

Marquette University  
**e-Publications@Marquette**

---

College of Communication Faculty Research and  
Publications

Communication, College of

---

12-1-2016

## No Girls Allowed: Television Boys' Clubs as Resistance to Feminism

Pamela Hill Nettleton PhD

Marquette University, [pamela.nettleton@marquette.edu](mailto:pamela.nettleton@marquette.edu)

---

Accepted version. *Television & New Media*, Vol. 17, No. 7 (November 2016): 563-578. DOI. © 2016  
The Author(s). Used with permission.

# No Girls Allowed: Television Boys' Clubs as Resistance to Feminism

Pamela Hill Nettleton

*Journalism and Media Studies, Marquette University  
Milwaukee, WI*

**Abstract:** This article analyzes the male-only spaces present in four television series, FX's *The Shield*, *Nip/Tuck*, *Rescue Me*, and ABC's *Boston Legal*, which each include a gendered territory as a recurring feature. I argue that these homosocially segregated environments enforce boundaries against women and shelter intense bromance relationships that foreclose romantic relationships of any kind, acting as physical incarnations of troubling retrograde sexual politics and ideologies. I also assert that the "boys' clubs" in which these narratives take place, enabled and empowered by the aesthetic dimensions of architecture and design, help establish workplace patriarchy as commonplace, reasonable, and benign. This article reveals that in these television boys' clubs, problematic gender ideologies are protected and celebrated, misogyny is naturalized, and patriarchal beliefs and behaviors legitimized.

**Keywords** television, boys', clubs, feminism, *Rescue Me*, masculinity, *Nip/Tuck*, *Boston Legal*, *The Shield*

## Introduction

The male characters in the American television dramas *Rescue Me*, *The Shield*, *Nip/Tuck*, and *Boston Legal* occupy boys' clubs— homosocially segregated areas where men keep company with other

men and women rarely, if ever, dare (or are allowed to) tread. In these male-centered television dramas of the early millennium, gendered territories in and outside the workplace become physical incarnations of troubling retrograde sexual politics and ideologies where men construct and foster friendships and partnerships exclusively with men and forbid the presence and influence of women. These environments take several forms: the New York firehouse of *Rescue Me*, the special forces meeting room in a police station of *The Shield*, the plastic surgery operating room and condo of *Nip/Tuck*, and the law office balcony with Scotch, armchairs, and cigars in *Boston Legal*.

Here, I expand and deepen explorations of gendered representations in contemporary television into the arena of the social use of specific environments—in this case, environments that support and protect male-only socialization and patriarchal exclusion of women. In this article, I address segregated locations of homosocial culture and track specific gendered political practices located there. By drawing out the ways in which these practices are located and sheltered in the boys' clubs in these four television programs, I argue that patriarchy is reinscribed and feminism resisted, which, in turn, contributes to naturalizing ideological and cultural practices in which the absence of females is enforced, the authority of males goes unchallenged, and male companionship is elevated to the level of family and couplehood, to the exclusion of women.

Neither a history of television masculinity nor a study of architecture, this article identifies and describes ways in which contemporary television representations of exclusively male territory participate in sheltering and shaping identity and ideology. This work contributes to media studies and to feminist media studies by identifying the characteristics of boys' clubs in male-centered television programs of the new millennium and postulating potential links between television's physical environments that foreclose the presence of women and the culture's ideologies and attitudes that exclude women. These contemporary television programs are considered here in the specific historic and cultural context in which they occur, at a time when same-sex marriage and "the bromance" are foregrounded in media and as a social issue, and in a cultural climate of emphatic stress on postfeminist masculinity.

This research considers four television series originating between 2002 and 2004 that lasted at least four consecutive seasons: *The Shield* (FX 2002–2007), *Nip/Tuck* (FX 2003–2010), *Boston Legal* (ABC 2004–2008), and *Rescue Me* (FX 2004–2011). Criteria for selection were that texts be a dramatic or drama/comedy series featuring primarily male characters in the central narrative, with a recurring presence of a male-only space. Intertextual narrative analysis, a method that identifies common themes across related texts, is used. Themes considered together can illuminate social meanings, cultural norms, and shared cultural values (Cloud 1992; Condit 1989; Hoerl and Kelly 2010). This analysis is undertaken in the context of feminist inquiry, considering the intersections of gender and the expressions of hegemonic forces in popular media. Diane Prushank characterizes media's reinforcement and construction of patriarchy to be so naturalized that, in it, "men find the domination and exploitation of women and other men to be not only expected, but actually demanded" (Prusank 2007, 161). Media messages are the terrain on which hegemonic values are worked out, expressed, and reinforced, and Robert Hanke (1998) describes media influence in producing hegemonic masculinity as essential. Lana Rakow (2001) contends that media do not carry messages about culture, media *are* culture, and that the role of popular media in disseminating patriarchal ideology must be recognized before social and cultural change can occur. This intertextual narrative analysis is situated within the body of feminist media studies and within the cultural studies perspective of Stuart Hall's (1980a, 1980b, 1997) theories of media representation. Mass media create and reinforce ideologies (Hall 1980b, 1992, 1997) and mass media produce meaning and value, along with representations (and misrepresentations) of lived experience (Williams 1981, 1982).

