postmodern American society. In modern society, thus, heroes are old-hat. These programmes, one could claim, have harnessed representational strategies that have led to the conception of more nuanced, complex, and intelligent stories regarding white male experience. This isn't to say that the white male is a downtrodden, under-represented figure. Of course not. He is, after all, the universal subject, vested with implicit authority. The white male body "carr[ies] traces of empire and maintain[s] the presumptions of universal subjectivity" (Shimpach 35). Debilitating, discrediting, and doubting the heroic white male figure and his claims to universal authority constitutes a politically charged enterprise that rejects "consensus and univocality" of American meaning and denies the belief that America remains a "monolithic and self-contained whole, no matter how diverse and conflicted" (Kaplan 15). While reminding audiences "what human beings are capable of doing – may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously," the white male antihero compromises the legitimacy of the white male subject (Petley 174). Instead of a simplified answer, the figure suggests both incertitude and possibility. Truth rests in minutia. This is both the appeal and the power of the antihero.

In its ideal state, the media in a democracy should address urgent questions facing the nation. In the post-9/11 sociopolitical climate, "corporate media, especially television, overwhelmingly promoted military solutions to the problem of global terrorism" (Kellner 145). Like any other mass medium, television appeals to core values and symbols within the nation. The media plays an integral role in drawing connections, establishing meaning out of mayhem, and making ontological leaps on behalf of its audiences. In the attempt to alleviate misgivings, "representational tools" are key in breeding a reassuring familiarity (O'Loughlin 45-46). Following the attacks and continuing through the invasion of Iraq, news updates from authoritative sources quickly integrated propagandist efforts

(Altheide 65). Mass media, with its capacity to organize audiences, would conform to its less ostensible function: "a delivery system for state ideology" (Taylor 241). There were many attempts to construct a narrative around the events; however, presentations of 9/11, according to Susan Faludi, focused merely on replication, failing to adequately address national trauma or encourage Americans to think constructively about their nation's position in the world (Faludi *Terror* 2-3). Used solely for explication, this type of storytelling denied important opportunities while tending to anxieties "deep in our cultural memory" (Faludi *Terror* 13). In the face of insecurity and anxiety, cyclical patterns of behaviour re-emerge. Through discursive means, "Western culture plays out a spiritual cycle of guilt, then victimage, then redemption" (McCorkle 172). There are various ways to complete this cycle on both a national and individual level. You can assert dominance through full-on military intervention, retreat to the idealism of early American folk tales, or pick up a reminder of American prowess in the Action section of Blockbuster Video.[85] The enduring reliance on American mythology functions as a complex form of narrativization, providing a means of understanding national identity through enduring and accessible frames of reference that re-inscribe traditional values and affirms ones (exceptional) place in the world. Classic binaries, thus, had to be re-centred and reinforced. This scripting, however, is insular, working "against broader emancipatory politics" and refuses to acknowledge connections and larger frameworks (Taylor 263). Despite clinging to non-political pretences, television not only contributes to the social and cultural milieu of the nation, but directly impacts the direction of discourse that determines weighty government issues such as domestic and foreign policy.

In an age characterized by fear and the need for security, some have lamented the purported softening of men in America.[86] Technology, post-industrialization, pro-feminist movements, and myriad

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85 For posterity, Blockbuster Video was a place in which one could rent VHSs and DVDs, located conveniently next to the bookbinder, blacksmith, and soothsayer.

86 During the Cold War, exceptionalist rhetoric was reiterated in an attempt to further define the West from the rest (Rodgers 27). Contemporaneous political anxieties were intimately linked with the potential mutability, or

social and political advancements have instigated a fear that men can no longer be "men." In an extensive analysis of the speeches of President George W. Bush, James W. Messerschmidt detects distinctive patterns of gendered language.[87] Bush's image and campaign were predicated on the belief that unwavering faith in traditional masculinity was the best way to confront the problem of terrorism (Kimmel 253). Adopting metaphorical masculine heroic characteristics[88] and framing America as battling feminized, infantilized foreign societies and uncivilized hypermasculine enemies, Bush catered to enduring notions of both sexism and Orientalism (Messerschmidt 156). Today, white men continue to script themselves as protectors of women, while people of colour are used as a counterpoint to white masculinity when ascertaining acceptable, moral, and sexual propriety (Fine 69).[89] Of course, this binary favours white men, fixing racialized others and women in inferior rungs of the social ladder.[90] Because its eminence and existence is predicated largely on, at best, contrast, or, at worst, debasement,

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downright muting, of American masculinity. Looming in the collective psyche were fears of a matriarchal, "disintegrating, disunited America" teeming with incorrigible women, exerting excessive power in all aspects of American life. There was a belief that this feminization of the public sphere would eventuate the corruption of public policy (Kim 48).

