

HETERONORMATIVITY VERSUS HOMOSEXUAL REPRESENTATIONS: THE LACKING TRADITIONAL RHETORIC OF MEDIA NARRATIVES IN FAMILY GUY

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Abstract

Mainstream media has, since its inception, proved itself a vehicle for the normalisation of regressive and hegemonic ideologies in society. Media merely assumes a façade of tolerance, inclusion, and innocence to propagate ideals that are inherently queerphobic. Most mainstream media narratives invariably uphold the 'traditional' rhetoric of heteronormativity. Homophobic tendencies are not innate in humans; they are shaped by cultural influences, especially in the form of television. Media narratives have induced homophobic tendencies in its consumers through a constant exaltation of 'hegemonic masculinity'. This aggravates the insecurities of the average male heterosexual viewer, pushing them towards aggression or bullying to assert their masculinity. This paper is an exploration of how the adult animated satirical sitcom *Family Guy* exposes the hypocrisy of media and subsequently subverts the discriminatory ideologies preached within the framework of mainstream representations. Such new wave sitcoms achieve a subversion of deep-rooted gender discrimination through the employment of various language strategies like irony, exaggeration, allusion, polysemy, hyper stereotyping etc. This paper focuses on a detailed study of how the traditional heteronormativity is undermined by discourses on homosexuality. Season Four of *Family Guy* to substantiate the aforementioned observations.

Keywords: Hegemonic ideologies, heteronormative, Homosexuality, Mainstream media, Language strategies.

Introduction

The premise of storytelling in media has, for ages, been manipulated to frame the ideological sympathies of its viewers. Studies have identified the surprising extent of the ascendancy media has over its consumers. Media, through its tactful endorsement of hegemonic ideals, has assumed authoritative power over social and systemic constructions of various identities. The employment of culturally charged discourses that spark the interests of an extensive conglomeration of audiences has fuelled media's immense popularity and has ensured it a prominent position in functioning societies. The crux of such wide acclaim lies in its ability to feed the voyeuristic fetishes of viewers even from the ostensible safety and comfort of their living rooms. However, television swarms with problematic rhetoric that serves to reinforce conservative and regressive ideologies in a subtle and covert manner. The link between media language and gender discrimination has been historically proven. However, a new-wave adult animated sitcom experience proves that language can not only oppress but also liberate. Modern day American sitcoms like *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, *Bob's Burgers*, *Rick and Morty*, *South Park*, *Beavis and Butthead*, *King of the Hill*, and *BoJack Horseman* attempt to subvert the discrete linguistic discrimination that is

pervasive in mainstream media discursive. Such a blatant exposure of media hypocrisy is achieved through specific language strategies like irony, exaggeration, allusion, polysemy, and hyper stereotyping that will be discussed in the course of this paper. The purpose of this study is a detailed exploration of how societal notions of homophobia, hegemonic masculinity, and hetero normativity are subverted through Season Four of *Family Guy*. The portrayals of homosexuality in the series will be analysed using the Content Analysis methodology in this article. The goal of the present study is to analyse how *Family Guy* brings to light the hetero normativity of mainstream media representations through effective employment of language strategies.

Literature Review

The queer community and its representations have been frequently researched through analyses of history, politics and popular culture. Various studies have pinpointed mainstream media as being the chief information provider and social model. Rimal, Chung and Dhungana (2015), through their self-report survey study, reached the conclusion that both social contexts and media exposure are equally critical in shaping an individual's outlook. On a similar note, Gehrau, Bruggemann and Handrup (2016), find out through their research, that media is a powerful vehicle for inspiring and influencing audiences, including young adults. The societal, political and cultural conditions of sexual minorities have been explored in the works of Ruth Vanita (2005) and Susan Stryker (2008). Rebecca Elizabeth Krelko (2013) in her thesis makes landmark observations about homophobia and humor in new-wave sitcoms like *Family Guy*. However, she classifies the sitcom under numerous other problematic mainstream narratives in prevalence. This study attempts to bridge a gap in research by focusing on the revolutionary potential of the sitcom *Family Guy* in subverting the regressive tendencies of other media narratives.

Homosexual representations in *Family Guy* are assessed through a study of language strategies like irony, exaggeration, allusion, polysemy and hyper stereotyping that have been employed in the media text. Through a detailed study of episodes ten, thirteen, sixteen, nineteen, twenty-three, twenty-four and twenty-five of *Family Guy* Season Four, this paper explores how new wave sitcoms subvert the stereotypical codes set by mainstream television. The competition among various masculinities to attain hegemonic status, thus birthing homophobia and queerphobia in society, has also been looked into. A queer counter-culture has been exalted as exhibiting the potential to deconstruct the hetero normativity of media and other representations. Antonio Gramsci's theory of Cultural hegemony and Levi Strauss' Theory of Binary Opposites are crucial in providing a theoretical framework in which to situate this media text. The review of literature in this article also includes sections titled- Queer Sensibilities in Visual Media, A Discussion and Analysis of Homosexual Representations in *Family Guy*, Title Song, Jungle Love, Identifying the Homosexual, Competition of Masculinities, Masculinity vs. Femininity, John Herbert, Queer Counter Culture and Bruce Straightman.

