

# Modern Masculinities: Resistance to Hegemonic Masculinity in *Modern Family*

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*Since its debut in 2009, the ABC television show Modern Family has captivated audiences and academics alike. The show professes a modern perspective on families, but many scholars have concluded that its male characters uphold problematic, normative expressions of gender. In contrast, we use the concept of hegemonic masculinity to argue that Modern Family resists normative expressions of masculinity by attuning viewers to the socially constructed nature of hegemonic masculinity and by authorizing feminine and flamboyant behaviors as appropriately manly. These counterhegemonic strategies work in tandem to scrutinize confining expectations for men and to offer viable alternatives. Taken together, their coexistence mitigates against an oppressive hybrid version of hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, our analysis introduces readers to the rhetorical power of hegemonic masculinity and strategies to resist it; considers the efficacy of these strategies while drawing a wide audience; and stresses the importance of diverse gender representation in popular media.*

**Keywords:** *Modern Family*, hegemonic masculinity, resistance, comedy, television, sitcom

The ABC television show *Modern Family* concluded on April 8, 2020, securing its place in history as among the longest running and most successful domestic situation comedies. Beginning with its first season in 2009, and ending with its eleventh and final season in 2020, the series currently stands as the “third longest-running network sitcom in television history.”<sup>1</sup> While ratings dipped

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Berman, “Signing Off: ‘Modern Family’ Concludes on ABC After 11 Seasons,” *Forbes*, April 8, 2020, [forbes.com/sites/marcberman/2020/04/08/signing-off-modern-family-concludes-on-abc-after-11-seasons/#6070b6669ac8](https://forbes.com/sites/marcberman/2020/04/08/signing-off-modern-family-concludes-on-abc-after-11-seasons/#6070b6669ac8).

during its tenth and eleventh seasons to under 5 million viewers on average,<sup>2</sup> the show drew 7.09 to 12.93 million viewers per season over its first nine seasons<sup>3</sup> and 7.4 million viewers to its series finale.<sup>4</sup> *Modern Family*'s popularity even reached global proportions, winning the International Television Audience Award for Comedy in 2014, which is awarded to the comedy series with the highest worldwide ratings.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the series has also been widely recognized for its creative achievement, including Primetime Emmy Awards for Outstanding Comedy Series for its first five seasons—a feat that only one other sitcom in history (*Frasier*) accomplished.<sup>6</sup>

The series centers around three generations of the Pritchett family. The elder father Jay Pritchett (Ed O'Neil) is married to his second wife Gloria Delgado (Sofia Vergara) and lives with her son Manny (Rico Rodriguez) and, later, their son Joe (Jeremy Maguire). Jay's marriage to his first wife Dede (Shelley Long) left him with two children, Mitchell and Claire. Mitchell Pritchett (Jesse Tyler Ferguson) lives with his boyfriend and eventual husband Cameron Tucker (Eric Stonestreet) and their adopted daughter Lily (Aubrey Anderson-Emmons). Claire Dunphy (Julie Bowen) is married to her husband Phil (Ty Burrell), and they have three children: Haley (Sarah Hyland), Alex (Ariel Winter), and Luke (Nolan Gould). All three families reside in suburban Los Angeles and regularly interact with each other.

Media writers cite *Modern Family*'s diverse presentation of family as revolutionary at the time of its debut in 2009 and as responsible for changing television sitcoms in the years since, with headlines declaring that the show “changed TV sitcoms,”<sup>7</sup> “helped change TV,”<sup>8</sup> and reflects “how far we’ve come.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, in a television genre historically dominated by heterosexual and Caucasian roles, *Modern Family*'s characters stand out for featuring an openly gay couple (Mitchell and Cameron); their adopted Vietnamese daughter (Lily); a divorcé (Jay); his Latina wife (Gloria); and her Latino son (Manny). As *Modern Family*'s casting director Jeff Greenberg explained, “This is today’s modern family: a blend of different ages, ethnicities, sexualities, adoptions, [and] mixed marriages.”<sup>10</sup> Martin Gitlin similarly noted that *Modern Family*'s “title certainly represents a new and open examination of what the definition of a family really is, while delivering some of

<sup>2</sup> “Modern Family: Season Eleven Ratings,” *TV Series Finale*, April 9, 2020, [tvseriesfinale.com/tv-show/modern-family-season-11-ratings](https://tvseriesfinale.com/tv-show/modern-family-season-11-ratings).

<sup>3</sup> Nellie Andreeva, “Full 2011-2012 TV Season Series Rankings,” *Deadline Hollywood*, May 24, 2012, <https://deadline.com/2012/05/full-2011-2012-tv-season-series-rankings-277941/>; Lisa de Moraes and Patrick Hipes, “2017-2018 TV Series Ratings Rankings: NFL Football, ‘Big Bang’ Top Charts,” *Deadline Hollywood*, May 22, 2018, [deadline.com/2018/05/2017-2018-tv-series-ratings-rankings-full-list-of-shows-120239551/](https://deadline.com/2018/05/2017-2018-tv-series-ratings-rankings-full-list-of-shows-120239551/).

<sup>4</sup> Will Thorn, “TV Ratings: ‘Modern Family’ Series Finale Scores Three-Year High 7.4 Million Viewers,” *Variety*, April 9, 2020, <https://variety.com/2020/tv/news/modern-family-series-finale-tv-ratings-1234575788/>.

<sup>5</sup> Matt Mitovich, “*NCIS* and *Modern Family* Are Named World (Ratings) Champions,” *TVLine*, June 11, 2014, [tvline.com/2014/06/11/ratings-ncis-modern-family-most-watched-in-world/](https://tvline.com/2014/06/11/ratings-ncis-modern-family-most-watched-in-world/).

<sup>6</sup> Steven Zeitchik, “‘Modern Family’ Has an Incredible Legacy. There May Never Be Another Show Like It,” *The Washington Post*, February 5, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/02/06/modern-family-has-an-incredible-legacy-there-may-never-ever-be-another-show-like-it-again/>.

<sup>7</sup> Scott D. Pierce, “‘Modern Family,’ Consistently Funny and Important, Has Changed TV Sitcoms,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, April 5, 2020, <https://www.sltrib.com/arts/living/2020/04/05/mission-accomplished/>.

<sup>8</sup> Emily Yahr, “You Might Not Care About ‘Modern Family’ Anymore, But It Helped Change TV,” *The Washington Post*, February 8, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/you-might-not-care-about-modern-family-anymore-but-it-helped-change-tv/2019/02/07/c6907130-2b0f-11e9-b011-d8500644dc98\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/you-might-not-care-about-modern-family-anymore-but-it-helped-change-tv/2019/02/07/c6907130-2b0f-11e9-b011-d8500644dc98_story.html).

<sup>9</sup> Joe Reid, “*Modern Family*'s End is a Reminder of How Far We’ve Come: Eleven Years Later, the ABC Sitcom Feels Far Less Revolutionary,” *Primetimer*, April 6, 2020, <https://www.primetimer.com/features/modern-family-s-enduring-legacy-is-reminding-us-how-far-weve-come>.

<sup>10</sup> Jeff Greenberg, Personal Interview, August 14, 2018.

the finest humor of any sitcom produced in the twenty-first century.”<sup>11</sup> The modernity of *Modern Family* seems to rest in its contemporary depictions of family relationships, ethnicity, and sexuality.

We agree that *Modern Family* offers a modern perspective on these aspects, but we are particularly interested in its depictions of masculinity through its primary adult male characters across eleven seasons. As we will later explain, scholars who have analyzed *Modern Family*’s male characters have concluded that the show actually reinforces problematic, normative expressions of masculinity. In contrast, we use the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* to argue that *Modern Family* resists hegemonic masculinity through two strategies: (1) by attuning viewers to hegemonic masculinity’s socially constructed nature and (2) by authorizing feminine and flamboyant behaviors as appropriately manly. These counterhegemonic strategies work in tandem to scrutinize confining expectations for men and to encourage viable gender alternatives. Moreover, their coexistence mitigates *against* an oppressive hybrid version of hegemonic masculinity which, as gender scholar James W. Messerschmidt argues, merely absorbs “subordinated styles and displays” (like femininity and flamboyancy) to “secure and obscure” its power.<sup>12</sup>

To support our argument, we will first provide an account of the scholarship on *Modern Family* to distinguish our position from previous analyses of the show. We will then turn more robustly to the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the possibilities of resistance to it, focusing on two strategies, or counterhegemonic practices, the show employs. First, we will investigate how *Modern Family* scrutinizes and attunes viewers to hegemonic masculinity as a particular kind of social performance that is acted for and policed by others. Second, we will explore how *Modern Family* authorizes alternative performances of masculinity associated with femininity and flamboyancy. Along the way, we will consider how the co-presence of these strategies prevents the aforementioned oppressive hybrid version of hegemonic masculinity. Finally, we will reflect on the implications of the show’s resistance for viewing audiences. Specifically, our analysis introduces readers to the power of hegemonic masculinity while encouraging them to recognize strategies to resist it; considers the efficacy of these strategies to resist hegemonic masculinity while drawing a wide audience; and stresses the importance of diverse gender representations in popular media.