87 He states that Bush Jr. and his insertion of troops into Afghanistan and Iraq, "appealed to a hegemonic masculine role as the superordinate heroic *succorer* (protector *and* rescuer) of subordinate emphasized feminine and infantile *victims* from subordinate toxic masculine *villains"* (Messerschmidt 155, original emphasis). This discourse, the "villain-victim-hero-narrative, "legitimized gender inequality and bolstered a rationale for unilateral military campaigns against both Afghanistan and Iraq (Messerschmidt 156).

88 Metaphors are great and all, but *literally* loping around ones ranch wearing a cowboy hat or dressing up like flight-combat GI Joe can also convey this message. For visual learners and Bush, a man who appears to have a personal vendetta against the English language, this proved a real boon.

89 Resistant to negotiation, American war mythology has remained inveterate in its depiction of women. The integration of women into the modern military and the propagation of alternative histories continue to erode restrictive and spurious conceptualizations, illuminating the important roles women have played in the trajectory of the nation. However, mythological narrative, tales of physical prowess, and stories that hinge on proactive corporeal symbols of the nation appear to remain an exclusively male domain. In regards to military enterprise, the image of the female body does not carry the symbolic preponderance of the male war hero. In the construction of a purposive and patriotic narrative, women have usually been relegated to inferior positions, used exclusively to represent virtue, tradition, and nation state (Schubart 71).To analogize this hierarchical structure of gendered power relations, we may think of the nation as a ship. The woman serves the role of the figurehead, the carving at the bow. Despite her emblematic function, we know that a man is steering the vessel.

90 In war, women are denied "autonomy and independence of mind as well as adulthood. These gender representations undermines American democracy by naturalizing paternalistic, authoritarian rule and promoting the extension of masculine protection "beyond the imagined frailty of women and children and applied to society as a whole" (Hogan 167).The racialized "other" occupies a feminized position in relation to national white male citizenship (Eng 18). Colonial discourse continues to reverberate, aiding in the maintenance of an unmarked, unnamed white/Western self. The colonized "other" is marked wholly and hierarchically different from the white male subject.

exposing “whiteness” as a “culturally constructed ethnic identity” is a worthwhile enterprise (Eng 138). As Lynn Spiegel reminds us, following 9/11, media, and its will to remember, “was connected to the resuscitation of national culture in a country heretofore divided by culture wars and extreme political partisanship (Spiegel 241-42). Much of the programming post-9/11 encouraged 'infantile citizenship.' As Lisa Lowe states, “every narrative articulation of freedom is haunted by its burial, by the violence of forgetting” (206). Narratives have the capacity to instantly and powerfully simplify historical continuities and discontinuities, visually imploding historical narratives by seizing images and using them to frame unfolding events as well as re-scripting those from the past (Hoskins 305). Narratives have the capacity to not only preclude the dissemination of truth, but can aid in the propagation of outmoded social hierarchies and contribute to the maintenance of dangerous public discourses. Mobilized urgently and expediently, traditional discourses began to appear, serving to comfort the nation, while justifying crusades against Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, and dissuading public debate. Politicians and pundits who embraced this rhetoric contributed to a “failed public sphere “characterized by “self-censorship by network news agencies in their coverage of the war, the failings of representative government, and the simple complacency of most Americans in not asking tough questions of either of these entities” (Fox 17).[91] In the context of politically charged sites of violence, images of heroes and victims can preclude political engagement by falling into the realm of comfort culture, encouraging viewers “to feel sadness for the loss of lives in a way that discourages any discussion of the context in which those lives were lost” (Sturken 22-23). A politics of fear is constructed through “news and popular culture accounts” and exploited by state control agencies,