Methodology

Contemporary populations have become increasingly dependent on visual media to convey cultures and even to shape identities. Consequently, media narratives should not be dismissed as being insignificant or harmless. Rigid gender dichotomies and toxic notions of masculinity propagated through media have the potential to inculcate homophobia and queerphobia into society. A critical analysis of media representations is the need of the hour. Only through a rigorous and systematic evaluation of media discourses, can societal inequalities be exposed and thereby overturned.

The adult animated sitcom *Family Guy* becomes remarkably pertinent to this study because it blatantly exposes, ridicules and subverts the regressive notions endorsed by mainstream media. The show reaches 6.3 million households each week and undoubtedly asserts a significant influence over its viewers. *Family Guy*'s wide critical acclaim and reception, therefore, warrants the need to examine its contents. This study employs a rigorous Content Analysis of the show to examine how language techniques are utilized to subvert the discriminatory tendencies of mainstream media. Content Analysis is a methodology adopted by researchers to locate, identify and analyse

certain words, themes or concepts from qualitative texts. This method helps in quantifying concepts like bias and partiality within the language of media texts under examination. Quantitative inferences can thus be formulated about the messages propagated through the samples under study. Content Analysis has been defined as, “Any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages.” (Holsti, 1968). Content Analysis has been chosen as the methodology for this research taking into consideration its reliability and efficiency. This method allows cultural texts to be critically examined not merely for their quantitative value, but also for their qualitative merits. Consequently, the results of such analyses can be applied to larger cultural contexts.

The Fourth season of *Family Guy* was chosen in order to analyse the language strategies used for resistance in the series. This sample was deemed best for study owing to its immense popularity and its varied homosexual representations. Moreover, this season was the first to air on Fox after the controversial cancellation of the show in 2002. Season Four still remains the most watched one among the show’s nineteen seasons and it also contains the greatest number of episodes dealing with specific incidents of homophobia that is relevant to the present study. All thirty episodes from Season Four were put through a rigorous study to decode their homosexual representations. Of these only seven episodes were found to be most suitable for the present research. The episodes thus selected are *Brian Sings and Swings* (Season 4, Episode 19), *Jungle Love* (Season 4, Episode 13), *You May Now...Uh...Kiss the Guy who Receives* (Season 4, Episode 25), *Model Misbehaviour* (Season 4, Episode 10), *The Courtship of Stewie’s Father* (Season 4, Episode 16), *Peterotica* (Season 4, Episode 24) and *Deep Throats* (Season 4, Episode 23). These episodes were coded to analyse *Family Guy*’s utilization of language strategies like irony, exaggeration, allusion, polysemy, hyper stereotyping etc. to facilitate a subversion of mainstream media discourses. An episode was coded as subverting homophobic media representations if it contained any of the following: The introduction of queer vocabularies or aesthetics like ‘Camp’ and ‘Drag’ into a staunchly heterosexual realm; hyper stereotypical representation of a homosexual male; Verbal exaltation of hetero normative ideals followed by an outright denunciation of them; Polysemic allusions to queer subcultures and Exaggerations of a straight character’s sexual confusion. Apart from a systematic Content Analysis of the show, this study also includes a detailed literature review.

The observations in this study shall be made by taking into consideration the theories of Levi Strauss and Gramsci. Levi Strauss’ Theory of Binary Opposites affirms the existence of contradicting elements in media narratives. According to Strauss, concepts like ‘Good vs. Evil’, ‘Human vs. Supernatural’ and ‘Masculine vs. Feminine’ are propagated through media rhetoric. This rigid binary of male and female not only reinforces gender stereotypes but also brutally excludes representation or acknowledgment of multifarious other sexualities. Mainstream media consequently exhibits problematic and hetero normative tendencies. This study employs the Theory of Binary Opposites as one of the platforms on to base the observations. The problematic sexual dichotomies in media narratives will be viewed in light of this theory.