## **Bromance and Postfeminist Masculinity**

It is productive to situate these television formations of masculinity contemporaneously within the relevant historical and cultural context of the early millennium, when same-sex marriage is in the news, bromance narratives are abundant in media, and postfeminist masculinity is dominant in the zeitgeist. Following 9/11, U.S. attitudes toward patriotism and defense shifted while being coupled with a deep sense of national insecurity (Hamad 2014;

Nettleton 2009). At the same time, several television narratives arose with central male characters who were often heroic but also deeply flawed, anxious, and conflicted (Lotz 2014; Nettleton 2009). At the same time, the foregrounding of same-sex marriage and same-sex bromances in contemporary culture (Davis 2014; DeAngelis 2014; Radner 2014) becomes an anxiety-producing force in a shifting landscape of moral and sexual identities. Colin Carman (2010, 50) characterizes film bromances as "redefining friendship onscreen at the precise time in American history when other political and cultural developments are redefining marriage." Michael DeAngelis (2014) credits bromances with offering straight men new ways to relate to each other in contained and heterosexual intimacy, but recognizes that "women in the bromance narrative are often represented misogynistically as loving yet controlling and annoying interferences." Bromances occupy interstitial space between heterosexual and homosexual, implying an intimacy that is not physically consummated and revealing the instability in heterosexuality (DeAngelis 2014). Although bromances—including the ones explored in this article—are not sexual, they, like homosexual sex between straight men, may reveal an instability heterosexual culture. Jane Ward (2015, 7) points to how "men manufacture opportunities for sexual contact with other men in a remarkably wide range of settings," such as fraternity hazing and informal military rituals in sex that may be characterized, not as sex, but as "straight-dudes-bonding" (Ward 2015, 136). Although film bromances cannot "radically critique or dismantle the heteronormative paradigms," Jenna Weinman (2014, 49) suggests they do offer new perspectives from which to view "maturity, intimacy, and citizenship, as well as the potentials and limitations of the heterosexual couple." This "new casualness about the homosocial-homoerotic divide" is explored by Judith Halberstam (2004, 308–309), who sees in the film *Dude, Where's My Car?* an unselfconscious migration from heterosexual to homosexual behavior and back again with a "heady indifference" to sexual codes (Halberstam 2004, 308–309). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985, 3) locates that divide firmly within patriarchy, as "It has apparently been impossible to imagine a form of patriarchy that was not homophobic." Sedgwick sees an "intelligible continuum" (Sedgwick 1985, 2) between family, friend, and romantic relationships among women but characterizes the same continuum among men as being "radically disrupted" (Sedgwick 1985, 2). The

male longing for friendship is rendered symptomatic of homosexuality and forces men to express desire for each other through triangulated relationships with women. Bromances can be extended into what John Clum (2002, 25) calls "crypto gay masculinity . . . the crippling belief that the asexual love of two men is far superior to the love a man might have with a woman *or* a man" [emphasis in original]. Hilary Radner (2014) points to the contemporary film bromance practice of using a female intercessory between two men as relief for homosexual tensions and a way of cementing homosocial relations. True friendship between men, according to Michael Kimmel (2008, 278), is perhaps the biggest risk a guy can take. It means being strong enough to show vulnerability, independent enough to brave social ostracism, courageous enough to trust another. A real friend reminds you that you are a man; he validates your gender identity.

Television bromances challenge hierarchies of sexual identity while presenting increasingly sympathetic representations of homosexuality, Ron Becker (2014) argues. Kelli Marshall (2011) suggests that the bromance in *Boston Legal* departs from previous bromances by offering a relationship that is "serious, poetic, and articulate" and that contemporary heterosexual men would value. The bromance trope is discursively critical in both popular conceptions of masculinity and in scholarly discussions of formations of postfeminism, presenting a decidedly postfeminist take on masculinity (Hamad 2011).

Yet, as critics have noted, an increase in the number of media representations of romantic homosexual relationships is not wholly positive when the onscreen characterizations of gay men are often sexually neutered or resemble heterosexual men (Dow 2001; Gross 2001; Walters 2001). Television shows with gay characters can reinforce traditional patriarchal attitudes and function to extend heterosexual male privilege, as Helene Shugart (2003) has asserted. When heterosexual romantic comedies are compared with homosexual ones, Debra Moddelmog (2009, 162) finds that camera techniques and plot narratives stop short of celebrating homosexual desire as legitimate, ensuring that "heterosexuality remains the privileged mode of desire and marriage, the sanctioned form of bonding." Gay characters are sometimes "neutered" and are produced as heterosexual rather than gay by being coupled and by being portrayed

without eroticism. Coupling domesticates sexual beings into "tame" and proper citizens, and helps them appear "appropriately gendered" (Ingraham 1999, 18). Portraying gay characters as asexual also diminishes their transgressive threat. They may be funny, friendly, catty, and out, but they are rarely horizontal and sexually intimate (Keller and Glass 1998; Shugart 2003). James Keller and William Glass (1998, 139) conclude that "the neutering of gay men is the film-makers' solution to the problem of heterosexual revulsion to homosexual passion."

In this way, even progressive representations can reinscribe traditional patriarchal roles, leaving hegemonic masculinity unthreatened. In her examination of television news stories about stay-at-home dads, Mary Vavrus (2002) finds reinforcement of the nuclear, heterosexual family imbedded in the apparent challenge to traditional masculine domestic roles.