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91 After enduring the psychosocial ramifications of 9/11, the prolonged disarray of engaging an amorphous enemy in the War on Terror, and a belaboured conflation of looming terror with the regime of Saddam Hussein (a situation exacerbated by false reports of weapons of mass destruction, the formation of a new “Axis of Evil”, a fruitless back-and-forth with the UN, and feckless attempts to justify a pre-emptive strike on a non-threatening sovereign state), we can see why a beleaguered public would desire a certain degree of hand-holding. In the construction of a purposeful national narrative, mass media outlets relied on myths, simplified binaries, traditional frameworks of understanding, and the abnegation of counter-evidence to comfort and aid an ailing nation.

pundits, and politicians who capitalize restlessness to "promote a sense of insecurity and reliance on formal agents of social control" (Altheide 55). The politics of fear impressed following 9/11 promoted vigilance (against crime and terrorism), anticipated further victimization, curtailed civil liberties, stifled dissent and characterized indifference as 'unpatriotic'" (Altheide 66).[92] Reaction to the day also revealed that the nation remains beholden to established discourses of rhetoric, symbol, and myth. All too often, government and media discourses rely on spurious notions of ethnicity and gender, pandering to Orientalist tropes that present American national identity as "democratic, modern, and free" while situating the Middle East as "primitive, barbaric, and oppressive" (Alsultany 595). Domestically, stereotypes are also employed. Diana Taylor explains, national insecurity breeds "the same old scenario drawn from a repertoire of frontier lore: evil barbarians, threatened damsels protected by heroic males (245). The "US state propaganda machine" (Hogan 166) contributed to the reassertion of a wartime binary of resilient, noble, power men, and innocent, fragile, victimized females, a gendered binary of tragedy, that relied on "the feminization of loss and surprise" and "the masculinist rush to save the day" (Taylor 244). Likewise, Hollywood's depiction of the onscreen hero continues to rely heavily on "imperial-era adventure stories written primarily for boys as primers on the ideals and pleasures of imperialism, urging young "readers to manliness" (Shimpach 33). Ideological scripting, an understanding in which the male body presented is "not just to be admired but, importantly, attained" maintains today (Beynon 126). Young white men, "resolved conflict through violence... securing, in each story, the future of the world for which they were responsible and in the process confirming their masculine identity (Shimpach 33). This masculine exceptionalism is, arguably, the curse of masculinity. As a representative hero in the post-9/11 context, Vic Mackey fails to affirm America's (past and future) progress. This is a positive failure.

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92 Reliance on victomology establishes an enemy while simultaneously configuring the white population as vulnerable, threatened and in peril (Ono 25).

A character like Vic Mackey may be the most accurate personification of America in its current climate: a cantankerous, stout, bald, phallic-figured man perpetually at the end of his rope, attempting to escape the sins of his past, but mired in the psychic trauma and circumstance of a lifetime excess and poor decisions. He may not be as readily iconic as the cowboy or the minuteman (give it time, I say) or as life-affirming and inspiring Uncle Sam. He is, however, a more honest affectation of America. Reliance on traditional representations of American masculinity that can reaffirm detrimental gender and racial binaries, contribute to dangerously reductive narratives, and strengthen isolationist concepts of exceptionalism. While the hero offers answers and affirmation, the anti-hero spurs thought. At this point, I turn my attention to *The Shield*'s Vic Mackey as an antihero, and the figure's potential remedial effects on a failed public sphere. In the detective genre, Jason Mittel recognizes, we traditionally "experience the fictional world through the perspective of a deeply flawed character whose perception colours our visions of the events and characters" (Mittell 141). The consequentialist approach Vic maintains toward his profession inculcates distrust in white male authority. One of Garret's aforementioned antiheroes, Vic's complexity and moral 'grey', speaking textually, can aid tremendously in the depth and appeal of the programme's narrative. I suggest, however, the practical utility of the antihero in modern American society rests in its ability to undermine, if not negate, white male claims to power, while providing much-needed nuance to the representation of dominant white masculinity. The personal and cultural value of these 'grey' characters can prove an optimal entry-point to overarching ideological struggles, negotiations of masculinity, and encourage increased interaction with pervasive social and political issues. As we will explore, in a culture encouraging unwavering adherence to dominant discourse, Vic Mackey fails as an affirmation of America's (past and future) progress. Moreover, it is important to note that antiheroes can still be purveyors of hegemonic masculinity, incorporating both pathological and respectable characteristics of dominant white masculinity. As such, Vic can highlight both the utility and cruelty exerted at both ends of this

masculine spectrum.