Another theory employed in the analysis of selected samples is Gramsci’s theory of Cultural Hegemony. Cultural Hegemony argues that the dominant ideology within a society is advocated and normalised through cultural narratives including media. Notions like masculinity have developed a hegemonic strain that assumes dominance over all other strains. The concept of hegemonic masculinity has come to be not only normalised but also idealised. Ostensibly inferior types of masculinities compete for proximity to hegemonic status rather than questioning its very existence. This concept of Cultural Hegemony is also employed in this study of the homosexual representations in *Family Guy*.

The article mainly discusses two research problems: Does *Family Guy* rewrite the Hetero normative and Hegemonic ideals propagated by mainstream media? What are the language techniques employed by *Family Guy* to subvert the subtle homophobia in mainstream media and to endorse pro-gay rhetoric?

Queer Sensibilities in Visual Media

Through the pretext of imparting pleasure, media is able to convince viewers to inadvertently conform to the ideologies they endorse. In his book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to define America*, James D Hunter identifies the

coexistence of rivaling worldviews within the American society. The ideological tug of war between the Conservatives and the Liberals in the political arena has invariably seeped into the domestic sphere in the guise of television. It is through purportedly neutral television programmes that gender, class and race bigotry permeate into the dynamic of everyday life. Critics have observed that in spite of the significant escalation of queer representation in television fiction, media still reiterates a sense of hetero normative hegemony that serves to further oppress the queer. Gross underrepresentation and stereotyping of cultural minorities have been the signature of mainstream media for ages. Before the late nineties, queer representation in media was limited to negative roles, custom-made for humour and ridicule. Stories of sexual identity crises were greeted only with utmost derision by a society that has been conditioned by media to equate queerness with immorality.

In the light of Levi Strauss' Theory of Binary Opposites, it becomes evident that the toxic binary of the feminine and the masculine has been nurtured to full potential by media discursive. "The mainstream media are an important element of defining and defending American culture's centre and its boundaries", observes Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus. The idea of traditional and moral family values invariably assumes a hetero normative, white and middle-class stance in media. Mainstream media acceptance of sexuality is limited to a hetero normative framework, pushing every nonconforming individual to the very fringes of civilization.

Family sitcoms are a genre that challenges the conventional notion that conflict is inseparable from the narration. The potential for narrative was traditionally associated with discord. "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way", as Tolstoy observed. However, the introduction of family sitcoms, which negated the need for discord in the transpiring of storylines, challenged the hitherto held conventions. Most American family sitcoms take shape in the backdrop of a seemingly happy family with limited discords and yet limitless narrative possibilities. Though family sitcoms predominantly engage with comedy, they are not alien to didacticism. Through the veneer of surface innocence and the tactful employment of polysemic language, Family sitcoms have proven their commendable capability to appeal to a wide range of audiences sans limitations of age, gender, race or class. The engrossing narratives offer a representation of almost all identities. Through innumerable and overlapping plot lines, sitcom narratives oscillate towards queer issues even from within the framework of a heterosexual family scenario. Sitcoms have also succeeded in constructing a strong sense of intimacy with the viewer, not only shaping their ideologies, but also presenting them with immense pleasure and camaraderie. Prolonged exposure to sitcoms "creates the possibility for a much stronger sense of audience involvement, a sense of becoming the part of the lives and actions of the characters they see" identifies Horace Newcomb. Childhood exposure to media is pivotal in a young adult's perceptions of family and social values in their later life.

The genre has now evolved to accommodate a new wave of sitcoms that expose to the core, almost all regressive ideologies and hypocrisies within media representations of minorities, especially the queer. For instance, *The Simpsons* is an American adult animated family sitcom that aired on Fox Channel on December 17, 1989. The popularity and longevity it has earned makes *The Simpsons* one of the most influential shows in the history of day time television. Critics like Harry Walters describe the show as "A breakaway ratings hit, industry trendsetter, a cultural template and a viewing experience verging on the religious for its most fanatical followers". The media experience underwent a seismic shift when numerous other shows like *Family Guy*, *Bob's Burgers*, *Rick and Morty*, *South Park*, *Beavis and Butthead*, *King of the Hill* and *Bojack Horseman* took the cue from *The Simpsons*. These sitcoms too began an active employment of sociolinguistic strategies to attain a subversion of hetero normative ideals that fuel homophobia and queer phobia. Through the employment of language techniques like irony and allusion, these new wave sitcoms engage in ideologically loaded debates from contemporary culture. Language, among other postmodern strategies has been deployed by such sitcoms as an efficient means to expose the inherent sexist binaries propagated by mainstream media, redefining hegemonic masculinity and other gender roles. A powerful deconstruction of normative patterns within the framework of media has been achieved through this chain of adult animated sitcoms. Through an endorsement of progressive political ideologies and by providing a lambaste of 'traditional', hetero normative family values advocated by mainstream sitcoms, this new wave of American sitcoms have brought about significant alteration to the television viewing experience. Conservatism, bigotry and prejudice are blatantly exposed through the medium of semi anarchist comedy.