### Analyzing *Modern Family*

Nearly all of the scholars who have analyzed the male characters in *Modern Family* conclude that the show purports to represent something new but actually reinforces traditional family and gender norms. Nicole Catherine Staricek, for example, argues, “Regardless of their claims of modernity, my analysis shows that all three of [*Modern Family*’s] families promote our culture’s dominant ideology of the [traditional] family structure . . . .”<sup>13</sup> For support, she points to the feminine and nurturing mother figures—namely, Gloria, Claire, and Cam—who submit to father figures—Jay and Mitch—who focus on work outside the home and financial stability. Although Phil departs

<sup>11</sup> Martin Gitlin, *The Greatest Sitcoms of All Time* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2014), 136.

<sup>12</sup> James W. Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity: Formulation, Reformulation, and Amplification* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 82.

<sup>13</sup> Nicole Catherine Staricek, “Today’s ‘Modern’ Family: A Textual Analysis of Gender in the Domestic Sitcom,” Master’s Thesis, Auburn University, submitted August 6, 2011, 52; see also Christina M. LaVecchia, “Of Peerenting, Trophy Wives, and Effeminate Men: *Modern Family*’s Surprisingly Conservative Remediation of the Family Sitcom Genre,” *Harlot* 6 (2011): [www.harlotofthearts.com/index.php/harlot/article/view/85/65](http://www.harlotofthearts.com/index.php/harlot/article/view/85/65).

from this father figure role because he “rejects a lot of our common beliefs regarding masculinity,”<sup>14</sup> Staricek argues that his departure—namely, his depiction as foolish, overly sensitive, and insecure—actually reinforces the norms because they typically result in Phil being corrected or laughed at by other characters.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Tamara Vuković recognizes the show’s attempts to resist “traditional discourse[s] of femininity and masculinity” through such characters as Phil, as well as Mitch and Cam, but argues that these characters ultimately uphold these discourses because they “are represented as inferior in relation to characters who fit the norm,” such as Jay.<sup>16</sup>

The only favorable scholarly evaluations of *Modern Family*’s representations of men concern its portrayal of Cam and Mitch, and even these analyses emphasize the show’s conservatism.<sup>17</sup> Scholars note the show’s “normalization” of Cam and Mitch, and Andre Cavalcante argues that such normalization “generates a symbolic remainder.”<sup>18</sup> He coins this process “anxious displacement” and explains that it “occurs in a media text when the dynamics of anxiety and symbolic excess are projected away from LGBT characters onto those in their orbit.”<sup>19</sup> In *Modern Family*, “racial excess” is displaced onto Lily and, similarly, queerness is displaced onto Cam and Mitch’s gay friends.<sup>20</sup> Cavalcante concludes that although such normalization is limiting, *Modern Family* “nonetheless render[s] gay masculinity visible, desirable, and legitimate.”<sup>21</sup>

Thus, scholarship on *Modern Family* concludes that its male performances include some variety but ultimately uphold problematic normative expressions, though a few researchers suggest that such conservatism functions progressively when conveyed by gay characters. In contrast, we use the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* to argue that *Modern Family* offers a modern take on gender. As we will explain, *Modern Family* resists hegemonic masculinity by drawing attention to its socially constructed nature and authorizing behaviors typically stigmatized as abnormal for men. Consequently, researchers have not fully accounted for the show’s resistant rhetoric. We turn next to the methodological concept that undergirds our analysis, *hegemonic masculinity*.

## Resisting Hegemonic Masculinity

Our analysis of *Modern Family*’s depiction of masculinity focuses on four principal adult male characters: Jay, Cam and Mitch (as a couple), and Phil. As fans of the show, we were already familiar with the series. Together, we watched every episode and rewatched numerous episodes—some multiple times over. We carefully noted the adult male characters’ dialogue, movement and appearance, interactions, roles, and environments. As we did so, we looked for patterns or themes concerning relationships with other characters, behaviors, and expressions across episodes and seasons so that our conclusions might capture the show’s discursive work as a whole rather than be limited to particular episodes or seasons. To be more specific, we carefully avoided cherry-picking particular examples in ways that might offer an incomplete or biased interpretation of the

<sup>14</sup> Staricek, “Today’s ‘Modern Family,’” 78.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 80–81.

<sup>16</sup> Tamara Vuković, “Representation of Gender in ‘Modern Family,’” Graduate Thesis, University of Zadar, September 29, 2016, 56.

<sup>17</sup> Tison Pugh, *The Queer Fantasies of the American Family Sitcom* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 173, 180.

<sup>18</sup> Andre Cavalcante, “Anxious Displacements: The Representation of Gay Parenting on *Modern Family* and *The New Normal* and the Management of Cultural Anxiety,” *Television & New Media* 16, no. 5 (2015): 456.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 463, 464, 465.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 468.

show's gender work. While the analysis that follows highlights illustrative examples, our investigation found they reflect patterns in *Modern Family*'s depictions of masculinities throughout the series' run. Our more thematic or longitudinal approach mirrors the process adopted by many other scholars who have analyzed television series using the concept of *hegemonic masculinity*.<sup>22</sup> Having said that, we offer our analysis as one way of reading *Modern Family*'s rhetorical representation of masculinities. We do not claim to have discovered *the* solely correct interpretation of the show. Rather, following Bonnie Dow's likening of rhetorical criticism to producing art, we strive in what follows to illuminate *Modern Family*'s gender work with the goal of helping readers "think about our world"—in this case, the television show—"in new ways."<sup>23</sup> To achieve this goal, we found the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* particularly enlightening.

### *Hegemonic Masculinity*

Hegemonic masculinity has emerged over the past three decades as a useful tool for examining gender in terms of power. Raewyn Connell pursued the theoretical development of hegemonic masculinity in the 1980s,<sup>24</sup> with Messerschmidt later joining her work<sup>25</sup> and then further developing it on his own.<sup>26</sup> While hegemonic masculinity has evolved in the decades since its initial theorization, its central focus remains on the ways particular masculinities legitimize their superiority in relation to other expressions of gender in specific contexts. Messerschmidt defines hegemonic masculinities as "those masculinities constructed locally, regionally, and globally that legitimate an unequal relationship between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities."<sup>27</sup> Messerschmidt goes on to explain that "certain culturally defined 'superior' gendered qualities legitimate unequal gender relations when they are symbolically paired with culturally defined 'inferior' qualities attached to femininity (Schippers 2007)."<sup>28</sup> Scholars who deploy hegemonic masculinity as a concept explore how such masculinities position and justify their practices as superior to different gender constructions (e.g., femininities, alternative masculinities) by stigmatizing other options as feminine.

Contemporary rhetoric scholars have turned to hegemonic masculinity as they make sense of gendered representations in television. Most scholars argue that the television programs they study symbolically constitute hegemonic masculinity with "superior" behaviors such as toughness and belonging in the public sphere;<sup>29</sup> heterosexuality, misogyny, and financial power;<sup>30</sup> and business

<sup>22</sup> Iqbal Akhtar and Deirdre Hynes, "Desperately Becoming a Father: Representations of Fatherhood in Desperate Housewives," in *Gender Under Construction: Femininities and Masculinities in Context*, edited by Ewa Glapka and Barbara Braid (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 115-130; Elizabeth Fish Hatfield, "'What it Means to Be a Man': Examining Hegemonic Masculinity in *Two and a Half Men*," *Communication, Culture, & Critique* 3, no. 4 (2010): 526-548.

<sup>23</sup> Bonnie J. Dow, "Criticism and Authority in the Artistic Mode," in *The Routledge Reader in Rhetorical Criticism*, edited by Brian L. Ott and Greg Dickinson (New York: Routledge, 2013), 148.

<sup>24</sup> Raewyn Connell, *Gender and Power* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987); Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829-859.

<sup>26</sup> Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinities and Camouflaged Politics: Unmasking the Bush Dynasty and Its War Against Iraq* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*.

<sup>27</sup> Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*, 75.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Hanke, "The 'Mack-Macho' Situation Comedy: Hegemonic Masculinity and its Reiteration," *Western Journal of Communication* 62, no. 1 (1998): 74-93.

<sup>30</sup> Hatfield, "'What it Means to Be a Man.'"

ownership, physical size, and patriarchy.<sup>31</sup> They find that popular television series, such as *Two and a Half Men* and *American Chopper*, frequently justify the superiority of such behaviors by contrasting them with “inferior” behaviors associated most often, but not exclusively, with gay masculinity.<sup>32</sup> Such stigmatization of gay masculinity is not surprising since Messerschmidt identifies it as a subordinate masculinity “in global North societies” due to gay men’s enduring cultural construction “as effeminate and feminine.”<sup>33</sup>

Hegemonic masculinity exerts and maintains power through its cultural ascendancy—such as through television—as people willingly accept, subscribe to, and literally applaud it.<sup>34</sup> Messerschmidt notes the persuasive global influence, in particular, of television programs like *Two and a Half Men* that are distributed worldwide and recirculated for audiences via syndication. This widespread diffusion enables these popular culture artifacts (and, too, other forms of global hegemonic masculinity) to exert pressure on regional and local hegemonic masculinities.<sup>35</sup> *Modern Family* is a similarly syndicated<sup>36</sup> and globally distributed program, airing in thirty countries across Europe, North and South America, Asia, the Middle East, and Oceania<sup>37</sup> and, of note, has been the focus of remakes broadcast in both Chile and Greece.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, its depiction of masculinity deserves continued attention.