The most lurid and reprehensible crimes on *The Shield* involve the sexual debasement of women and children. In the pilot episode of the series we are privy to the effectiveness of Vic's propensity for violence on the job and presented with our first moral quandary of the series. Vic's hands-on approach is requested when the interrogation of a suspected child molester proves unsuccessful (1.01). With the clock ticking and jurisprudence proving an insurmountable parapet, Vic's adversary, the recently-promoted Captain David Acaveda, puts his reservations aside, turns a blind eye, and unleashes Mackey on the suspect, smug, self-assured weaselly type who would compel the backhand of even the most devout Jain. "Charge me, or release me" is the suspect's constant refrain. When Mackey comes in and places a bottle of whiskey, a box-cutter, a lighter, and a phone-book on the table in the interrogation room, the suspect asks, "Your turn to be play bad cop?" Mackey responds coldly, "Good cop and bad cop left for the day. I'm a different kind of cop." When it comes to missing children, our detective doesn't faff about. The suspect loses his carefully maintained sang-froid when Vic punches him in the sternum. He then proceeds to grab the phone book and bludgeon the suspect. He mercilessly beats the information out of the suspect, undermining the legality of the investigation, much to the chagrin of the detectives in charge of the case. Vic, however, emerges with the information he requested and they are able to retrieve the child.[93] Pummelling a sadistic nonce is, of course, emotional bait for the audience, potentially shifting once-thought stationary ethical keystones. The scenario (paedophile with a little girl trapped in a basement) is the ultimate hypothetical to make even the most ardent legal dogmatist temporarily abandon the notion of due process and habeas corpus until those Yellow Pages are red. Vic's transgression and the audience's complicity (or at least empathy with his

93 In her analysis of rape, television, and crime drama, Lisa M. Cuklanz explains that hegemonic masculinity is expressed in the genre through "a violent temper directed at criminals but not at women" (Cuklanz 80). When a cop beats the bejesus out of a suspect, the assault can be interpreted as not just an expression of hegemonic masculinity's more pathological expressions, but a condemnation of the perpetrator's failure to live up to the tenets of hegemonic masculinity.

approach) reflects a greater contemporaneous debate occurring in the nation.

Another programme that deals with white authority in post 9/11 America is *24* (2001-09). Before moving to a more rigorous analysis on *The Shield*, a salient contrast can be made between Vic Mackey and *24*'s Jack Bauer. Fox's popular techno-thriller-drama follows Special Agent Jack Bauer and the members of an elite counter-terrorism group, CTU (Counter Terrorism Unit), as they attempt to stop the bomb, uncover conspiracies, and punish evil-doers. In *24*, Jack shows a real panache for sadism, torturing victims in myriad ways, each method more creative and genuinely perturbing than the last. He threatens to remove eyes with knives and sever digits with cigar cutters if information is not relayed, shoots a terrorist's wife in the leg when her husband withholds the location of hidden nerve gas, and menaces a suspect with a seemingly innocuous towel, threatening to cram it down his esophagus and pull it out, a perversion of the magic trick in which the never-ending handkerchief from the dimensionally-transcendental pocket ends in stomach lining.[94] Jack's actions, although at times bordering on the macabre, are always framed as necessary. The reprehensible actions of Jack for the sake of national security has been interpreted as thinly-veiled neo-conservative consequentialism.[95] Ideologically aligned with the conservative rhetoric of post-9/11 America, we understand that Jack, a man who has dedicated his life to public service (a fact punctuated by his literal twenty-four hour work schedule), operates in the interest of America's security. The concept of necessary evil is understood in

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94 The construction and cognitive accessibility associated with original memory is very much contingent on antecedent understandings of national and global narratives. This suggests a tethering to the past, a lack of manoeuvrability, and autonomy. “The most showcased victims [of 9/11]” Susan Faludi claims, “bore female faces”(Faludi *Terror* 5-6). While under duress, the body is placed in a “feminized position as an object of gaze” (Nishme 260). The act of torture feminizes the enemy. In Jack's masculine gaze, the enemy is immobilized, and our hero can get into the head of enemy, obtain information, and decide the dastard's fate. This revenge fantasy, one could argue, constitutes an affirmation of white male power that was undermined in the attacks.