Until the late 1980s queer representation in media was restricted to certain experimental movies, greatly barring gay, lesbian, transgender and other queer persons from experiencing camaraderie and inclusion in the domain. The escalating conservatism within the realm of culture demanded a palpable calling out of media hypocrisy. Recognition of political and other oppressions faced by the community became the need of the hour and *The Simpsons*, around the mid-1990s assumed a political statement against discrimination by subverting the toxic notions of gender and sexuality that have been normalized in media. This progressive wave of sitcom presented a more accommodating atmosphere for discourses on queer sexuality and homophobia. These shows, it can rightly be said, proved pivotal in establishing a queer sensibility within the society, through their rampant allusions to queer culture, discussions on highly politicised matters like same-sex marriage and the recurrent inclusion of queer characters in the episodes. Their discursive involves a regular toying with the fluidity of sexuality in an attempt to deconstruct the rigid and intolerant notions of gender performance. Through exposing the hypocrisy of media, adult animated sitcoms prompt the oppressed communities to raise their voice against the predominance of a single dominant ideology. Subversion of this dominant ideology facilitates a dialogue to help the minorities articulate their opposition. This study involves an analysis of a revolutionary adult sitcom- *Family Guy* (1999-), which has aided the subversion of hegemonic ideologies through the employment of various linguistic techniques like Parody, Irony, Polysemy, Allusion, Exaggeration, Intertextuality, Literalisation etc.

A Discussion and Analysis of Homosexual Representations in *Family Guy*

Family Guy which aired in 1999 is one of the most popular American comedy sitcoms till date. The series has been often compared to *The Simpsons* by critics and fans alike. Created by Seth McFarlane, *Family Guy* transpires in the backdrop of an all-American, middle class suburb like many of the usual mainstream family sitcoms. It is chiefly a parody of mainstream media representations that contribute to the normalization of hetero normative family structures. Such narratives were marked by the dominance of a genial patriarch who assumes absolute supremacy over the other ostensibly inferior members. The show traces the life of the Griffins- a white, middle-class family consisting of a father (Peter Griffin), a mother (Lois Griffin) and their three kids (Meg Griffin, Chris Griffin and Stewie Griffin). Both the men in the family, Peter and Chris, are portrayed as low intelligence beings. Chris has no decision-making ability whatsoever and blindly obeys whatever he is ordered to. Although Peter is the head of the family and the sole bread winner, he is unreasonably stupid, constantly leading the family into dangerous situations. He is a white, heterosexual male who fails to conform to the rubrics of hegemonic masculinity. His pubescent handling of affairs and his job at a toy factory reduces Peter to a juvenile, stupid figure although he contributes economically and otherwise to maintain familial stability. Meg, the only female child is the eldest sibling and often ends up being the butt of ridicule. Meg is constantly made fun of for her lack of socialising skills and her appearance. Stewie Griffin is the baby of the family and is often portrayed as being diabolical. World domination and murder of his mother are Stewie's driving forces. He is outwardly homophobic, though he enjoys transvestite pleasures in private. Their highly intellectual and anthropomorphic dog (Brian Griffin) is also a major character whose high intellect is often contrasted with the stupidity of other family members. Brian is, in most episodes depicted as the closest friend of Peter. The show places lesser importance on narrative story lines and instead devotes more focus on the notorious cut-away scenes that often depict exaggeration and hyper stereotyping. Most of the characters in the show are assigned surreal character traits while at the same time exhibiting relatable behaviour patterns that call out idiosyncrasies of the contemporary reality. The show has attracted large scale controversies and debates that surpass those surrounding *The Simpsons*. The intentional political incorrectness, sexual innuendos and deliberate bigotry have fed controversies for more than two decades now.

Title Song

Irony permeates into the rhetoric of *Family Guy* right from the title song. The song begins with Lois lamenting "It seems today that all you see is violence in movies and sex on TV". Peter joins singing, "But where are those good old-fashioned values on which we used to rely?" At this point, the rest of the Griffins chime in, "but luckily

there is a family guy” and the scene shifts to a show hall, where the Griffin Family is performing, clad in yellow. The dress code is gendered (Women wearing stockings, and men in suits), ostensibly establishing the “good old-fashioned” gender divisions. The title song derives its parodic power only when juxtaposed with the contents of each episode. What awaits us in the plot of the sitcom is nothing but an outright mocking of whatever was preached in the title song. This brings to the forefront not only the absurdities of socially constructed binaries but also the hypocrisy of mainstream media which feign tolerance while subtly endorsing homophobia. In stark contrast to the values inscribed in the opening number, *Family Guy* episodes swarm with blatant depictions of sex and violence. In addition, the very traditional values that are fondly remembered in the song are exposed as being pernicious throughout the episodes.