Our analysis of *Modern Family* explores the show’s counterhegemonic *resistance* to hegemonic masculinity. Messerschmidt recognizes the possibility of “counterhegemonic practices that critique, challenge, or actually dismantle hegemonic masculinities” and make possible “more egalitarian gender relations.”<sup>39</sup> By exploring how *Modern Family* resists hegemonic masculinity, our investigation offers a contrast not only to the existing scholarship on the show, as previously established, but also to the vast majority of communication research that concludes that the televised depictions of men and masculinities studied *support* hegemonic masculinity.<sup>40</sup> In fact, televised representations that resist or counter hegemonic masculinity are rare, and scholars who make such evaluations typically balance them with the claim that the show(s) also support(s) systems of hegemony.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Sharon R. Mazzarella, “Men, Media, and Machines: Fabricating Masculinities in *American Chopper*,” *Popular Communication* 6, no. 2 (2008): 68-84.

<sup>32</sup> Hatfield, “‘What it Means to Be a Man’”; Mazzarella, “Men, Media, and Machines.”

<sup>33</sup> Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*, 126, 138.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 53, 59-60.

<sup>36</sup> Lacey Rose, “‘Modern Family’: USA Plans Unprecedented Syndication Rollout,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, September 8, 2013, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/modern-family-usa-plans-unprecedented-630476>. Also, in January 2021, Hulu and Peacock announced they will both stream ‘all 250 episodes, spanning 11 seasons.’ Vlada Gelman, “TVLine Items: Modern Family’s Two New Homes, Tehran Renewed and More,” TVLine, January 26, 2021, <https://tvline.com/2021/01/26/modern-family-streaming-hulu-peacock-full-series/>.

<sup>37</sup> “Modern Family: International Broadcasts Wiki,” *Fandom*, August 4, 2016, [https://internationalbroadcasts.fandom.com/wiki/Modern\\_Family](https://internationalbroadcasts.fandom.com/wiki/Modern_Family).

<sup>38</sup> Michael Idato, “*Modern Family* Goes Global: Meet Chile’s *Familia Moderna*, Greece’s *Moderna Oikogenei*,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 30, 2014, <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/modern-family-goes-global-meet-chiles-familia-moderna-greeces-moderna-oikogeneia-20140630-zsqqk1.html#:~:text=And%20Married%20...%20with%20Children,%22Married%20for%20Life%22>.

<sup>39</sup> Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*, 142, 158.

<sup>40</sup> Hanke, “The ‘Mack-Macho’ Situation Comedy”; Hatfield, “‘What it Means to Be a Man’”; Mazzarella, “Men, Media, and Machines.”

<sup>41</sup> Carly M. Gieseler, “Pranking Peter Pans: Performing Playground Masculinities in Extreme Sports,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2014): 334-353; Berit Von der Lippe, “Images of Victory: Images of Masculinity?” *Nordicom Review* 27, no. 1 (2006): 63-79.

We turn next to two of the show's strategies to resist hegemonic masculinity. First we will explore how *Modern Family* attunes viewers to the social construction of hegemonic masculinity and, secondly, we will identify how the show authorizes feminine and flamboyant behaviors as appropriately manly.

## Resistance through Attunement

Hegemonic masculinity draws on the concept of gender (and sexuality) as a social construction.<sup>42</sup> In other words, gender and sexuality are not something people have but, rather, aspects of identity they accomplish in specific settings with others. For example, men accomplish gender by following accepted social practices, which make them identifiable to others *as* men; in turn, they reinforce those practices as gendered.<sup>43</sup> Masculinity's socially constructed nature is revealed, then, through its need to be successfully performed for an audience.

As established previously, hegemonic masculinity is a particular type of social construction of gender that "legitimate[s] an unequal relationship between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities" by contrasting idealized behaviors with stigmatized qualities for men.<sup>44</sup> Yet it functions nearly invisibly. Such "gendered power," according to Messerschmidt, is "constituted through acceptance of, and consent to, hegemonically masculine forms of meanings, knowledge, and practice that are ubiquitous locally, regionally, and globally, yet simultaneously *they are hidden in plain sight*."<sup>45</sup> The hiddenness or invisibility of hegemonic masculinity reinforces its power, because men—and women—are discouraged from questioning and challenging it; instead, they are more likely to perceive it as desirable, normal, natural, and, thus, unchangeable.

*Modern Family*, we contest, resists hegemonic masculinity, in part, by drawing viewers' attention to its socially constructed nature. It makes visible what typically remains invisible to untrained eyes; that is, the series' male characters depict hegemonic masculinity as a particular kind of performance that men struggle to execute yet nevertheless desperately attempt to accomplish. We will explore how, often through rhetorical strategies such as humor, stock characters and tropes, and mockumentary "interviews" and glances, *Modern Family* exposes for viewers the specific kinds of behaviors men are expected to enact, the ridicule they face when they fail, and the policing measures they take to retain hegemonic masculinity's power.

## Attuning to Performance

*Modern Family* makes heavy use of its "patriarch" character to showcase the types of performances that hegemonic masculinity requires of men. Patriarchal depictions of television fathers date back to the 1950s and 1960s and, according to Cerise L. Glenn, established "the roots of hegemonic white masculinity in television sitcoms."<sup>46</sup> Jay Pritchett, according to Greenberg, constitutes "the

<sup>42</sup> Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*, 113, 114.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 129-130.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 122-123, emphasis added; see also Michael S. Kimmel, "Invisible Masculinity," *Society* 30, no. 6 (1993): 28-35.

<sup>46</sup> Cerise L. Glenn, "White Masculinity and the TV Sitcom Dad: Tracing the 'Progression' of Portrayals of Fatherhood," in *Communicating Marginalized Masculinities: Identity Politics in TV, Film, and New Media*, edited by Ronald L. Jackson II and Jamie E. Moshin (New York: Routledge, 2013), 176.

patriarch of the family.”<sup>47</sup> Jay is the eldest male and father character, not to mention the most stereotypically manly and the most advantaged by his white male privilege. When viewers are introduced to him in the pilot episode, he has acquired wealth as a successful CEO of a closet business and attracted a much younger, beautiful, and second wife, Gloria Delgado. As the series proceeds, audiences discover that Jay is a Navy veteran and is often sought out for advice by his kids, grandkids, and, especially, his son-in-law, Phil.

*Modern Family* goes beyond simply presenting Jay as patriarch, however, to drawing viewers’ attention to his struggle and expectation to *perform* patriarchy—or the unequal relationship between men and women—as part of hegemonic masculinity. In several situations, the show highlights the lunacy of Jay’s attempts to prove he is smarter or more adept than the women in his life, particularly his Latin American wife. For example, in season two, Jay makes fun of Gloria’s Colombian customs, such as cooking for her departed grandmother. Because Gloria responds angrily, he—embodying the stereotype of the white patriarch—patronizes her while agreeing to help her cook. She then convinces him to “slap the chicken” while repeatedly yelling in a loud and high voice to “scare death away,” which he carries out, feminizing and infantilizing him.<sup>48</sup> Gloria’s scheme subverts Jay’s superior position as patriarch (and as white) and the knowledge and authority it assumes. While the audience laughs, Gloria confesses to the camera, “I made all that up. That’s not a real custom in Colombia. We’re not lunatics. But you mess with us, and we mess with you. That’s the custom.”<sup>49</sup> In scenes like this, *Modern Family* draws attention to Jay’s efforts to enact patriarchy by mocking Gloria’s foreign customs. He needs to perceive himself—or prove to himself and others—that he (a white, older man) is superior to her (a foreign, younger woman). Viewers are invited to notice and laugh at his silly, exaggerated attempts as just that—acts or failed performances of gender (and racial) superiority.