Placing an analysis of gendered territories in contemporary television within the context of postfeminism may assist in revealing the presence of assumptions that work to narrow and dismiss feminist agendas. Rosalind Gill (2007) defines postfeminism as a sensibility formed in response to feminism, and made up of interrelated themes linked to contemporary neoliberalism, including self-surveillance and self-discipline, a shift from objectification to subjectification, and an emphasis on individualism and empowerment. Feminist media scholars (Gill 2007, 2014; Hamad 2011; Levine 2001, 2008; McRobbie 2007; Negra 2009; Projansky 2001, 2007; Rodino-Colocino 2012; Tasker and Negra 2007; Vavrus 2002) critique postfeminism as problematic in its erasure of feminism and its inference that current cultural conditions follow feminist principles and are acceptable to feminists. Negra (2009, 6) argues that "postfeminism retracts the egalitarian principles of feminism" and is "marked by an idealization of traditionalist femininities, a habit of criminalizing the female professional, and powerful entrancing visions of perfected female bodies and sumptuous domestic scenes" (Negra 2009, 152). Vavrus (2002, 9–10) finds the postfeminist media perspective so ubiquitous that "even a brief consideration of the possible benefits of feminism" rarely appears, yet it does suggest "a more complex relationship between culture, politics, and feminism than the more familiar framing concept of 'backlash' allows" (Tasker and Negra 2007, 1). Typologies of postfeminist

masculinity also assume feminism is “over,” and media representations often conflate willingness to change a diaper or cry over a broken heart with ideological transformation and the obliteration of patriarchy. Postfeminist male characters are often characterized in television as “troubled, bumbling, hypochondriarchal losers . . . unlikely ideological warriors” (Gill 2014) or compassionate, complicated, but significantly flawed (Lotz 2014). This article aims to make productive contributions to both feminist politics and feminist media studies with nuanced analysis of the gendered environments present in contemporary television dramas, considering them in light of the tensions arising in this postfeminist, masculinist moment.

## **Space and Gender**

Architecture configures aesthetics and usage in ways that influence social interaction and enforce cultural codes, also shaping ideas of masculinity and femininity (Sanders 1996a, 1996b). Joel Sanders (1996b, 83) argues that interior spaces can “quietly participate in the manufacturing of male as well as female identities” while Amanda Lotz pinpoints the important narrative function of all-male spaces on television, which provide locations where male characters can try “to work out contemporary expectations of masculinity” (116). Doreen Massey (1994, 178) critiques the relationship between place and gender, noting that feminist geographers readily recognize that gender relations are affected by architecture, and architecture plays a role in gendering spatial use. Limiting women’s mobility is a “crucial means of subordination” (Massey 1994, 179):

Space and place are important in the construction of gender relations and in struggles to change them. From the symbolic meaning of spaces/places and the clearly gendered messages which they transmit, to straightforward exclusion by violence, spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the way in which gender is constructed and understood. (Massey 1994, 179)

Nancy Hartsock (1983) contends that the gendered nature of personality is in part due to the gendered construction of the different physical worlds of men and women. Cindi Katz and Janice Monk



scrutinize the limited spatial experiences of girls compared with boys and analyze how constrained access to certain environments affects women and society negatively (Katz and Monk 1993, 267). Recognition of the power relationships inherent in the arrangement and design of space may have come slowly to feminist scholars, Leslie Weisman argues, because female architects were a rarity for so many years. She positions the claiming and occupying of environments as a political act communicating power relations and social status. Architectural configurations may appear to be naturalized, inactive, and unimportant to the visibility and equality of women, but can, in fact, reflect and enforce the dominance of some groups and the subordination of others (Weisman 1992). Public and private terrain reflects and anchors social order, and spatial segregation—such as men's clubs that bar women—imposes hierarchies (Hayden 1997). Gwendolyn Wright (1983, xvii) argues that "Slavery and racism, industrial exploitation, the segregation of classes, and a limited role for women have found expression in American patterns of residential architecture." Among suburban homes of the 1950s and 1960s, Mary Beth Haralovich (1989, 66) finds that "domestic architecture was designed to display class attributes and reinforce gender-specific functions of domestic space." Kimmel (2006) contends that fraternal organizations played an historic role in offering men solace from a threatening world. Exclusively male societies reveal that men define their gender identity as primarily "other than" female; boundaries are enforced through cultural practices, shaming women, and shaming men who allow women access. When women do transgress onto gendered ground, they are sometimes punished. In 1995, the Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina, admitted its first female cadet. Male cadets abused and harassed her until she left the school. Susan Faludi (1999, 115) interviewed cadets who explained their attraction to the male-only space of the Citadel as a haven from changes in the world that "brought women into every aspect of public life."