Essentialist identity discourses are also rampant within the framework of *Family Guy*. Through the portrayal of Meg’s sexual confusion in the episode ‘Brian Sings and Swings’ (Season 4, Episode 19), *family Guy* explores the fluid nature of sexuality. In this episode, Meg Griffin adopts a lesbian lifestyle after being mistakenly read as a homosexual. This new avatar wins her acceptance and camaraderie within the queer community. We now see a Meg who has become the archetype of a stereotypical lesbian. She finds herself a girlfriend, wears a torn flannel shirt, has spiky hair and assumes a butch attitude. The sudden and drastic contrast in Meg’s demeanour comes through as unsettling for many regular viewers and through this shocking hyper stereotyping *Family Guy* attains the subversion of social stereotypes. Through the dialogue between Meg and her parents, the sitcom exposes the stings of societal discrimination faced by homosexual individuals, especially in the event of coming out of the closet. *Family Guy* toys with the fluidity of gender performance and exposes the absurdity of assigning such dire significance to the act of coming out. Meg, in spite of her heterosexual inclination, assumes a “fixed lesbian identity” to fit in within the community. She comes out to her parents declaring, “Mom, dad, I am a lesbian”. To this Lois responds by reassuring Meg that she will accept her daughter even if she was “gay, blind or retarded”! This dialogue between Meg and Lois, equating homosexuality to physical disabilities like blindness and retardation, brings out the inherent supremacy of hetero normativity. Anything that deviates from the heterosexual framework is either considered a disability at best and an abomination at worst. *Family Guy*, through exaggerations of this kind calls out the societal reiterations of a hetero normative discourse.

Jungle Love

The sitcom blatantly exposes the ostensibly “neutral” language employed by media to subtly propagate problematic notions like sexism, racism and homophobia. Media’s potential for motive conscious delivery of information to a naïve audience and its framing of homosexual affairs in a negative light through the use of condescending language are exposed in the episode titled ‘Jungle Love’ (Season 4, Episode 13). This episode tells the tale of the Griffin family touring a South American jungle. While Chris falls in love with a tribal girl, Peter tries to colonize the entire tribe by virtue of his whiteness and consequently superior masculinity. In the meanwhile, we see Stewie and Brian attempting to record a video report of a bunch of tribal men. The men, scantily clad in a mere loincloth, are invested in felling and bucking trees, oblivious to Brian’s camera. The video is reminiscent of a nature documentary and considers Native Americans as a strange and promiscuous wild species that is under observation. *Family Guy* through this parody of a documentary exposes the extent of hetero normative and sexist agendas that can be permeated into society through the medium of seemingly neutral language. It shows how anti-homosexual agendas are more often than not implicit in the apparently ‘objective’ media rhetoric.

Identifying the Homosexual

A humorous critique of stereotypical codes that serve to redefine gender and sexual binaries within the system is offered through the technique of hyper stereotyping that features in almost every episode of *Family Guy*. In the episode ‘You May Now...Uh... Kiss the Guy Who Receives’ (Season 4, Episode 25) a couple of social stereotypes about the queer community are busted. Moreover, in a bold, political move, it criticizes the conservative religious institutions that, to this day, reiterate the existence of rigid gender roles. In this episode we see a Lois who is ambivalent about her feelings towards same sex marriage. She decides to consult the local priest

hoping to conclusively shape her convictions. The priest shows Lois a black and white documentary, considered to have been written by God himself! The documentary is curiously titled 'The Homosexual and You', exposing the homophobia and hegemonic hetero normativity permeating the documentary right from the start. The title presumes the existence of a rigid heterosexual binary. Those who conform to the rubric of hetero normativity are considered 'normal' and addressed as 'You', while the deviant individuals are considered a different, strange and inferior species. The title, however, is merely the tip of the iceberg, heralding the harsh homophobia that would inevitably follow in the video. The premise of the documentary lies in identifying a homosexual man. The video offers a few tips on spotting gays- the first test for homosexuality is asking the subject in question his favourite Madonna song. If he provides an answer and appears to be excited about it, then he definitely is a gay! On the contrary, if the man exhibits ignorance about the singer's albums, he is 'normal'. Through this exaggeration, *Family Guy* exposes society's toxic habit of linking one's sexual orientation to their preferences in art. The documentary goes on to ridicule the church's appalling statements against the homosexual community.