Similar to patriarchy, *Modern Family* identifies toughness as an expectation of hegemonic masculinity, and it reveals the labor involved for Jay to perform toughness and to sublimate the emotions that might be read as feminine and, thus, stigmatized as unmanly. For instance, in season five when Jay’s best friend Vincent, known as “Shorty,” announces his plan to move away to Costa Rica, Jay responds angrily. He attacks Shorty for making a rash decision. The show makes Jay’s response visible to viewers as a *performance* of emotional toughness by having Gloria point out later that Jay actually feels hurt and should drop the tough act and, instead, express his sadness and disappointment. She states, “You pretend to be so tough . . . but deep down you’re the most sensitive person in this house.”<sup>50</sup> Gloria further advises, “You have to tell him [Shorty] how you feel.”<sup>51</sup> Her insight gains veracity when Jay agrees, tells Shorty he loves him, tearfully hugs his friend, and Shorty responds with his own tearful expression of love. Watching the two men embracing and crying, Gloria admits to her son, Manny, “If I’m being honest, this is a little girlier than I thought.”<sup>52</sup> We see in this example Jay’s initial attempt to perform masculinity (by acting emotionally tough), his shift to openly emoting sadness, and the reason he feared expressing his feelings—they were ultimately feminized (by Gloria) as inappropriate for men. Thus, *Modern Family*

<sup>47</sup> Greenberg, Personal Interview, March 23, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 2, Episode 2, “The Kiss,” directed by Scott Ellis, written by Abraham Higginbotham, aired September 29, 2010, on ABC.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 5, Episode 13, “Three Dinners,” directed by Steven Levitan, written by Higginbotham, Levitan, and Jeffrey Richman, aired January 22, 2014, on ABC.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



uses its patriarchal character to resist hegemonic masculinity by humorously drawing attention to toughness as a labored and all-too-often required performance for men.

The show further highlights hegemonic masculinity as socially constructed by presenting its expected qualities as learned behaviors rather than innate characteristics. During a party in a season two episode, the extended family determines that Jay's toughness is the reason his son Mitch feels uncomfortable with public displays of affection with his partner, Cam. Mitch learned from Jay that men do not express intimacy, at least publicly, lest they risk being perceived as unmanly. Jay explains that he grasped this lesson from his father, who failed to openly express love for Jay when he was growing up.<sup>53</sup> In season six, Jay again reflects on his father's "tough it out" parenting style—such as throwing Jay in a lake as a boy—as the reason why he refused to rescue Mitch from camp as a child.<sup>54</sup> Although he at first justifies his decision by arguing that "[l]earning to fend for yourself is an important part of becoming a man," Jay later explains to Mitch, "That tough it out stuff, that was my dad talking."<sup>55</sup> Consequently, *Modern Family* invites viewers to recognize toughness in particular, and hegemonic masculinity more generally, as a socially constructed and, in particular, a *learned* performance. By tracing toughness through three generations of fathers and sons—Jay's father, Jay, and Mitch—the series reveals that toughness is more the result of modeling and enactment than a naturally occurring masculine quality. It illustrates, too, that just as men can learn toughness, they can also learn to perform emotionally intelligent performances of gender, such as empathy and vulnerability. Indeed, in the aforementioned episodes, Jay ultimately hugs and kisses Mitch, and he softly admits to Mitch that "I should've come by and picked you up from camp."<sup>56</sup> Such reflections on, and adjustments to, Jay's gendered performance make visible the rigidly confining contours of hegemonic masculinity. This visibility, we propose, weakens masculinity's ability to function hegemonically.

In addition to patriarchy and toughness, *Modern Family* also attunes viewers to hegemonic masculinity's worrisome connection to sexuality. Constitutive of hegemonic masculinity is heteronormativity, which positions heterosexuality as the normal and natural expression of human sexuality and, in doing so, renders all other sexual identities as abnormal and unnatural. Hegemonic masculinity draws upon heteronormativity because of the strong associations between heterosexuality and masculinity on the one hand and homosexuality and femininity on the other.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, hegemonic masculinity encourages or even requires queer people to pass—or successfully perform—as straight. As Shinsuke Eguchi argues, "The rhetorical usage of straight-acting reinforces the culturally idealized masculine form, hegemonic masculinity."<sup>58</sup> Straight-acting typically involves behaving in ways that display physical and emotional restraint, if not downright sublimation, of expressions perceived as soft, sensitive, or exaggerated; otherwise, the consequence for those men judged (accurately or not) to be homosexual is stigmatization as feminine, effeminate, and/or flamboyant.

*Modern Family* uses Mitch and Cam to further reveal the performative nature of hegemonic masculinity through their "straight-acting." Two gay men, Mitch and Cam begin the series as long-term boyfriends who adopt a child (Lily) from Vietnam and later marry. In particular, the show

<sup>53</sup> *Modern Family*, "The Kiss."

<sup>54</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 6, Episode 18, "Spring Break," directed by Gail Mancuso, written by Paul Corrigan and Brad Walsh, aired March 25, 2015, on ABC.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*, 124.

<sup>58</sup> Shinsuke Eguchi, "Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity: The Rhetorical Strategy of 'Straight-Acting' among Gay Men," *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* 38, no. 3 (2009): 200.

draws attention to Cam's occasionally more successful straight-acting performance in contrast to his partner, Mitch. Cam is depicted, for instance, as physically tougher than Mitch, such as when he scares off a man who is bullying Mitch at a gas station<sup>59</sup> or the multiple times the show refers to his ability to perform hard, physical, and blue-collar labor on the farm he grew up on (in contrast to Mitch, who works in the white-collar field of law).

Cam's straight-acting, especially in juxtaposition to Mitch's failed attempts, draws viewers' attention to heteronormativity as a performance. For example, as a former offensive lineman for the University of Illinois, Cam's athletic prowess, coded as masculine, readily engenders him to the family's aforementioned patriarch, Jay. In an especially potent example from season one, Cam arrives at Jay's house, eager to watch the big game, with his face painted and wearing a jersey, and quickly uses football-related vocabulary, including "quarterback rollout to the left" and "he's got the slot."<sup>60</sup> Mitch unsuccessfully fakes an interest in the sport in an attempt to keep apace with his boyfriend and relate to his father. Although Mitch tries, he cannot follow Jay and Cam's athletic lingo, including a reference to Dick Butkus which Mitch mistakes as a homophobic slur.<sup>61</sup> His is an obvious charade of "straight masculinity" that fails the test of the more successful performers (Jay and Cam) in this context. Mitch's failure, however, draws attention to straight-acting (manifested in this case as football fervor) as, in fact, an act itself. It positions Cam as a gay man who can, when need be, successfully transgress into hegemonically masculine realms by accurately enacting a sports performance typically associated with, but not the exclusive province of, straight men. Indeed, when Cam reveals his face, half-painted in Illini blue, and asks, "Am I straight?" (referring to the paint on his face), Mitch tellingly replies, "I am not sure what you are right now."<sup>62</sup> Cam's ability to act straight helps him avoid the ridicule that Mitch and, as we will see below, Phil endure when they fail to adequately perform hegemonic masculinity.

### *Attuning to Failure and Ridicule*

*Modern Family* uses its "fool" character to reveal the ridicule men face when they fail to adhere to the overly rigid structures of hegemonic masculinity. Jay's son-in-law, Phil, plays what scholars have labelled in other sitcoms as "the fool" because he frequently behaves more like a child or buffoon than a competent adult.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, to name just two examples, *Modern Family* showcases Phil as bungling a romantic Valentine's Day escapade with his wife, Claire,<sup>64</sup> and failing to responsibly take care of his kids—by accidentally hitting Luke and drugging his daughter, Alex—while Claire runs for town council.<sup>65</sup> Most critics who study televised depictions of "the fool" argue that this role reinforces gender norms by implying that chaos occurs when men are removed from their "natural" place as patriarchs and/or from outside the home as breadwinners.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 1, Episode 9, "Fizbo," directed by Jason Winer, written by Corrigan and Walsh, aired November 25, 2009, on ABC.

<sup>60</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 1, Episode 5, "Coal Digger," directed by Winer, written by Christopher Lloyd, aired October 21, 2009, on ABC.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Butsch, "Class and Gender through Seven Decades of American Sitcoms," in *Media and Class: TV, Film, and Digital Culture*, edited by June Deery and Andrea Press (New York: Routledge, 2017), 38-52.

<sup>64</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 2, Episode 14, "Bixby's Back," directed by Chris Koch, written by Danny Zuker, aired February 9, 2011, on ABC.

<sup>65</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 3, Episode 5, "Hit and Run," directed by Winer, written by Elaine Ko, aired October 12, 2011, on ABC.

<sup>66</sup> Hanke, "The 'Mack-Macho' Situation Comedy"; Glenn, "White Masculinity and the TV Sitcom Dad."

Phil's antics indeed play for laughs. However, *Modern Family* also uses his behaviors to showcase the gendered stigma he endures when he fails to perform hegemonic masculinity successfully. In the series' fourth season, for instance, Jay assumes Phil does not want to buy or test-drive his Harley Davidson motorcycle, explaining to Phil, "I just never thought of you as a motorcycle kind of guy."<sup>67</sup> Jay's statement causes Phil to feign interest despite his fear. Phil confesses to viewers, "I'm terrified of motorcycles, but sometimes you have to do things to show the world you're still a man."<sup>68</sup> Another striking example occurs in a season seven episode, "The Storm." During a major storm, Phil offers to solve a series of water problems for Jay, including a clogged rain gutter and an overflowing pool. We learn from Claire that Phil is overcompensating for an earlier embarrassing incident in which he fainted after seeing himself dressed as a clown in a house of mirrors (due to his fear of clowns). Phil says to Jay, "I need to feel like a man. Let me pump your pool."<sup>69</sup> In these and similar examples, Phil explicitly characterizes masculinity as something a man performs.