Steven Cohan (1996) characterizes the "bachelor pad" in the Rock Hudson/Doris Day film *Pillow Talk* as a den of "space-age" technology and furnishings designed to lure and trap women. Push buttons caused lights to dim, music to play, and a bed to drop out of the wall. The space collaborated in seducing the female and establishing the male as dominant and predatory—and it revealed, Cohan argues, "the culture's deepest anxieties about the stability,

coherence, and normality of American maleness, underscoring the homophobia that structured the cultural meaning of 'masculinity' as the opposite of 'femininity'" (Cohan 1996, 28). Viewers can virtually "inhabit" these masculine spaces, along with male characters, and in a way, participate in boys' club membership. Lance Strate (1992, 87) suggests beer advertisements provide a virtual version of hanging out with the guys. The idea that viewers "participate" in male-only televised environments is advanced by Ann Johnson (2007, 166), who argues that the blatant sexism in *The Man Show* (1999-2004), a Comedy Central talk show including female erotic dancers, scantily dressed women jumping on trampolines, and attacks on powerful women, may help viewers feel they, too, are protesting "an imagined dominant female authority."

This article focuses on gendered spaces in four specific television narratives and does not aim to address male-only spaces in cinema or other visual media. However, the ways in which televisual and cinematic formats differ, particularly how the televisual format defines and participates in the limitation and demarcation of space, is productive to consider. Cinema's affinity for presenting broad vistas and wide horizons contrasts with television's smaller screen focus on interpersonal communication and interiors (Allen and Hill 2003). Televisual interior spaces can appear convincingly legitimate. The 1959-1961 television program *Playboy's Penthouse* used a studio set that was appeared to be Hugh Hefner's apartment. Ethan Thompson (2008) argues that because the racially integrated cast in a studio looked as if a racially integrated party was occurring in a private apartment, syndication in the racially segregated southern states was stifled. In the intimate televisual format, interior spaces repeatedly viewed on the small screen in the private space of the living room of the viewer acquire cumulative power and impart an immersive experience to the viewer. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill (2003, 106) argue that "The weekly, sometimes daily reproduction of intimate spaces on television can give them a greater sense of familiarity than even the spaces of our much more immediate, non-televisual environments." In this way, television narratives set in dramatically imagined male-only spaces in television studios can acquire the patina of being existent in reality, and behaviors occurring in those televisual spaces can be seen by viewers as normalized and commonplace.

During the same period as these male-centered television series and their boys' club narratives flourished, homosocial segregation as a social practice was extended into the incarnation of the "man cave"—a male-only room in a home otherwise shared with a partner and/or a family. Although the series *Man Caves*, featuring the design and building of extraordinary dens and rec rooms, was launched on the DIY network (Hamilton et al. 2007 to present), the popular press ran articles on men "staking out personal space at home" (Jefferson 2007) trumpeting "man land: more homes have a room just for him, and you'll know it when you see it" (Belanger 2005). Writing about "where men hide," James Twitchell (2006, 13) examined deer camps, garages, and locker rooms "where certain rules are held in abeyance and others rigorously invoked":

Other interesting transformations happen when men (or the individual man) go into the separation mode . . . language quickly turns raunchy when men get in groups, social hierarchy is supercharged, alcohol is often the necessary lubricant to conversation, uniforms may get donned, initiation rituals (when extreme: hazing) get invoked, urination becomes celebrated, gambling often becomes a pastime, and secrecy is mandated. (Twitchell 2006, 13)

The existence and rising popularity of man caves at the same time that boys' clubs become commonplace on male-centered television demonstrates multiple levels of normalization and validation for segregated male space.

### *Inside the Boys' Clubs*

In her examination of films in which an apartment functions as more than a set but also drives narrative, Pamela Wojcik considers the intersections of domestic spatial configuration, gender, and culture. The imagined filmic apartment is also a simultaneous imagining of the masculinities of the characters who work and operate inside the space. These apartments reveal masculinity "as under constant pressure, vulnerable to intrusion, and marked by feminine and queer influences . . . tenuous, contingent, and mobile" (Wojcik 2010, 138). Apartments, Wojcik (2010, 179) argues, allow tenants to "inhabit a new temporality of contingency and encounter . . . [and] play with identities and roles, especially sexual experimentation." In similar

fashion, the boys' club spaces of these four television programs participate in shaping narrative plot arcs and are also formative in interpreting and framing the masculinities and behaviors they house.

In *Rescue Me*, the boys' club is the firehouse of a group of New York City firefighters. The kitchen is where problems are solved as they are in traditional family sitcoms, by sitting around the table arguing, laughing, fighting, and teasing. Many scenes are set here, often with a firefighter preparing a meal in the background and another reading the paper, like a parody of Ward and June in *Leave It To Beaver*. But this kitchen has no curtains or homey touches; surfaces are unadorned and utilitarian. Walls are concrete block and hung with newsy bulletin boards, the table is covered with playing cards and old magazines, chairs are mismatched, and lighting is industrial and fluorescent. Scenes are also set in the garage, where firefighters wash trucks and organize gear. When a wife or girlfriend visits, she stands outside the open garage door as if a gender line is drawn on the concrete, and her husband steps out of the building to speak to her. Inside the firehouse, the men call each other "brother" and conversations are far-ranging and intensely personal, touching on topics including addiction, sexual dysfunction, and parenting.