Competition of Masculinities

Society's obsession with hegemonic standards of masculinity has led to the prevalence of homophobia and mental ailments, as was discussed in the earlier sections of this paper. Media representations of culture dictate that a hegemonic male should be competent enough to safeguard his masculinity. A male who has to face sexual violation is not only refused any empathy but is also ridiculed for being effeminate or even 'gay'. *Family Guy* through language techniques like irony and exaggeration has attempted to subvert the toxic societal convictions regarding masculinity. The problematic dichotomy of the masculine and the feminine has reinforced the physical prowess and superiority of hegemonic masculinity over other types of sexualities. Those individuals who challenge the dominant race, gender or class ideologies presented through the media discourse are often ostracised and excluded from group activities. *Family Guy*, through the use of blatant satire, makes a desperate attempt to subvert the problematic politicizing of sexualities within media culture.

Family Guy also provides a biting satire of the competition between different masculinities for hegemonic status. As was discussed earlier, this needless conflict among non-hegemonic males not only proves to be pernicious to their emotional and social wellbeing but also reinforces the supremacy of the hegemonic status quo. Through his sitcom, Seth MacFarlane lays bare the very futility and the inevitable perils of such a comparison of sexualities. The oppression of weaker masculinities by the relatively stronger ones in society is demonstrated through the episode titled 'Peterotica' (Season 4, Episode 24). In this episode, attributes like money power, tone and style of Language, the extent of aggression etc. are considered to determine the superiority of one type of masculinity over the other. Here we find Peter approaching his father-in-law, Carter Pewterschmidt, for monetary assistance to get his book published. While Peter is a mere blue-collar worker, Pewterschmidt is a billionaire and naturally assumes a more superior form of masculinity than his son-in-law. The tone and style of language employed is condescending. For instance, he greets Peter by saying, "What's up homo!" The usage of the word 'homo' as an insult, reiterates the societal perception of homosexual masculinity being significantly inferior to other types of masculinities. Body shaming is also employed as a technique to downplay Peter's masculinity. He is called "Fatso", "Fathead", "hobo" and "fat peasant" throughout the duration of the episode. Through discrimination against Peter, Pewterschmidt establishes his masculinity as being closer to the hegemonic standards. In another similar episode, we find Peter being raped by an ostensibly more masculine bull during a rodeo. The surface absurdity of a bull raping a man is transcended when the audience realizes the action's symbolic significance.

The Bull is rendered as possessing almost all attributes of hegemonic masculinity. He is muscular, aggressive and hypersexual, with a dominant stance, deep voice and a stern tone. Peter, on the other hand, is the embodiment of a far inferior kind of masculinity. His stout frame, pubescent outlook to life and low education makes Peter's masculinity way inferior to that of both Pewterschmidt's and the Bull's. However, neither does the bull nor does Pewterschmidt comply with every facet of hegemonic masculinity. This forces them to overcompensate for this through aggression against inferior sexualities. Their dominance over Peter also subverts the notion that males who possess more attributes of traditional masculinity will invariably come out triumphant. *Family Guy* uses language style and tone as major indicators of masculinity.

Masculinity vs. Femininity

The normalised assumption of masculinity being the more dominating power within the male-female dichotomy is exposed through the depictions of Peter's dominative instincts in the episode titled 'Model Misbehaviour' (Season 4, Episode 10). What sparks Peter's jealousy in this episode is Lois' decision to pursue a career in modelling. Another instance of Peter's jealousy is when Lois calls him handsome while they were both facing the bathroom mirror. In a moment of hyper-stupidity, Peter punches his own reflection in the mirror. Through these exaggerated depictions of jealousy, *Family Guy* subverts the normalized notion that women are the property of the hegemonic male, especially within a marital relationship. The ideological supremacy of the masculine over the feminine is challenged through the stark contrast in the personalities of Peter and Lois. This portrayal of a mismatched couple is a parody of endless mainstream sitcom plotlines that monetise on the scope of humour birthing from such a gross dissimilarity. *Family Guy's* depiction of Peter's jealousy and dominance serves to question the status quo and redefine the staunch gender roles that are being reinforced through such media narratives.

Linguistic representations

Through language strategies like hyper stereotyping of homosexuality, *Family Guy* exposes and subsequently denounces the social stereotyping of it. The show presents us with quite a few homosexual characters, but none in a positive light. The queer community has been represented through characters like Mr. John Herbert (a neighbour of the Griffin family), Jasper (Brian's cousin) and Mr. Weed (Peter's boss). The homosexuals in *Family Guy* are distinguished by their effeminate language, transvestite tendencies and conspicuous sexuality. More often than not, a lisp is also indicative of gayness within the show's rubric. Probably the most abominable representation of homosexuality in the show is presented through the character of Mr. John Herbert who makes recurring appearances. Herbert is the epitome of negative stereotyping and it is chiefly through him that the absurdities of societal stereotypes against the queer community are brought to the forefront.