Unfortunately, neither escapade succeeds in proving Phil's manhood. Once he's ridden the motorcycle into the hills overlooking Los Angeles and, consequently, out of cell phone range, he falls and gets trapped under the bike. He eventually frees himself and returns home to Claire, who says he looks "so cool" on the motorcycle.<sup>70</sup> In response, Phil incredulously retorts, "Do I, Claire? Do I really?" as he reveals he had to cut off one pant leg extremely short—at the crotch line—to disembark from the motorcycle.<sup>71</sup> Phil's foolishness results in a comedic visual image that subtly questions his sexuality and certainly his competence riding a motorcycle. Likewise, Phil's efforts to pump Jay's pool result in his fainting a second time at the site of Cam dressed as Fizbo the Clown and being awkwardly complimented by Gloria. When Phil tells her he always wanted to be a hero, Gloria responds, "'Hero?' You're so much more than that. You have flaws. You fall down a lot. . . . You cannot even open a jar [referring to a pickle jar he struggled to open]. You cry all the time."<sup>72</sup> She goes on to explain that Phil makes people feel comfortable, but the scene ends with Jay entering and easily opening the same jar Phil could not twist off.<sup>73</sup> In both cases, Phil not only fails to perform tests of masculinity—riding a motorcycle without incident, successfully pumping the pool, easily opening the pickle jar—but he is also feminized for his failures—as revealed for the audience via his cut-off pant leg, repeated fainting, and Gloria's "compliments."

Rather than reinforce hegemonic masculinity, Phil's failed performances resist it. By inviting viewers to heartily laugh at Phil's demoralizations, *Modern Family* draws attention to the silliness and sadness of both his desperation to execute hegemonic masculinity and to the gendered ridicule he faces when he cannot perform gender successfully. A man should not so desperately need certification of the masculinity he supposedly has naturally, nor should he be subject to feminization for struggling with such specific acts as riding a motorcycle, pumping a pool, or opening a pickle

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<sup>67</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 4, Episode 6, "Yard Sale," directed by Mancuso, written by Higginbotham, aired October 31, 2012, on ABC.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 7, Episode 14, "The Storm," directed by Jim Bagdonas, written by Zuker, aired February 24, 2016, on ABC.

<sup>70</sup> *Modern Family*, "Yard Sale."

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> *Modern Family*, "The Storm."

<sup>73</sup> This episode ends by affirming Phil's ability to comfort people, which he does by enabling Jay to mourn the death of a Navy buddy. This ending ultimately celebrates Phil's more stereotypically feminine ability to nurture others. We explore this strategy of authorization in the next section.

jar. This foolishness attunes audiences to look for the policing and punishment associated with hegemonic masculinity as they laugh at Phil.

### *Attuning to Policing*

*Modern Family* also weakens hegemonic masculinity by revealing its reliance on policing or accountability. Messerschmidt explains that people perform their gender and sexuality in anticipation of being interpreted and judged (i.e., held accountable or policed) by other people.<sup>74</sup> Such social accountability, and people's investment in it, can go unnoticed unless it is made obvious or apparent. *Modern Family* further resists hegemonic masculinity by making this key mechanism visible and attuning the audience to its important role. One way *Modern Family* orients viewers to its reliance on accountability practices is by depicting its male characters surveilling their *own* actions and appearances, or self-policing. For instance, in the ninth season, Mitch asks his husband, Cam, if he noticed that their home contractor (an attractive straight man named Fernando) refers to Cam as "boss" and to Mitch by his name.<sup>75</sup> He explains, "He treats you like the actual boss and me like I'm some, you know, ditzy trophy wife."<sup>76</sup> When Cam explains it may be due to his increased assertiveness, Mitch muses, "Do you think so, because I actually have thought that. I mean, maybe I'm too passive . . . ."<sup>77</sup> In this scene, Mitch both questions why he failed to elicit an affirmation of his masculinity from the contractor, and he reveals his previous internal scrutinizing, or policing, of his actions. He then immediately attempts to self-correct by demanding of the contractor that the dishwasher be moved. The contractor has Mitch get on his back under the sink to understand why that is impossible, resulting in Mitch putting himself in a vulnerable and submissive physical position—a result made clear to viewers when the contractor offers to brush sawdust from Mitch's shirt and Mitch giggles (because "it tickles") and Cam shakes his head in the background disapprovingly.<sup>78</sup> In this and similar examples, *Modern Family* invites viewers to laugh at the anquish Mitch experiences when reflecting on the unsuccessfulness of his masculine performance as well as at the ridiculous lengths he goes to correct it. The show further encourages viewers to notice the labor involved in self-policing and to find the accountability that hegemonic masculinity relies on as silly, if not ludicrous.

*Modern Family* also draws attention to the socially constructed nature of hegemonic masculinity when male characters police each other's performances. In order to remain invisible and appear natural, hegemonic masculinity cannot be in competition with alternative performances of gender.<sup>79</sup> When men deviate from the appropriate gendered performance in concert with hegemonic masculinity, the alternative performance must be degraded or rejected to reinforce the perceived superiority and inevitability of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>80</sup>

*Modern Family* frequently showcases men's policing of each other's gendered performances. In addition to Phil's desire for Jay's affirmation, *Modern Family* consistently highlights Jay's continuous need to degrade and "correct" his stepson's (Manny) foreign expressions of gender. Through the first several seasons, Manny's depiction is frequently anchored by his foreignness as

<sup>74</sup> Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*, 116.

<sup>75</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 9, Episode 3, "Catch of the Day," directed by Fred Savage, written by Richman, aired October 11, 2017, on ABC.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*, 131.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 116.

a Latino, including his performance of gender, which Jay typically assesses as failing to properly perform hegemonic masculinity because of what he perceives to be Manny's feminine actions (e.g., being romantic, dressing fashionably) and "un-American" interests (e.g., native Columbian cultural traditions). Jay frequently "teaches" Manny to alter his gender practices so as to better meet the judgments of his new white and American evaluators. Indeed, *Modern Family* establishes Jay's policing of Manny's performance in the show's pilot episode when Manny wants to wear a silk shirt and declare his love for an older girl. Jay mockingly advises him, "If you put on a puffy white shirt and declare your love for a 16-year-old, you're going to be swinging from the flagpole in your puffy white underpants."<sup>81</sup> When Gloria objects to Jay's disapproval, Jay explains it will "[toughen] him up" and that he's "hard on Manny . . . because I don't want to see him make a fool of himself."<sup>82</sup>

Manny's alternative performance of masculinity, while more traditional for a young man in Colombia, is degraded by Jay as other and feminine in his newfound American situation. Jay's criticisms police Manny's behaviors and ward off challenges to a white hegemonic masculinity assumed by Jay to be superior in the United States. In doing so, *Modern Family* further attunes viewers to the constructed nature of white and American hegemonic masculinity, including its need to protect itself from challenges by alternatives. Any gender expression that must be protected, taught, or degraded must be a performance to be perfected rather than an innate essence to be exuded.

*Modern Family* thus draws viewers' attention to the ways its male characters strive to perform hegemonic masculinity's ideals, the ridicule they face when they fail, and the policing measures they take to retain hegemonic masculinity's power. In doing so, the show depicts hegemonic masculinity as a social construction that requires significant and ongoing labor to maintain its perceived superiority over non-hegemonic masculinities, foreigners, and women. Making this typically invisible work apparent and, consequently, inviting viewers to laugh at its absurdity, allows *Modern Family* to regularly resist hegemonic masculinity over the arc of its eleven seasons. We next identify an additional counterhegemonic strategy the show uses to resist hegemonic masculinity: the authorization of feminine and flamboyant behaviors as appropriately manly.

### Resistance through Authorization

Alongside revealing and scrutinizing the particular kind of performances required by hegemonic masculinity, *Modern Family* also resists hegemonic masculinity by authorizing feminine and flamboyant behaviors as appropriately manly. Messerschmidt argues that hegemonic masculinity can be countered by weakening the hierarchical relationship of supposedly superior and inferior qualities that hegemonic masculinity relies upon.<sup>83</sup> Drawing on sociological case studies, he notes how "practices that previously were identified as feminine behavior became recognized and established as positive masculine behavior and thus challenged gender hegemony."<sup>84</sup> In this spirit, *Modern Family* further resists hegemonic masculinity through its characters' lauded performances of behaviors coded as more caring and nurturing (and thus feminine) or more overtly homosexual, ex-

<sup>81</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 1, Episode 1, "Pilot," directed by Winer, written by Levitan and Lloyd, aired September 23, 2009, on ABC.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*, 151.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

aggerated, or even campy (and thus flamboyant). In so doing, *Modern Family* destabilizes hegemonic masculinity by sanctioning otherwise subordinated and stigmatized behaviors for men. We turn next to each of these sets of counterhegemonic practices: the authorization of both femininity and flamboyancy.