Like the firehouse, the male-only space in *The Shield* is a first-responder headquarters designed for functionality that accommodates homosociality. Only elite Strike Team cops are allowed inside a special police station room called "The Clubhouse" (*The Shield* 2002, episode 2). When other police officers—and even their bosses—want to speak to a Strike Team member, they must knock on the locked door of the clubhouse to request entry. Although this room is a workplace, there is a poker table in the center of the room, sporting gear piled in the corner, and a battered sofa hugging a wall covered in tacky paneling. The Clubhouse blurs boundaries between work and play, and imbricates masculinity with the responsibilities of being a special team police officer. The men in the Clubhouse dress alike in tight jeans, black jackets, and wrap-around shades, and display tattoos. They speak like the Three Musketeers, minus the elegant diction: "We survive it together or not at all" (*The Shield* 2005, episode 52), "I've got your back, you've got mine" (*The Shield* 2003, episode 17), "Tell you what—next time, you save my ass" (*The Shield* 2003, episode 17). Vic Mackey, head of the team, is father figure to his "boys," delivering

lectures about sticking together and putting the “family” of male team members first (*The Shield* 2004, episode 30).

### *A less rough-hewn version of a male-only family and boys' club exists in Nip/Tuck.*

Two plastic surgeons in practice together, Christian Troy and Sean McNamara, twin heads of a family that includes children fathered by each of them, practice medicine side-by-side, and operate a medical practice in an office that looks like a cross between the Rock Hudson bachelor pad Cohan (1996) examines and a trendy bar. Here, waiting rooms are edgy and contemporary, furniture is angular and uncomfortable looking, and lighting is indirect and subdued. When interviewing patients, the surgeons sit shoulder-to-shoulder in matching high-tech chairs on the same side of a desk in a room lit only by a lava lamp and an aquarium; examining a patient closely would require a flashlight. Interrogating the patient like twin inquisitors, they ask, “What don't you like about yourself?” elevating self-loathing to a medical condition. Christian and Sean function as one doctor, examining and operating on patients together. Most patients are women, and surgeries appear as a series of threesomes, the two men poking and prodding a still, constrained female body. They also share women romantically; Christian fathered the son Sean raises as his own, and they date the same women. Series creator Murphy says, “Christian and Sean will always choose each other over everyone else” (*Nip/Tuck* 2003–2010).

The intense bromantic (if not romantic) bonding between male characters extends to matrimony in *Boston Legal*. A balcony at the skyscraper office of the Crane, Poole & Schmidt law firm is the boys' club. Although the office includes many lawyers, the only characters who appear on the balcony are Denny Crane, a founding partner slowly losing his cognitive capacity to Alzheimer's, and Alan Shore, a younger attorney. As if in a traditional men's club, the pair occupy symmetrically placed, plastic armchairs, smoking cigars and drinking. Furnishings are twinned everywhere: identical potted shrubberies, balustrade spheres, windows. The pair's conversations at day's end are philosophical, chatty, and supportive; they confess their platonic love for each other and un-self-consciously hold hands. They have asexual

sleepovers, wear matching outfits, and speak tenderly to each other. Denny tells Alan, "we may not have sex, but ours is an affair of the heart" (*Boston Legal* 2008b, episode 92).

In these four series, the relationships between male characters supersede and trump relationships with romantic partners and family at home. Male characters display a comfort in and ownership of their boys' club workspaces that is not consistently evident in scenes set in their homes. The homosocial bonds are intense and the spaces in which these bonds are fostered are fiercely guarded. Intertextual narrative analysis of these four series yields two unifying narrative themes: the rigid enforcement of the gender boundaries of the boys' clubs, and the intensity of the bromances sheltered there.

## **Themes: Enforced Boundaries and Bromance**

In two of the programs, female incursion into male space is treated with direct animosity. In *Rescue Me*, a female firefighter is briefly allowed inside the firehouse. When the chief breaks it to the crew that a woman will soon join the station, the firefighters are aghast. "Over. My. Dead. Body," says Lou. "Having a woman in the firehouse. It—it's destructive. It's, it's disruptive. I mean, look, we got a dynamic going on here, you can't mess with that" (*Rescue Me* 2004b, episode 9). The crew plan to "freeze her out" until she quits, but when Laura arrives in a midriff-baring top and tight, low-slung jeans, several firefighters volunteer to break the silence and "pretend" to be her friend. Much is made of the difference between the crew's male bodies and Laura's female one. Before she arrives, there is discussion of whether her female body will be able to do the work; once they see her body, the crew treats her as a sexual object. She bends over to fetch food from the refrigerator, and as the men gaze but pretend to discuss football, Laura says, without turning around,

I know you guys are talking about my tits and my ass. Just in case you were wondering, I'm a 34 C cup. My nipples are slightly larger than average and stand up like top hats when aroused. My ass is as tight as a snare drum and still soft to the touch. Any other questions?

Then she makes Tommy a sandwich that he says is the best he has ever had (*Rescue Me* 2004c, episode 11). Although this speech could be construed as a manifestation of agency on Laura's part, it also plays directly into the fantasies of her male co-workers. Sassy but still subservient, she serves them food after making comments that, at least metaphorically, disrobe her. She may be in the workplace, but she is established as a sexual object, at home in the kitchen. Later on, Tommy tells Laura, "Let me tell you something, sister. You serve two purposes in this house. You can give me a blow job or make me a sandwich" (*Rescue Me* 2004c, episode 11). Laura assists in a symbolic self-violation: she offers up her body for viewing, and fills in the details the men cannot see for themselves with her own commentary that lays her naked before them. Ultimately, Laura fails on the job—she is too weak to open a heavy door (how did she pass training?) and does not have the stamina to keep up with the men while climbing staircases and hauling heavy gear. No female masculinity here—masculinity and male bodies are for men only, as is the firehouse, by extension. Eventually, Laura earns respect from the men by treating victims with sensitivity—an only slightly tweaked version of a traditional female role. Predictably, she strikes up a romance with a firefighter, and when it goes bad, she leaves the firehouse and the series. In attempting to use her own physical strength and cunning to rescue others, Laura has overreached her heteronormative role.