Herbert is an old man who tries to woo much younger boys like Chris Griffin and his friends. Through the exaggerated narration of Mr. Herbert's actions and language, *Family Guy* brings out the societal idiocy of branding aged homosexual individuals as paedophiles. A direct link between paedophilia and queerness has sadly been established, mainly through media narratives, to safeguard the hegemony of hetero normative ideologies. It is assumed that homosexual males, who are biologically unable to reproduce, pass on their sexual identity to younger unsuspecting boys in a frantic attempt to carry on their legacy. The horror of older men preying on innocent heterosexual boys is rooted in homophobia and is circulated through media representations. *Family Guy* exposes the extremity of such negative stereotypes through the hyper stereotyping of Mr. Herbert's homosexuality. In the episode titled 'The Courtship of Stewie's Father', (Season 4, Episode 16), Chris accidentally breaks Herbert's window with his baseball. Mr Herbert then approaches the teenager's parents asking for reparations. However, when Lois suggests that Chris pay back the old man from his monthly allowance, Herbert intervenes, saying, "Perhaps we could work something else. I could use this strapping young man to do some chores around my house." It is indicated through the changing background score and through Herbert's facial expression that this invitation was devoid of any naivety. Once Chris reaches Herbert's house and starts mowing his lawn, the old man lustfully watches on. His homosexual identity sanctions the use of effeminate or grossly inappropriate language because social stereotyping exempts them from anything remotely moral. Mr Herbert's hyper-stereotypical demeanour and language usage aid in the subversions of societal bigotry against the gay community.

A reading of homosexual representation within *Family Guy* is incomplete without a mention of the show's most recurring gay character, Bruce Straightman. Including the irony invoked by his surname, Straightman's character serves as a platform for the subversion of various hetero normative ideals. Straightman's gradual coming out process is meticulously explored through the sitcom. The subtlety of his homosexuality is emphasised through language techniques like allusion and polysemy. Instead of an explicit confrontation of Straightman's sexuality, the show maintains the delicacy of his pre-coming out stages, by restricting any discourse on the matter to merely

tenuous references. It was not until Season 19 that Bruce came out of the closet and married his long-time lover, Jeffrey. The early seasons of the show abound with wordplay and subtle allusions to queer cultures while discussing the facets of Straightman's gayness. Examples of such allusions can be observed in various episodes starting from Season 4. His implied homosexuality forms the basis of most of the gay jokes in the show. For instance, in one of the episodes, when such a joke was made without including a reference to Bruce's sexuality, he wakes up panic stricken at the middle of the night exclaiming "Oh no! They 's doing gay jokes without me!" In this cut away scene it is shown that Bruce shares the bed with a huge bear who then consoles him saying, "Shh, shh, shh. It's okay you're part of it now." The anthropomorphic bear in this scene is most evidently an allusion to the subsection of 'Bears' within queer culture. A 'bear' in gay slang refers to a huge, hairy homosexual man who embodies rugged masculinity. Bear communities have emerged as a distinct sub culture within the queer framework and have earned for themselves representation in various popular culture and art. *Family Guy* thus tactfully employs polysemic language to bring out the double code of meaning embedded within the rhetoric of sexuality. In this context, however a 'Bear' is not a discriminatory tag. Quite on the contrary, the show provides an ecological angle to sexuality, through a comparison of the Natural species of Bears with the 'Bear' of an ostensibly "unnatural" culture. *Family Guy* initiates debates in queer ecology through this allusion.

Queer Counter Culture

A hyper stereotyping of homosexual characters' physical attributes like the style of their discourse, their choices in clothing or their tastes in art can be observed throughout the duration of the show. It is through these kinds of exaggerations that *Family Guy* exposes conservatism, bigotry and prejudice within social systems. One of the landmark gay liberation moves within the rhetoric of day time television was in the form of the *Family Guy* episode titled 'You May Now... Uh... Kiss the Guy who Receives' (Season 4 , Episode 25). This episode shows the family welcoming Brian's homosexual cousin Jasper (an anthropomorphic, talkative dog) and his fiancé Ricardo (a mute Filipino). Jasper, often referred to as a "flaming scene queen", exhibits predominant traits of Camp Culture with his overgrown hair, funky dressing and kitsch earrings.