### *Authorizing Femininity*

*Modern Family* counters hegemonic masculinity by rewarding its male characters for exhibiting behaviors typically stigmatized as feminine. This is especially apparent in the gendered performances of Phil. Phil openly and unabashedly nurtures, cares for, and expresses his love to his family, and the show frequently rewards him with success or superiority over hegemonic versions of masculinity rather than only mocking him for unmanliness (a strategy discussed in the previous section). For example, when Phil infers that his daughter Alex is nervous about fitting in at her new college, he lovingly coaxes her—despite her initial protestations—to participate in a freshmen ritual (in which “freshmen jump off a high dive in cheesy prom dresses”) to help her make new friends.<sup>85</sup> He confesses his “own first-year insecurities” at college to Alex, explaining, “I didn’t know anybody, and no matter how hard I tried I was always on the outside. And then suddenly one day, something clicked and I was in.”<sup>86</sup> Although Alex expresses disinterest in joining the ritual, she later discovers Phil bought her a prom dress, and the episode ends with Alex jumping off the diving board to cheering onlookers.

Similarly, when Luke’s basketball coach quits suddenly, Jay takes over but his aggressively masculine style results in the kids performing poorly. Phil then coaches the boys with a more nurturing and supportive style, which proves enjoyable and successful.<sup>87</sup> In scenes such as these, Phil’s wise inferences and supportive responses reflect his emotional intelligence and his capacity for intimate connections. By depicting these behaviors as successful, *Modern Family* positions such expressiveness, nurturing, and emotional wisdom, which can be denigrated as feminine when present in men, as not only appropriately manly and fatherly but even superior to the toughness and competitiveness required by hegemonic masculinity.

The show sanctions Jay’s softer moments of vulnerability as well, particularly through his interactions with the family’s French bulldog, Stella. The bulldog is introduced to Jay indirectly by Gloria at the end of the series’ second season. Jay comes across a man he does not know sitting at his kitchen table; as he explains, “At least once a month, I find a total stranger sitting in my kitchen. Gloria collects every kind of stray, looking for work, money—you name it. She’s got a big heart. It’s the one thing I’d like to change about her.”<sup>88</sup> As the camera pans back to this stranger (Guillermo, played by Lin-Manuel Miranda), Stella jumps onto a chair and barks. Jay responds with little fanfare, saying simply, “Hey, a dog. That’s new.”<sup>89</sup> Both of Jay’s comments reflect his initial performance of hegemonic masculinity. Not only is he unimpressed by the dog and man in his home but he positions his indifference—to both animal and stranger alike—as the appropriate masculine behavior in contrast to Gloria’s nurturing, caring, and “big-hearted” femininity.

<sup>85</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 7, Episode 11, “Spread Your Wings,” directed by Bagdonas, written by Vanessa McCarthy and Ryan Walls, aired January 13, 2016, on ABC.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 1, Episode 20, “Benched,” directed by Chris Koch, written by Zuker, aired April 14, 2010, on ABC.

<sup>88</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 2, Episode 22, “Good Cop, Bad Dog,” directed by Savage, story by Higginbotham, teleplay by Higginbotham and Richman, aired May 11, 2011, on ABC.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

By episode's end, however, the hard veneer of Jay's masculinity has cracked. After fighting off Gloria and Manny's attempts to keep the dog, Jay, who is determined to take Stella to the pound, finds himself in a staring contest with the whimpering canine. The scene cuts to a brief interview with Gloria, who declares to the audience that "I like a strong man, a man who can say no when I can't."<sup>90</sup> Her affirmation of Jay's hegemonic masculinity is, however, immediately undercut by Jay returning home with Stella in his arms; as he gives the dog to an excited Manny, he begrudgingly utters "not a word" to Gloria.<sup>91</sup> Thus, the episode ends with Jay expressing a more caring and nurturing masculinity, as he holds Stella and affirms for both himself and the audience at home: "I'm strong."<sup>92</sup> The series' introduction of Stella authorizes Jay to redefine masculine strength, if only temporarily, to include caring and connection.

Jay's moments of softness and vulnerability are not reserved for Stella alone, however. For instance, *Modern Family* reveals Jay's ultimate appreciation of his family on his birthday when he originally wanted to fish by himself on the lake. After being kept from his wish by his family's mistakes and then enduring their poorly planned birthday party, Jay declares he wants to "go upstairs, curl up with a Ludlum, and call it a day."<sup>93</sup> But when Manny invites Jay to join him in their backyard pool in Jay's fishing boat to "pop open a few drinks and hang out on the water," Jay confesses to the camera, "Now the old Jay would have said, 'I wanted to be on a lake, with a fishing rod and sunshine, not bobbing around at night in a swimming pool.' I miss the old Jay."<sup>94</sup> While sarcastic, Jay suggests that his new self values familial emotional bonds and selflessness over emotional distance, toughness, and isolation. Consequently, *Modern Family* justifies and, thereby, authorizes Jay's sensitive, connected, and nurturing expressions of masculinity, which are often associated with femininity.

*Modern Family* further authorizes femininity by revealing its benefits for men in contrast to the destruction wrought from the pressures and expectations of hegemonic masculinity. During a seemingly routine trip to the mall, for example, another driver steals a parking spot from Phil, who was driving.<sup>95</sup> When Phil initially responds calmly, Jay instructs, "[H]ere's the only thing you gotta know about being a man. Never let someone take what is yours."<sup>96</sup> When Phil disagrees, Jay asks, "You got any lipstick in your purse?" clearly feminizing him for giving away the parking spot rather than erupting in violent anger.<sup>97</sup> Later on, Jay confronts the driver and learns he was distraught about his dog's death; Jay also discovers that Phil took his advice to act tougher and attacked a cologne salesman. Consequently, Jay seems to regret the violent toll his approach takes on other people. He apologizes to Phil and admits he admires Phil's more easygoing ways (which are, as discussed previously, often rooted in behaviors coded as feminine). In this example, we watch the physical and emotional anguish felt by Phil and the driver who lost his dog (not to mention the cologne salesman). Both initially play for laughs, but become poignant when Jay recognizes the harm he caused and sincerely apologizes to Phil.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 2, Episode 24, "The One That Got Away," directed by Bagdonas, written by Corrigan, Walsh, and Dan O'Shannon, aired May 25, 2011, on ABC.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 2, Episode 10, "Dance Dance Revelation," directed by Mancuso, written by Ilana Wernick, aired December 8, 2010, on ABC.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

In highlighting *Modern Family*'s authorization of femininity, we explicitly reject the claim that the series sustains hegemonic masculinity by redefining it, such as by *incorporating* behaviors associated with normative femininity. Messerschmidt calls such incorporation "hybrid hegemonic masculinit[y]" and defines it as "involv[ing] the incorporation of subordinated styles and displays (masculine and/or feminine) into certain men's (and women's) identities, and in the process simultaneously secur[ing] and obscur[ing] their hegemonic power."<sup>98</sup> Much recent work on hegemonic masculinity in rhetorical and media studies identifies hybrid hegemonic masculinities at work,<sup>99</sup> including in scholarship on the depiction of sitcom fathers as fools.<sup>100</sup>

Unlike the texts these scholars study, however, we argue that *Modern Family* avoids reviving hegemonic masculinity via a hybrid version. Rather than incorporate these feminine qualities into hegemonic masculinity, *Modern Family* positions them in direct contest with hegemonic masculinity. Characters are depicted as having to choose between two masculinities, if sometimes in hindsight. Jay laments his opting for aggressive confrontation *in contrast to* Phil's more understanding approach. He chooses to spend time with his family and connect with Stella *instead of* isolating himself on his birthday and returning the dog to the pound. The feminine behaviors cannot be integrated into hegemonic masculinity because, based on the show's depictions, these behaviors vigorously compete with performances of hegemonic masculinity. The clashing co-existence of the two versions of masculinity teaches characters (and the audience at home) valuable gendered lessons and destabilizes hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, Messerschmidt found that in some case studies "the co-existence of hegemonic and nonhegemonic masculinities can possibly lead to more humane and less oppressive ways of being a boy or man."<sup>101</sup> *Modern Family*'s authorization of feminine qualities offers the viewing audience a preferable alternative gender performance to hegemonic masculinity.

### *Authorizing Flamboyancy*

Alongside *Modern Family*'s authorization of feminine behaviors by its male characters, the series also sanctions flamboyancy. Such endorsement likewise resists hegemonic masculinity, which typically subordinates and stigmatizes homosexuality or any behaviors that might also be coded as "gay," such as flamboyance. Flamboyance allows for the external, exaggerated, and even campy performance of masculinity (by both queer and straight men alike). When stigmatized as inappropriate or unmanly (i.e., effeminate, often hyperbolically so), flamboyancy reinforces hegemonic masculinity. But when "recognized and established as positive masculine behavior," flamboyancy challenges hegemonic masculinity by destabilizing its subordination of gay masculinity.<sup>102</sup> We find such authorization of flamboyancy in *Modern Family*.

Central to our discussion of flamboyancy as a counterhegemonic practice are the characters of Mitch and Cam. The show resists hegemonic masculinity by drawing attention to their "straight-acting," as noted in the previous section. *Modern Family* also counters hegemonic masculinity by rewarding their flamboyant actions as gay men. Near the end of the series' first episode, for instance, Cam emerges clad in a red silk robe while *The Lion King* soundtrack plays loudly in their

<sup>98</sup> Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*, 82.