95 It has been posited that “24 clearly endorses torture as a means of extracting information from terrorists, which has been a major ideological and policy distinction between US political parties since 2001” (Miller 92). Delegates from West Point have actually expressed anxiety to 24 producers in 2007 over the expectations and attitudes adopted by new military recruits pertaining to interrogation methods and torture (Miller 92).

both 24 and *The Shield*. Vic's actions, on the other hand, tend to be less venial.[96] At best, he is usually situated as the lesser of two evils, pitted against murderers, cop-killers, drug fiends, child molesters, and a host of other violent offenders. Shawn Ryan, creator and executive producer of *The Shield*, has stated that he has created the show as an exploration of security, more specifically what people are willing to sacrifice in order to guarantee security. Ryan notes the questions he would return to while developing the series: "Are there times when we want the cops to be bad? Are there times when we ignore the cops being bad as long as they are doing the dirty work for us?" (Prigge 94).[97] The moral rectitude of consequentialism is weighed against its practical utility, the ends always justifying the means.

David Thorburn offers insight into the significance of programmes such as *The Shield* in the context of a failed public sphere. Absorbed into "paradigms of moral conflict," seemingly innocuous melodrama is transformed into "a peculiarly significant public forum, complicated and immensely enriched because its discourse is aesthetic and broadly popular" (440). Appealing and accessible, programmes, thus, constitute "a forum or arena in which traditional ways of feelings and thinking are brought into continuous, strained relation with powerful institutions of change and contingency" (Thorburn 440). With its cerebral and participatory functions, melodrama "gestures simultaneously toward ordinary reality *and* toward a moral and emotional heightening that is rarely encountered in the "real" world" (Thorburn 442).[98] If mainstream texts are to command a popular audience, they must

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96 Many of his actions would most likely be considered immoral and definitely illegal. While Jack always has the greater good on his mind, Mackey is regularly motivated by personal avarice. Justifying his illicit actions takes a substantial amount of rationalization. More cynically and in line with the culture of fear and conservatism, in a period of insularity and xenophobia, it could be more difficult for viewers to cheer on a corrupt authority figure who is more likely to exercise authority on white American citizens than a man who will exert his dominance over a clearly-defined foreign.

97 While earlier characters such as Dragnet's iconic Joe Friday exhibited "ultimate faith in the system's ability to function, as the narration positions the audience as an active participant in the systematically guaranteed machinery of justice" (Mittell 141), Vic's lack of faith could indicates increasing distrust in state authority.

98 As Cara Louise Buckley explains, "Theoretical examinations of television audiences have been continuously mutating and evolving, moving scholarly conceptions of viewers from that of a mass both easily swayed and barely participatory, to more current understandings of a people engaged in "an area of cultural struggle" (Buckley citing Ang 167). "This notion of struggle," she continues, "not only raises the intensity of participation of the viewer, but also increases the significance of critical examinations of audiences" (Buckley 167).

draw on well-worn archetypes and a familiar generic and moral order, while “referring outward to a recognizable contemporary social world with its historically specific cultural anxieties, debates, and discourses” (Purvis 114). There is a need to reject the concept of the "”distracted surrender gaze theory” at odds with contemporary television consumption (Caldwell 25). On the contrary, television “both invites and rewards an intense and discriminating involvement” (Purvis 95). The “dramatic pleasures” of a show like *The Shield* relies “upon the fictional frame to make their representation violence and anxiety palatable” (Mittell 198). Although narratively within the national borders, viewers attuned to the sociopolitical zeitgeist can construe a relational critique of contemporaneous governmental policy within *The Shield*. Through its characterization of those who have been sworn to protect and serve the citizenry, the programme presents an ambivalent depiction of American authority that distorts the image of the public servant, a symbol that proved valuable following 9/11, exploring concepts such as consequentialism and denying national innocence. What the text leaves unsaid (its 'unconscious') can, “in the reader's hands, generate meaning” (Purvis 41). This is, perhaps, the greatest strength of the antihero. Rather than offering clear-cut understandings of the current climate, there is room to come to conclusions on ones own. The men are grey and the messages are grey. They do not proselytize. They expose viewers to complexities and complications. Narrative texts reveal ideological contradictions. Although they may seem to foster social conformity, we have to acknowledge that dominant discourses can be countered and questioned within popular genres (Purvis 57). For *The Shield*, the questions we are entreated to ask moves beyond the ethical minefield of post-9/11 America, encompassing the enterprise of naming and questioning white masculinity. The ambivalent representation of white male masculine authority reflected through Vic's actions both reify existing national anxieties and inculcate a broader distrust in the white male ruling class. As an apparatus of state control, Vic houses and exercises secular and divine authority.[99] The performance and negotiation of hegemonic masculinity