Camp is often considered a queer counter-culture, an alternative type of aesthetic that brutally defies the hetero normative standards in the realm of art. Camp Sensibility professes the beauty of androgyny, where what attracts in a man is his female essence and what makes a woman truly charming is the masculine within her. It is a gay subculture that conspicuously diverges from mainstream aesthetic and is characterised by kitsch, flamboyance, transvestism and bizarre tastes. Through an exuberant celebration of this counter-culture, *Family Guy* facilitates an inclusivity and political representation of LGBTQ+ minorities within the established social systems. Irony surfaces in the episode when it is the gay guest, Jasper, who discovers Camp aesthetics within the Griffin family. During dinner at a fancy Greek restaurant Jasper discovers kitsch aesthetics in Lois' earrings. "Lois, darling, those earrings are delicious. Total kitsch. Like an Andy Warhol wet dream. I'm opening a museum and putting you in it, they're that fabulous", he compliments Lois. The sexual innuendo and the reference to the gay artist Andy Warhol help Jasper to introduce a sense of queerness into the character of Lois Griffin, a heterosexual mother of three. Through this casual introduction of homosexual aesthetics into the realm of staunch heterosexuality, *Family Guy* toys with fluid nature of gender and sexual identities. The show exposes the irrationality of framing identities based on individuals' preference in art and popular culture. Lois, a straight woman depicted as exhibiting an affinity for Camp aesthetics, questions the very process of identity construction on the basis of art preference or language usage. Earlier in the same episode, the show had ridiculed the notion of determining one's sexual orientation based on their liking for the works of the gay icon, Madonna. New wave sitcoms reiterate the fact that compliance to conventionally queer ways of life including language and art is quite feasible within a heterosexual dynamic as well. This topples the conventional link between lifestyle choices and identity, thus providing a new angle to identity-based discrimination.

Family Guy offers numerous other instances that demonstrate an absolute collapse in the hetero-homo dichotomy that is religiously upheld in most mainstream media representations. The show acknowledges how such rigid binaries will invariably lead to gender-based discriminations and how a palpable calling out of such problematic stereotypes is the need of the hour. Another instance where *Family Guy* overturns gender norms is in the episode

'Deep Throats' (Season 4, Episode 23) where in a cut away scene we see two talking cars. One car is painted blue while the other is painted pink, obviously to indicate their genders according to stereotypical assumptions. The blue car, understood to be a male, pulls up near the female car and asks, "Hey! How're you doing there? Listen...Uh...you're very attractive and...Uh...you wanna go behind the Applebee's and do it? Huh?" To this the pink car, quite surprisingly replies in a male voice, "Chuck! It's me, Morty. They had me painted". The blue car immediately regrets having said all that and in utter shock says, "What? Oh! Oh my God! I'm so embarrassed... Why didn't you say something earlier?" However, the conversation takes an unexpectedly gay turn when Chuck looks at Morty again saying, "But look at you, you're hot" and Morty remarks, "Let's not rule anything out." This scene undoubtedly topples the rigid binaries of masculine and feminine; heterosexual and homosexual.

Findings

The following paragraph summarises the crucial research questions addressed in this study. Through an elaborate discussion of the immense socio political and cultural influences of mainstream media on its viewers, the present research points out the need for research in this aspect. This paper attempts to bridge this gap in research through a crisp and systematic discussion of media's problematic rhetoric. Mainstream media has, since time immemorial, advocated subtle homophobia and queer phobia through its normalisation of hetero normative ideals. Concepts like hegemonic masculinity are reiterated through mainstream media representations. This study focused on proving the observation that *Family Guy* was indeed able to rewrite these regressive conventions through an outright subversion and ridiculing of them. Through a detailed content analysis of the selected episodes, it was proven that the sitcom was in fact successful in attaining a powerful subversion of homophobic media ideals. For the process, it has been found out that *Family Guy* has employed various language strategies like irony, exaggeration, allusion, polysemy and hyper stereotyping. These strategies and their employment have been discussed in detail through analyses of specific scenes.

Conclusion

Owing to techniques like animation and over dramatization, adult animated sitcoms sometimes pass off as a children's cartoon! It is in fact surprising how the apparently juvenile cartoons possess the potential to overturn cultural ideologies and even politically established systems. The hitherto normalised and deep-rooted societal convictions are blatantly subverted by these sitcoms, all the while assuming the façade of comedy. Problematic social stereotypes are juxtaposed with an exaggerated version of the same stereotypes in order to expose the very irrationality of such exercises. An entire generation of young adults have begun to question the systemic normalisation of concepts like hetero normativity and hegemonic masculinity that is being propagated through mainstream media narratives. It can be said that adult animated sitcoms, through the strategic employment of language, have helped to rebuild a more inclusive and empathetic society from the debris of an earlier, bigoted one. The study in a way points that the so called traditional norm of heteronormativity is broken yielding place to homosexual representations in media narratives.

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