In *The Shield*, the male-only space is violated when Shane takes a girlfriend, Mara. Members of the Strike Team, led by Vic, walk through the clubhouse door and are startled to find Shane and Mara embracing on the sofa. Mara converses with an embarrassed Shane, the group exchange mocking glances, and Vic calls Shane "lover" and says he is "whipped." When Shane tells Mara "I love you" on the phone, Lem gives Shane a look so shaming that Shane responds with "blow me" (*The Shield* 2004, episode 30). Mara tries to enter the clubhouse later, but is quickly ejected by Vic who gets nose-to-nose with her, backs her out the door, and orders her to "stop whining in my face" (*The Shield* 2004, episode 30). Mara is seen as a significant threat to the male pack and to the integrity of the male space. Both Laura and Mara are desirable enough for one male "traitor" to have sex with them, and both are disciplined and harassed for transgressing into male space.

In the other two programs, female incursion into male space is resolved by the women being rendered “not women” or by being transmuted from professional to sexual beings, as was *Rescue Me*'s Laura. In *Boston Legal*, the boys' club balcony is a site for misogyny and reinscribing the powerful law partner Shirley Schmidt, back into a traditional female role. In the office, Shirley is in control and in charge. On the balcony, she becomes an object of desire shared by both men. Denny was once her lover, Alan would like to be her lover, and Denny acts as gatekeeper to Shirley, denying Alan access and privileging the male bond over the heterosexual one. In *Nip/Tuck*, women transgress into male-only space primarily as patients—as inert, anesthetized, silent, draped female bodies being opened, reshaped, and reformed by men. Liz, the anesthesiologist, is a lesbian, occupying a literal “no man's land” between heterosexual male and female, and therefore off-limits as a sexual partner. Women in the clubhouse are dealt with by making them into “not women”—either unconscious or lesbian—or by making them into “not colleagues” by sleeping with them. The boundaries of boys' clubs are defended by members who abandon their customarily charming and good-natured mannerisms and display aggression and anger at the presence of a female. Any intruding woman is made into a sexual partner or treated like a potential one, threatened and physically intimidated, and blocked from entering the male domain.

Inside these exclusionary, male-only spaces, a second theme can be observed: that of intense, asexual bromances that foreclose possibilities for romantic relationships with either sex. In *Rescue Me*, a firefighter commits suicide the day after retirement because he misses seeing his family every day—his “other family” of men (*Rescue Me* 2004a, episode 1). An ongoing, palpable tension exists between characters' work and home “families.” In *The Shield*, the romance and marriage of Shane and Mara is treated as a rupture. Mara is painted as a scheming threat, and is resented and mistrusted by the rest of the men. Shane must repeatedly choose between his “boys” and his wife, and when he chooses his wife, it is the beginning of the end of the entire team. In *Nip/Tuck*, Sean and Christian's bromance positions asexual homosocial love as superior to any other. After a fistfight over a woman, Sean hugs Christian and weeps, “I loved you most” (*Nip/Tuck* 2004, episode 21). When Christian is left crying at the altar after an aborted wedding ceremony, Sean promises that the two men



will remain partners, Christian asks if Sean means it, and Sean answers, "I do" (*Nip/Tuck* 2005, episode 39). *Nip/Tuck* plays with the idea of desire and romance between the men but protects heterosexuality by never crossing the line; *Boston Legal* marries the men off but makes it clear that Alan marries the increasingly ill Denny to be his caretaker and heir, and enforces heterosexuality with the men's sexual escapades with women.

The two unifying narrative elements found in these four television programs—the imposed boundaries against women in boys' clubs, and the intense bromance relationships that foreclose romantic relationships—are buttressed by the presence and configuration of gendered televisual terrain. The firehouse, the balcony, the medical office, and the police clubhouse offer protected, bounded zones that shelter misogynist ideology and behavior. In these imagined architectures, the exclusion of females is harshly and directly enforced, and homosocial bonding is elevated to the level of family and couplehood while romantic bonding (both hetero and homosexual) is dismissed.

Most importantly, these televisual rooms and buildings reproduce male-only territory in the spaces in which they are viewed, bringing particular constructions of masculinity and femininity home and helping to establish workplace patriarchy as commonplace, reasonable, and benign. Television's boys' clubs protect and legitimate homosocial segregation by enclosing it in physical walls that become ideologically impermeable to women. Although such locations offer men privacy in which to explore progressive permutations of masculinity, they also imply that such exploration must occur without the participation of women. Representing publically funded civic services such as firefighting and policing as sites for sheltering male privilege and gendered practices is deeply problematic and troubling, and appears as a reinscription of the public/private spheres gender delineation. The unchallenged male claims to these spaces reveal assumptions about power relations, status, work hierarchies, and ownership of property, services, and ideas. In addition, the importance given to defending the space from female incursion dichotomizes men and women as colleagues in the workplace, and the forceful and defensive rejection of women in these enclaves allows for uncritical expression of retrograde, sexist attitudes and harassing behaviors.