99 John Bodnar has referred to the American Revolution as “the end of history” for Americans, meaning that

within the crime drama proves a fruitful object of investigation. Despite diverging moralities and motivations amongst the genres protagonists, the male detective figure has remained a clear moral contrast to the malevolence, lasciviousness, and avarice of their criminal adversary. The context in which its content was sired and consumed makes *The Shield* that much more subversive. A representative of white male state authority, Vic is both representative of men and *The Man*. And, to paraphrase the jargon of work-shy Gen X'ers, he is keeping us down! Despite their coalescing qualities, heroes are reductive figures that spur adherence while dissuading political action, ultimately serving to mollify the masses through reductive narratives that propagate enduring binaries of good and evil.

As discussed, 9/11 was an event that resulted in the celebrated return of traditional masculinity, a presence thought sorely lacking in Western culture, through the reassertion of traditional principles and characteristics (heterosexuality, breadwinning, and aggression) and far-reaching socio-economic practices that favoured white male dominance. A character like Vic Mackey may resonate with male audiences because he offers hope that men can still be men, presenting a vicarious vision in which viewers can indulge the white male with gaze 20/20 acuity. Unabashed fortitude, prowess, and all-around maleness, however, is challenged by the visibility of Mackey's emotional pain and the imminent

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the conflict generated "a nation and a political system that deserved citizen support in the past, present, and future" (Bodnar 234). Rebellion had been reformulated as "dramatic stories in which great men made irrevocable decisions that now deserved praise, and ordinary people deferred to higher authority and fought heroically for political dogma" (Bodnar 244). Lisa Lowe puts forth her concept of the "economy of affirmation and forgetting," a mechanism that "civilizes and develops freedom for "man" in modern Europe, while relegating others to geographical and temporal spaces that are constituted as uncivilized and unfree" (206). The same practices are visible within the American context, beginning with the early days of European expansionism continuing through the rise of the American empire. To safeguard the "proper" trajectory of the nation and continue *the* narrative of progress, thus, it remains important to *believe* in men, the arbiters of the nation, no matter a nation's growing incredulousness. After all, every nation needs a unique consciousness; "to cherish heroes, to recall its past and to gather to itself the loyalty that goes with heroes and memory" (10). The white male, the universalized subject, continues to do just that, harkening back to a familiar "secure heterosexuality and whiteness," the universal norm in a colonial world order" (Eng 152). In times of strife, centralizing struggles through the figure of the white male has the capacity to "kindle" the imagination by "evoking memories of the hopes and bravery of pioneers making their trek through the wilderness that was America" (Bodnar 233). Because this figure is so intimately linked with progress, doubting our man's faculty on the frontier (wherever it is located today) has the capacity to undermine the national notion of progress.

peril he has placed himself in.[100] Any victory is merely a temporary deliverance. In the end, Vic denied redemption.[101] Contrarily, interest in the character may be generated through his deficiencies, a fulfilment of the axiomatic proposition that misery loves company. Mackey shares many of the trepidations of the common white man, including a distrust of bureaucracy and a loss of faith in official ("by the book") authority. Additionally, he is plagued by economic concerns, reveals a lack of confidence regarding his abilities as a husband and father, and fears encroaching emasculating forces invading the public sphere. *The Shield* suggests a restlessness with masculine banality and a failure to maintain a sustainable, fulfilling identity. Instead of solely serving as a conduit for vicarious feats of manliness or as a mirror for male anxieties, a more positive and remedial interpretation of *The Shield* (and other male-centred dramatic programmes, for that matter) suggests that such characterizations (coupled with depictions of the physical, mental, and emotional consequences endured by the white male choices) reflect (and appeal to) audience desires to move beyond white male control, refuse the rhetoric of the ruling class, destroy power structures that subjugate women and ethnic minorities, and