<sup>99</sup> Wei Luo, "Television's 'Leftover' Bachelors and Hegemonic Masculinity in Postsocialist China," *Women's Studies in Communication* 40, no. 2 (2017): 190-211; Emily Ryalls, "Emo Angst, Masochism, and Masculinity in Crisis," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2013): 83-97.

<sup>100</sup> Glenn, "White Masculinity and the TV Sitcom Dad"; Hanke, "The 'Mack-Macho' Situation Comedy."

<sup>101</sup> Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*, 151.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



living room.<sup>103</sup> He holds Lily up, presenting her to the family as if she is the lion prince, Simba. Cam's flamboyancy is clear as "The Circle of Life" reverberates. And, pivotally, it is celebrated. Cam's entrance proves to be of necessity, as it comes after Mitch's failed attempt to more rationally explain the couple's decision to adopt Lily—an attempt that is met by surprise and homophobic distress. It is only after Cam's flamboyant action that Jay, and the group as a whole, embrace the new addition to the family. Moreover, this authorization of Cam's flamboyancy as superior to Mitch's restraint occurs in the series' first episode, rather than years into its run, a move that invited recurring expressions of flamboyancy in the decade of episodes to come.

Indeed, as if to ensure its affirmation of this act of flamboyancy, *Modern Family* returns—or "circles" back—to it in its season ten finale when Phil and Claire's eldest daughter, Haley, gives birth to twins.<sup>104</sup> This time, a now much older Lily precedes Cam and Mitch into the hospital room where the extended family waits to meet the babies. She lowers the lights and brings in a speaker, which again plays, "The Circle of Life." Mitch and Cam, now wearing matching red silk robes, dramatically carry the babies into the room and, once again, raise them like Simba. As before, this act signifies the valuing of babies whose introduction to the family were initially questioned (when Haley, a relatively young mother, revealed her pregnancy to the family). The parallels to the pilot episode are illustrative, along with the differences: both Mitch and Lily now readily join Cam's flamboyant display, their participation suggesting the performance is totally appropriate.

*Modern Family* presents Cam's (and later Mitch's and Lily's) flamboyancy as a strategic performance rather than a natural essence. The show made this point most overtly in the seventeenth episode of season ten.<sup>105</sup> During an evening conversation in a remote cabin, Cam admits to Mitch, Phil, and Jay that his extravagant behavior resulted from children making fun of him as a boy. When the other men ask why Cam likes to wear so many different outfits, he replies, "I guess when I was a kid, I realized I wasn't ever going to fit in, so I decided to stand out. I embraced my flamboyance to let the world know their insults won't hurt me."<sup>106</sup> Here, the show affirms that Cam chose flamboyance in response to kids' teasing. The behavior is an act performed not simply to survive socially but to harness gendered power. It counters hegemonic masculinity by embracing and showcasing the very performance of gay masculinity that hegemonic masculinity degrades. It frees Cam from the social punishment that accompanies hegemonic masculinity's policing of his sexuality and authorizes his alternative, flamboyant performance as a worthwhile expression of masculinity.

Mitch also rejects such policing and embraces flamboyancy as a preferable expression of masculinity. In the second episode of the series, Cam and Mitch's storyline focuses on their experience at a toddler play class. Mitch declares his fear that they will be "judged enough as the only gay parents there" and mocks Cam's clothing; "wow, paisley and pink," he snickers, before further rebuking Cam with the sarcastic insult, "was there something wrong with the fishnet tanktop," suggesting that Cam's decision is dangerously akin to the flamboyant dress one might expect at a LGBTQ+ pride parade or gay club.<sup>107</sup> He places his fear onto Cam by requesting that his partner

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<sup>103</sup> *Modern Family*, "Pilot."

<sup>104</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 10, Episode 22, "A Year of Birthdays," directed by Levitan, written by Levitan, aired May 8, 2019, on ABC.

<sup>105</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 10, Episode 17, "The Wild," directed by Bagdonas, written by Ko, aired March 13, 2019, on ABC.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 1, Episode 2, "The Bicycle Thief," directed by Winer, written by Bill Wrubel, aired September 30, 2009, on ABC.

change his clothes and, with him, perform a “a slightly toned down version of ourselves.”<sup>108</sup> Cam attempts to do so by passing as straight: he changes his clothes, shifts his voice to a lower register, and disinterestedly talks about grilling.<sup>109</sup> His “straight persona” plays for laughs as it is an unwilling performance, one expressed solely to appease his partner.

However, Mitch’s fear is deemed both without merit and unjustified, as Mitch and Cam quickly encounter another gay couple at the class who are unabashedly flamboyant (one man even wears a purple paisley shirt) and beloved by the other parents. It is the sight of the couple—flamboyancy made manifest—that ultimately makes Mitch see the error of his ways. The episode concludes with Mitch “releasing” Cam from his forced passing, even if he is a bit reluctant and ashamed to do so. Cam flamboyantly dances, and Mitch looks on with an expression of supportive trepidation, suggesting that flamboyancy can be a positive behavior, and a counterhegemonic one at that, of masculinity that opposes the straight-acting dictated by hegemonic masculinity. Rather than warding off or policing these behaviors as unwanted, the show presents them as (equally) viable, even preferable, performances of masculinity. *Modern Family* shows there are benefits and advantages to these performances and not just to straight-acting ones.

*Modern Family*’s characterization of flamboyance within its male characters does not stop at Mitch and Cam. Indeed, there are numerous examples of both Phil and Jay (as well as Manny) engaging in acts that come across to audiences as campy, over-the-top, bombastic and, ultimately, as flamboyant. These gendered performances are humorous due to their exaggerated effect; it is indeed funny to watch the series’ heterosexual men also engage in acts that strongly depart from the rigid expectations of hegemonic masculinity. Such flamboyant performances authorize *Modern Family*’s heterosexual characters to transgress beyond the hegemonic confines of traditional, restrained masculinity. This is particularly clear with the series’ patriarch, Jay, and his aforementioned relationship with Stella.

While certainly not the first sitcom father to have a pet dog (e.g., *My Three Sons*, *Brady Bunch*, *Full House*), Jay’s adoption of Stella into the family’s life and home is notable for the ways it authorizes the performance of a masculinity that is not only more feminine, but also flamboyant. In the third season, Jay lets a snoring Stella sleep in his and Gloria’s bed (“she probably got scared and snuck in”<sup>110</sup>), buys her professional cupcake dog treats that are so appetizing that a hungry Mitch and Cam eat them as well (they’re “not too sweet” and taste “almost like pâté”<sup>111</sup>), and is revealed to be showering with the dog as well, much to Gloria’s confusion and dismay (“you used to put *me* first! You used to want *me* in that shower!”<sup>112</sup>). Jay also refers to Stella by a litter of pet names (e.g., “honey,”<sup>113</sup> “this little angel,”<sup>114</sup> “gorgeous,”<sup>115</sup> “little girl”<sup>116</sup>), and accessorizes her with boots, a fancy bed, and, in one memorable episode, an expensive GPS-enabled dog-tracking

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 3, Episode 3, “Phil on Wire,” directed by Winer, teleplay by Zuker, story by Bianca Douglas and Zuker, aired September 28, 2011, on ABC.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, emphasis in original.

<sup>113</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 3, Episode 13, “Little Bo Bleep,” directed by Koch, written by Cindy Chupack, aired January 18, 2012, on ABC.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 10, Episode 14, “We Need to Talk About Lily,” directed by Higginbotham, written by Higginbotham and Richman, aired January 30, 2019, on ABC.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

collar to prevent her from hooking up with a neighborhood dog.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, he shouts “my baby” upon hearing Stella bark and jump into the family’s pool; Jay, in a notable sign of his pet-centered flamboyance, jumps in to save her, shouting, while wearing all of his clothes<sup>118</sup> (an action that savvy viewers might compare to Cam’s own flamboyant screaming after locking an infant Lily in the car<sup>119</sup>).

*Modern Family* authorizes Jay’s flamboyancy via his relationship with Stella and, as the above examples demonstrate, enables both him and the viewers at home to realize the joys of not just pet ownership but, too, of flamboyant performances of masculinity. Indeed, Jay comes a long way from his initial interactions with Stella in season two. As opposed to the indifference expected of him by hegemonic masculinity, we see that Jay embraces an exaggerated, sometimes campy, and regularly over-the-top love for Stella. He dotes on her and, at times, seems to care more for her than his wife, children, or grandchildren. Jay’s nicknames, accessories, and actions betray an attachment to Stella that positions him as a man who, despite his role as the family’s patriarch, gladly performs a masculinity with a canine-inspired touch of flamboyance.