Rendering boys' clubs as aesthetically fashionable, as in *Nip/Tuck* and *Boston Legal*, reifies sexism as desirable, hardly outdated, and still current. Depicting them as organized but rough-edged, as in *Rescue Me* and *The Shield*, suggests a "masculine" alternative to heterosexual domesticity that forcibly rejects "feminine" aesthetic ideals. The frequent appearance and the narrative importance in these series of interior environments devoted entirely to men naturalizes them, making them appear appropriate and even ubiquitous. The boys' clubs of these male-centered media narratives are televisual incarnations of environments in which problematic ideologies are protected and celebrated, sexist attitudes are deeply entrenched, and patriarchal beliefs and behaviors legitimized. Giving these ideologies a literal home, the boys' clubs make these ideologies appear to be worth housing. Awarding them the dignity of protected and well-designed space dignifies patriarchy and wraps it in a postfeminist pretense of equality and equity.

## **Acknowledgements**

The author thanks the anonymous reviewers and Dr. Vicki Mayer for comments and suggestions that strengthened and focused this work. Thanks go to Dr. Steven Goldzwig and the Diederich College Initiative for the Study of Communication, Values, Ethics, and Social Justice, and to the Marquette University Gender Resource Center, for funding initial research in this work.

Author's Note I am the sole author of this work.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## **References**

- Allen Robert C., Hill Annette. 2003. *The Television Studies Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Becker Ron. 2014. "Becoming Bromosexual: Straight Men, Gay Men, and Male Bonding on U.S. TV." In *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*, edited by DeAngelis Michael, 233–54. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

- Belanger Leigh. 2005. "Man Land: More Homes Have a Room Just for Him, and You'll Know It When You See It." *The Boston Globe*, February 3. [http://www.boston.com/yourlife/home/articles/2005/02/03/man\\_land/?page=full](http://www.boston.com/yourlife/home/articles/2005/02/03/man_land/?page=full).
- Carman Colin. 2010. "'Bromance' Flix and the State of Dudedom." *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 17 (1): 50.
- Cloud Dana L. 1992. "The Limits of Interpretation: Ambivalence and Stereotype in *Spenser: For Hire*." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 9 (4): 311–24.
- Clum John M. 2002. "He's All Man": Learning Masculinity, Gayness, and Love from American Movies. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cohan Steven. 1996. "So Functional for Its Purposes: Rock Hudson's Bachelor Apartment in *Pillow Talk*." In *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity*, edited by Sanders Joel, 28–41. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Condit Celeste Michelle. 1989. "The Rhetorical Limits of Polysemy." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6 (2): 103–322.
- Davis Nick. 2014. "I Love You, Hombre: Y tu mamá también as Border-Crossing Bromance." In *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*, edited by DeAngelis Michael, 109–38. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- DeAngelis Michael. 2014. "Introduction." In *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*, edited by DeAngelis Michael, 1–28. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Dow Bonnie J. 2001. "Ellen, Television, and the Politics of Gay and Lesbian Visibility." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18 (2): 123–40.
- Faludi Susan. 1999. *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*. New York: W. Morrow.
- Gill Rosalind. 2007. "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10 (2): 147–66. Abstract
- Gill Rosalind. 2014. "Powerful Women, Vulnerable Men and Postfeminist Masculinity in Men's Popular Fiction." *Gender & Language* 8 (2): 185–204.
- Gross Larry P. 2001. *Up from Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Halberstam Judith. 2004. "Dude, Where's My Gender? Or, Is There Life on Uranus?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10 (2): 308–12.
- Hall Stuart. 1980a. "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms." *Media, Culture & Society* 2 (1): 57–72. Abstract

- Hall Stuart. 1980b. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, edited by Hall Stuart, Hobson Dorothy, Lowe Andrew, Willis Paul, 128-38. London: Hutchinson.
- Hall Stuart. 1992. "Race, Culture, and Communications: Looking Backward and Forward at Cultural Studies." *Rethinking Marxism* 5 (1): 10-18.
- Hall Stuart ed. 1997. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Hamad Hannah. 2011. "'My Wife Calls Him My Boyfriend': Gary Barlow and Robbie Williams' Reconciliatory Bromance." *Flow: A Critical Forum on Television and Media Culture* 13 (Sept).  
<http://flowtv.org/2011/02/my-wife-calls-him-my-boyfriend/>.
- Hamad Hannah. 2014. *Postfeminism and Paternity in Contemporary U.S. Film: Framing Fatherhood*. New York: Routledge.
- Hanke Robert. 1998. "Theorizing Masculinity with/in the Media." *Communication Theory* 8 (2): 183-203.
- Haralovich Mary Beth. 1989. "Sitcoms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s Homemaker." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 11 (1): 61-83.
- Hartsock Nancy. 1983. "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism." In *Discovering Reality*, edited by Harding Sandra G., Hintikka Merrill B., 283-310. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- Hayden Dolores. 1997. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Hoerl Kristen, Kelly Casey Ryan. 2010. "The Post-nuclear Family and the Depoliticization of Unplanned Pregnancy in *Knocked Up*, *Juno*, and *Waitress*." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 7 (4): 360-80.
- Ingraham Chrys. 1999. *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Jefferson Elana Ashanti. 2007. "Men Are Staking Out Personal Space at Home." *Chicago Tribune*, June 3.  
[http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2007-06-03/news/0705311645\\_1\\_space-women-s-movement-manly](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2007-06-03/news/0705311645_1_space-women-s-movement-manly).
- Johnson Ann. 2007. "The Subtleties of Blatant Sexism." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4 (2): 166-83.
- Katz Cindi, Monk Janice, eds. 1993. *Full Circles: Geographies of Women over the Life Course*. New York: Routledge.
- Keller James, Glass William. 1998. "In & Out: Self-Referentiality and Hollywood's 'Queer' Politics." *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 26 (3): 136-43.