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100 Vic's ruthlessness reveals its depths later in the episode when he kills Detective Terry Crowley, an informant feeding information to Internal Affairs regarding the Strike Team. To protect his crew, their livelihoods, and their families, Vic takes it upon himself to shoot Crowley in the face, wangle the crime scene, and blame the murder on the deceased drug dealer that Vic has also just killed (justifiably in self-defence). The murder of his colleague is Mackey's ultimate transgression, an original sin that Mackey spends years covering up.

101 In the end, Vic's past catches up with him. Spearheading the take-down of a drug cartel, Vic is able to acquire both employment with ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and the promise of full immunity for his (at the time) unspecified crimes (7.12). Confessing a laundry list of felonious acts to his agency handler, Mackey is able to stave off prosecution and temporarily remove his head from the chopping block. His ending, however, is far from happy. The team he endeavoured to save is long-gone, hampered by the death of colleagues before its formal dissolution. He loses his badge, his corruption has been exposed, the respect of his colleagues disintegrates, and his confession implicates his only remaining friend in a number of unlawful acts. Moreover, his wife is informed of Vic's activities and his family are placed in witness protection (7.13). Last but not least, Vic is no longer allowed to dispense justice on the streets of Farmington. He is consigned to a clerical position within the ICE offices as punishment/poetic justice for his behaviour. In the show's final scene, Mackey sits at his desk, his trademark leather jacket and tight-fitting black t-shirt replaced with a nondescript suit and tie. Wing-clipped, we are to assume Vic will spend the next three years languishing in a cubicle-partitioned, air-conditioned hell of his own making, driven insane by the incessant buzz of fluorescent lights, the inane prattling of co-workers, and general monotony that is only broken by the occasional game of computer solitaire. His blue collar whitened, stripped of his gun, relegated to a desk, subject to the whims of his incensed bosses lest he infringe his immunity deal, there is no salvation for Vic Mackey. Weighing in on Vic's fate, Jon Landgraf, president of FX, reminds viewers that Vic "managed to preserve his own freedom and his life by sacrificing everything else in his life that was important" (Hibberd). In the male-centred serial drama, conventional cocksureness, direct action, and violence usually fail to rectify overarching tensions.

abandon attachments to vexing, trammelling, and detrimental, masculinities.

In brief, Vic intimates more than backlash rhetoric. Rather than a celebration of masculinity, Vic offers an exploration of adhering to dominant white masculinity. An inversion of expectations, the violation of his position of trust is a particularly abhorrent. The programme blurs the white male gaze and denies the legitimacy extended to white male stewardship, a position based on a sacred right to rule, innocence, infallibility, and justifiable exercises of force. Perhaps we should take Lisa Lowe's suggestion to envision "a much more complicated set of stories about the emergence of the now" (208). While rallying around the exceptional, noble, and heroic white male figure can provide direction, an adherence to this idealized masculinity maintains insularity in the international community and a continued division within the nation. The security Vic ensures makes us feel queasy. Vic, our conduit in the wilderness and representative of white male authority, encourages much-needed self-reflection on a national scale and urges a revaluation of the faith placed in contemporary authorial agents and institutions.

Conclusion: Revelations and Revolution in The Male-Centred Drama

While the world continues to progress, American men are experiencing a "culture lag" in which the ideologies that shape meaning in our lives remain conspicuously static, while the "*structure* of our lives have changed" (Aronson, original emphasis, 41). The mere idea that men must think of revaluating their position in the world is met with anxiety and trepidation. Any deviation from the norm, it is believed, would constitute a loss. Men, however, should embrace every opportunity to question their place in the world. For most men, the divide between self and cultural image is a constant source of tension. What men need is a revolution. The idea of a male revolution may conjure unsavoury thoughts. Misconstrued as a continuation of adoption of victimization rhetoric, one could perceive a group of incensed men advancing down Main Street, America. This male pride parade, a walking