By authorizing flamboyancy not only for gay men but also its heterosexual characters, *Modern Family* depicts it as a performance available to any man. Even men who identify as heterosexual do not have to act straight—or excessively restrained or emotionally detached—to be perceived by others as acceptably masculine or manly. Again, we reject the argument that *Modern Family*’s sanctioning of flamboyancy, especially by its heterosexual characters, actually reinforces hegemonic masculinity by incorporating subordinated behaviors into its performance. As we noted previously, Messerschmidt warns of hegemonic masculinity’s ability to reconfigure itself. He draws on Demetrakis Demetriou’s 2001 article to note how, in Western societies, some heterosexual men “appropriate ‘bits and pieces’ of gay men’s styles and practices, and . . . thus construct a new hybrid configuration of gender practice. Such an appropriation blurs gender difference but does not undermine unequal gender relations.”<sup>120</sup> Demetriou looks back to the 1960s and 1970s when women’s liberation and gay rights became more visible and explains that hegemonic masculinity incorporated elements of gay masculinities “because they provided a masquerade behind which women’s subordination could be masked.”<sup>121</sup>

We argue, however, that *Modern Family* avoids using flamboyancy as a cloaked instrument of patriarchy. Similar to our earlier explanation, the show presents flamboyancy in opposition to straight-acting. At times it authorizes flamboyancy, as we just described. But at other times, it draws attention to how hegemonic masculinity stigmatizes flamboyancy and requires passing as straight. Yes, male characters are shown stigmatizing—or fearing the stigmatization of—flamboyance (and feminine qualities) in some scenes. But the two sets of qualities are depicted as in tension. Mitch must choose between directing Cam to suppress his flamboyant behavior or liberating him to openly perform it. Jay either stigmatizes flamboyancy to retain the superiority of heterosexual qualities, or he abandons those very qualities to perform the expressiveness and campiness that flamboyancy enables. The co-existence and tension in the show between hegemonic and coun-

<sup>117</sup> Ibid; *Modern Family*, Season 11, Episode 4, “Pool Party,” directed by Higginbotham, written by Higginbotham and Jon Pollack, aired October 16, 2019, on ABC.

<sup>118</sup> *Modern Family*, “Little Bo Bleep.”

<sup>119</sup> *Modern Family*, Season 1, Episode 6, “Run for Your Wife,” directed by Winter, written by Walsh and Corrigan, aired October 28, 2009, on ABC.

<sup>120</sup> Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*, 45.

<sup>121</sup> Demetrakis Demetriou, “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique,” *Theory and Society* 30, no. 3 (2001): 352.

terhegemonic performances draws attention to flamboyancy (and femininity) as sites of contestation between two dueling masculinities. Consequently, *Modern Family* weakens hegemonic masculinity's exercise of power over women and alternative masculinities through competition and scrutiny rather than strengthens it through hybridization.

## Conclusion and Implications

As we have illustrated, *Modern Family*'s rhetorical power lies squarely in its ability to resist hegemonic masculinity in a comedic, yet critical, fashion through strategies of attunement and authorization. The show reveals the nature and work of hegemonic masculinity and sanctions behaviors typically stigmatized as unmanly. These counterhegemonic strategies work in tandem to scrutinize confining expectations for men and to offer viable alternatives, and their co-existence mitigates against an oppressive hybrid combination.

The show's resistant work offers at least three lessons or implications for the viewing public. First, *Modern Family*'s use of attunement and authorization highlights the importance for viewers to be wary of superficial readings of, or reactions to, popular television shows. In our estimation, critics of *Modern Family* who have concluded the show reinforces gender norms have overlooked *how* the show depicts the socially constructed nature and work of hegemonic masculinity, and they have too quickly discounted *Modern Family*'s authorization of femininity and flamboyancy for men. Viewing the show with a stronger awareness of *Modern Family*'s counterhegemonic strategies can help casual viewers and critics alike appreciate its strategic and "modern" depictions of men and, perhaps, more closely examine gender representations on other television family sitcoms that seem to play with their male characters, such as *Schitt's Creek*, *Fresh Off the Boat*, and *Kim's Convenience*.

Second, our analysis helps viewers appreciate the strategies required for a television show to resist hegemonic masculinity *and* draw a wide audience, especially as a mainstream family situation comedy. *Modern Family* was groundbreaking at the time of its release in 2009 for departing from television sitcoms' traditional featuring of nuclear, heteronormative, and white families (e.g., *Everybody Loves Raymond*, *Home Improvement*, *Married ... with Children*, etc.). Joe Reid notes that "a blended family with some ethnic flavor and a big ol' gay relationship front and center" represented, in 2009, "ABC taking a bold step forward."<sup>122</sup> Scott Pierce adds, "It's almost hard to believe in 2020, but in 2009 it was a fairly big deal that one of the three couples in 'Modern Family' is gay."<sup>123</sup> Departing from the traditional family model—and, we add, from reinforcing hegemonic masculinity—could have prevented large audiences from embracing the show. Yet, *Modern Family* was a ratings juggernaut for the last *decade* on ABC, becoming a hit even in "Middle America."<sup>124</sup>

In order to appeal to such widespread audiences, *Modern Family* likely could not resist masculinity norms in explicit and obvious ways. The strategy of attunement to hegemonic masculinity accordingly worked more subtly. It took men and expressions of masculinity that were already familiar to viewers and subtly shined a scrutinizing light on them. The strategy of authorization similarly shined a supportive light on behaviors typically stigmatized as unmanly. Thus, the strategies played on and stretched the public's familiarity with stock television characters and tropes while also appealing to viewers.

<sup>122</sup> Reid, "Modern Family's End."

<sup>123</sup> Pierce, "'Modern Family.'"

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

Of course, we should recognize limitations to these more subtle forms of resistance. Viewers might miss, or themselves resist, the show's resistant work. Even if we assume that viewers picked up on the show's resistance to hegemonic masculinity, they might have missed its less frequent commentary on whiteness specifically. And the show rarely draws attention to economic status or class in the performance of masculinity—a factor to which scholars like Richard Butsch have drawn special attention.<sup>125</sup> Finally, we recognize that *Modern Family* is a single show on television produced in the United States and broadcast globally. Within this broader context, *Modern Family*'s contemporary take on gender might actually enable ABC specifically, or even U.S. broadcast television corporations more broadly, to strengthen their hegemonic power. It could also allow ABC to appear modern while still overwhelmingly producing popular shows that reinforce hegemonic masculinity. But acknowledging these larger contexts and limitations does not mean viewers should dismiss *Modern Family*'s work wholesale.

Indeed, third and finally, *Modern Family* helps viewers appreciate the importance of diverse gender representations in media. Cultural battles and debates over media representation rage on,<sup>126</sup> and these battles matter, especially on prime-time television, where 10% of characters in scripted primetime broadcast series are LGBTQ+.<sup>127</sup> We posit that positive representations of diversity matter, particularly to viewers hungry to see people more like themselves depicted in laudatory ways but also to viewers who may learn about “others.”<sup>128</sup> Edward Schiappa specifically identified *Modern Family*'s depiction of Cam and Mitch's marriage—and Jay's shift from discomfort with, to embracing of, that union—as influential on audiences: “[W]e see his character change and evolve and accept the marriage. And I think that does important psychological work for mainstream viewers who may not have direct interpersonal contact with gay people in their lives.”<sup>129</sup>

We add that *Modern Family*'s supportive portrayal of not only gay characters but of heterosexual men who exhibit femininity and flamboyancy is a positive step toward more progressive gender representation. Viewers are invited to engage with and, perhaps more importantly, pedagogically learn from these diverse expressions of masculinity. By drawing attention to hegemonic masculinity as a performance, *Modern Family* encourages viewers to reflect on how and from whom they learned to act manly and, likewise, on what or who they reject as unmanly. It invites viewers to possibly adopt or simply accept alternative behaviors themselves. Such invitations are among the most “modern” features of *Modern Family*.

<sup>125</sup> Butsch, “Class and Gender through Seven Decades of American Sitcoms.”

<sup>126</sup> Erik Ortiz, “Backlash Grows Over Campaign to Make Elsa From ‘Frozen’ a Lesbian,” *NBC News*, May 13, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/backlash-grows-over-campaign-have-disney-princess-elsa-frozen-be-n573691>; Josh Milton, “Netflix Deserves Masterclass In Owning Homophobes Who Feel Gay TV Characters Are ‘Unnecessary,’” *Pink News*, May 9, 2020, <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2020/05/09/netflix-twitter-gay-meme-homophobic-lgbt/>; Andreas Wiseman, “Disney/Pixar’s ‘Onward’ Banned in Multiple Middle East Countries Due to Lesbian References,” *Deadline*, March 6, 2020, <https://deadline.com/2020/03/disney-onward-banned-multiple-middle-east-markets-lesbian-lgbt-reference-1202876168/>.

<sup>127</sup> Jeff Green, “Why Stop at 10%? Advocates Push for Even More LGBT Characters on TV,” *Bloomberg*, November 8, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-11-08/representation-of-lgbt-characters-on-tv-why-stop-at-10>.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Edward Schiappa, quoted in James Kim and Michelle Lanz, “How TV Shows Like ‘Modern Family’ Helped Shape Perceptions of Same-Sex Marriage (POLL),” *The Frame*, June 26, 2015, <https://www.scpr.org/programs/the-frame/2015/06/26/43442/how-tv-shows-like-modern-family-helped-shape-perce/>.