- Kimmel Michael S. 2006. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kimmel Michael S. 2008. *Guyland*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Levine Elana. 2001. "Toward a Paradigm for Media Production Research: Behind the Scenes at General Hospital." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18 (2): 66–82.
- Levine Elana. 2008. "Remaking *Charlie's Angels*: The Construction of Post-feminist Hegemony." *Feminist Media Studies* 8 (4): 375–89.
- Lotz Amanda D. 2014. *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the 21st Century*. New York: New York University Press.
- Marshall Kelli. 2011. "Bromance and the Boys of Boston Legal." *Flow: A Critical Forum on Television and Media Culture* Feb. <http://flowtv.org/2011/01/bromance-and-boston-legal/>.
- Massey Doreen B. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- McRobbie Angela. 2007. "Postfeminism and Popular Culture: Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime." In *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, edited by Tasker Yvonne, Negra Diane, 27–39. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Moddelmog Debra A. 2009. "Can Romantic Comedy Be Gay? Hollywood Romance, Citizenship, and Same-Sex Marriage Panic." *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 36 (4): 162–73.
- Negra Diane. 2009. *What A Girl Wants? Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism*. London: Routledge.
- Nettleton Pamela Hill. 2009. "Rescuing Men: The New Television Masculinity in *Rescue Me*, *Nip/Tuck*, *The Shield*, *Boston Legal*, & *Dexter*." (Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2009). <http://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299//57963x>.
- Projansky Sarah. 2001. *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Post-feminist Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Projansky Sarah. 2007. "Mass Magazine Cover Girls: Some Reflections on Postfeminist Girls and Postfeminism's Daughters." In *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, edited by Tasker Yvonne, Negra Diane, 40–72. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Prusank Diane T. 2007. "Masculinities in Teen Magazines: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 15 (2): 160–77.
- Radner Hilary. 2014. "Grumpy Old Men: 'Bros before Hos.'" In *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*, edited by DeAngelis Michael, 52–78. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

- Rakow Lana F. 2001. "Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture: Giving Patriarchy Its Due." In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, edited by Storey John, 275–91. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Rodino-Colocino Michelle. 2012. "Man up, Woman down: Mama Grizzlies and Anti-feminist Feminism during the Year of the (Conservative) Woman and beyond." *Women & Language* 35 (1): 79–95.
- Sanders Joel. 1996a. "Introduction." In *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity*, edited by Sanders Joel, 11–25. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Sanders Joel. 1996b. "Male Space." *Architecture* 85 (6): 77–83.
- Sedgwick Eve Kosofsky. 1985. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Shugart Helene A. 2003. "Reinventing Privilege: The New (Gay) Man in Contemporary Popular Media." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 (1): 67–91.
- Strate Lance. 1992. "Beer Commercials: A Manual on Masculinity." In *Men, Masculinity, and the Media*, edited by Craig Steve, 78–92. London: Sage.
- Tasker Yvonne, Negra Diane. 2007. "Introduction: Feminist Politics and Postfeminist Culture." In *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, edited by Tasker Yvonne, Negra Diane, 1–26. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Thompson Ethan. 2008. "The Parodic Sensibility and the Sophisticated Gaze: Masculinity and Taste in *Playboy's Penthouse*." *Television & New Media* 9 (4): 284–304. Abstract
- Twitchell James B. 2006. *Where Men Hide*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Vavrus Mary Douglas. 2002. "Domesticating Patriarchy: Hegemonic Masculinity and Television's 'Mr. Mom.'" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19 (3): 352–73.
- Walters Suzanna Danuta. 2001. *All the Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ward Jane. 2015. *Not Gay: Sex between Straight White Men*. New York: New York University Press.
- Weinman Jenna. 2014. "Second Bananas and Gay Chicken: Bromancing the Rom-Com in the Fifties and Now." In *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*, edited by DeAngelis Michael, 29–51. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Weisman Leslie. 1992. *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

- Williams Raymond. 1981. *Culture and Materialism*. New York: Schocken.
- Williams Raymond. 1982. *The Sociology of Culture*. New York: Schocken.
- Wojcik Pamela Robertson. 2010. *The Apartment Plot: Urban Living in American Film and Popular Culture, 1945 to 1975*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Wright Gwendolyn. 1983. *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*. New York: Random House.