spacialization of white male anxiety, moves in formation. Rush's “Tom Sawyer” is their “We Shall Overcome.” Marching towards the industrial district, they have come in a vain attempt to reclaim what has been lost.[102] Or, contrarily, 'revolution' could suggest a solemn protest of disavowal, housing a group of men who call for the complete demasculinization of men. Afraid of fulfilling the derogatory image of male potential that Robert Bly and others have put forth, these self-hating men espouse the rhetoric that men are inherently monstrous. Liberated from the manly coil, the smell of burning jockstraps waft in the air while someone plays Shania Twain's “Man I Feel Like a Woman” on an acoustic guitar, the men sit in a circle and chastise the folly of modern men for failing to be “in touch” with their feelings. Just as the former glory of the patriarchy cannot be restored through anti-feminism rhetoric of the former group, the latter men fail to see that the male 'problem' cannot be solved with the anti-male rhetoric and the promulgation of stereotypes that all men must work to sublimate damaging atavistic behaviour [103] In both camps, we have types of men who would more than likely perceive their counterparts as 'the problem'. A more inclusive, yet individualistic movement, is needed, and it can only be initiated through the denial of the purportedly immutable white masculine dominance. Because of its connotative possibilities, 'revolution' may be an inopportune word to describe increased self-awareness. However, in the face of the ubiquity of the dominant discourse, challenging the once-though immutable tenets of white male masculinity and moving towards *real* self-awareness is revelatory. It is important to come to terms with the inevitable decaying of the empire of the privileged white male, rather than allow him to transmogrify in a vain attempt to reassert his will to power, or destroy himself in the process of reinvention.

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102 I had to refrain from mentioning the act of high-fiving again. Somewhere along the line I must have internalized that high-fiving is the most masculine thing one could ever possibly wish to do.

103 Such a reductive interpretation of the male experiences serves as both a justification and absolution for poor reprehensible behaviours In this understanding, at best, men are fated to be a little chauvinistic, and, at worst, born rapists. As a rationale for societal control, it seems counter-intuitive that violence-prone, ticking time bombs should be trusted with anything.

The aforementioned cultural lag appears to be the dominant problem for men of the male-centred drama. While the previous chapters have explored the domestic and workplace implications/complication of stagnation, a programme such as *The Shield* amplifies the discourse at a national level. By exploring the performativity, anxieties, and downright dangers of relying on dominant masculinity, the male-centred drama is a space of exploration. As discussed in the introductory chapter, these programmes are sites of negotiation for masculinities. Instead of towing the line, they exemplify modern anxieties regarding the white male's place in society. As discussed, they form a powerful, discursive critique of orthodox masculine behaviour and suggest a desire to move away from pervasive, simplified definitions of masculinity. Instead of espousing masculine restoration, they actively display a desire and need to re-examine dominant male norms and compel viewer engagement with this worthy enterprise. As a capstone for this analysis, perhaps it would be best to end with a rather salient quote from *Rescue Me* in which Tommy Gavin attempts to get out of a parking ticket. Upon referencing 9/11 in an attempt to get out of paying for his actions (a tactic that he regularly employs for more egregious behaviour), an incensed beat cop lambasts Tommy.

> 9/11 was four years ago, champ. Deal with it. You've had your day. They wrote books about you guys. They put you up on a pedestal. And what happened? Turns out you ain't just heroes. Turns out some of you do blow, and have gangbangs. Turns out some of you are just broken down drunks on the verge of a complete and total mental collapse. America don't like it when things get complicated (2.02).

American men have experienced a fall from grace and not just in the readily apparent economic sense. As seen in the constant redeployment of gendered binaries and the guiding properties of white masculine authority, America *really* doesn't like it when things get complicated. For American men, life appears more vexing than ever. However, as we have explored, propping up outmoded paradigms is its own form of cowardice. Men, as intimated through these programmes, are realizing that the old norms

for manhood are no longer applicable in the postmodern marriage, family, or workplace (Feasey 154). Suppressing individual complexities and desires for an outmoded, homogenous, culturally-delegated vision of masculinity eventuates its own complications. Confronting the claims to and validity of white masculinity, these programmes challenge broader ideological institutions that most men dare not challenge. The male-centred drama encourages these men to 'man up' in a positive, productive manner.

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