Transition, Crisis and Nostalgia: Youth Masculinity and Postfeminism in Contemporary Hollywood, an Analysis of *Superbad*

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This essay explores the representation of youth masculinity within contemporary Hollywood comedy. By focusing on the intersection of gender and generation, it emphasises the importance of relationality when considering representations of boyhood. Using Superbad *as a case study, this essay reveals the nuanced ways in which the crisis of masculinity is represented within popular culture in a postfeminist context. Foregrounding issues of homosociality in coming-of-age narratives, this essay emphasizes the tensions between generational expectations and performances of gender. Themes of loss and nostalgia are explored through analysis of the juxtaposition of adult and adolescent male characters in* Superbad, *providing insight and understanding of the complexities of boyhood.* Superbad *is contextualized in relation to teen comedy more broadly, highlighting the important cultural space that contemporary Hollywood comedies play in (re)constructing discourses of masculinity.*

Keywords: boyhood, comedy, film, masculinities, postfeminism, *Superbad*, youth.

Introduction

In this essay we seek to understand the ways in which youth masculinities and boyhood are constructed and represented in popular teen comedy film by examining the film *Superbad* (Greg Mottola, 2007). We argue that we need to take into account the impact that

postfeminism has had on the representation of boyhood, because the pervasiveness of postfeminist discourse has rarely been explored in the interrogation of men and masculinity. Given the centrality of male protagonists in contemporary Hollywood film, this is a particularly important endeavor.

We undertake close textual analysis to position the narrative themes and comic motifs of *Superbad* within both the historical context of Hollywood coming-of-age comedies, as well as the post-millennial adult comedies that surrounded its release. *Superbad*'s interception of these two types of comedy film will be analysed through the film's relational representation of youth and adult masculinities, highlighting a theme common to both the coming of age format and comedy of immaturity: the temporal.

The narrative of *Superbad* follows best friends Seth and Evan and their friend Fogell as they navigate their final weeks of high school. Their journey takes them on a quest for alcohol for a big party, where they hope to lose their virginity with female classmates Becca and Jules. On their way they encounter many hurdles, including a brush with the law, drugs, and fights. The central role of these teenage boys provides a starting point through which to make sense of the representation and construction of youth masculinities, particularly when understood in relation to adult male characters, such as the cops (Officer Slater and Officer Michaels) and the driver (Francis) whom they encounter en route to the party. We draw upon discourses of postfeminism, and more specifically we consider the emphasis postfeminism places on time, generation, and chronology within the life cycle. Given the centrality of male characters within the film and by focusing on the temporal aspect of youth masculinities in *Superbad*, we will inevitably be unable to analyze all representations of youth masculinity and boyhood that the film offers. However, what we do wish to illustrate throughout this essay is the importance of understanding youth masculinities as *relational* and culturally contingent, which is heightened through the representations of masculine temporal struggles

represented within Hollywood comedies more broadly. We therefore provide a rich contribution to a relatively underdeveloped field within film and cultural studies: the representation and construction of boyhood and youth masculinities.

Exploring Postfeminism in *Superbad*

There has been burgeoning academic debate surrounding the ways in which notions of postfeminism have become normalized within Western culture. Postfeminism, and the idea that feminism has "had its day," has had a profound influence on culture and thus the discourses that govern identity.

Postfeminism has been understood in a number of ways within both academia and the media, with both celebration and criticism. Gill and Scharff outline four of these contexts and the extent to which these postfeminisms might be positive or negative conditions (2011: 3-4). They discuss postfeminism as "an epistemological break from feminism" (2011: 3), referring to a transformative condition moving away from "hegemonic" second wave feminism in order to incorporate greater social diversity. Secondly, they outline understandings of postfeminism as code for an historical shift away from feminism, a condition in which feminism is "past," complete, or in any case no longer necessary, described by Genz and Brabon as a "generational shift between the relationship between men and women and for that matter, women themselves" (2009: 3). As noted by Leonard regarding the film *Monster-In-Law* (2005), this generational battle is fought in popular culture under fierce competition, as the postfeminist icon "publicly flogs" feminist attributes in order to establish a new state of femininity (Leonard 2009: 114).

The third postfeminist context is that of backlash against feminism and the direct criticism of that which is understood to be feminism's fault: here, the weakening of

masculinity. The loss of feminine virtue and the emergence of a hostile battleground of gender and sexual politics are all problems that feminism is perceived to have created.

Lastly, in reference to McRobbie's work (2004), postfeminism is described and criticized as a state of tension for femininity, freedom and female power. In this "sensibility" (Gill 2007), feminism is both visible and disavowed, as women are seen to enjoy conspicuous freedoms as a result of feminist activism but in exhibiting such freedoms disavow the need for feminism henceforth. The parameters in which the successful postfeminist character is constructed and the freedoms she enjoys because of feminism are also strictly controlled. The postfeminist state is one of being independently wealthy and ultimately a healthy and proactive consumer. The postfeminist heroine's relationship to men is also a site of this tension: even though she has the opportunity to live without a dependency on men, her life often orients around her romantic and sexual relationships with men. The satisfactory conclusion of the postfeminist narrative is one of heterosexual marriage and often the heroine's departure from employment.

Much of the contemporary feminist debate places particular emphasis on the ways in which the postfeminist context has impacted *femininities* and *female* culture. While there has not been an absence of masculinity in these postfeminist works,[1] there has been relatively little attention given to the topic, and even less so to *youth* masculinities. This reflects the relatively under-explored field of boyhood within film studies. However, we believe that the lens of postfeminism offers an insightful context through which to understand the multiple and complex ways in which boyhoods are constructed and (re)presented within contemporary Hollywood.

Superbad and Postfeminism's "Preoccupation with the Temporal"

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[1] Steven Cohen's work for example offers insight into masculinity in relation to consumption and transformation (2007: 177-200).

Critiques of postfeminism have identified a range of themes that can be applied to a reading of boyhood in relation to *Superbad*. However, postfeminism's "distinct preoccupation with the temporal" (Tasker and Negra 2007: 10) is of particular interest when considering the representation of youth cultures. Postfeminist "preoccupation with the temporal" has led to a rise in anxieties about aging (Negra 2009: 12), with, in the case of femininity, emphasis placed on girlishness and adolescence. This had led to what Wearing has argued to be the normalization of "chronological decorum" (2007: 298) within popular culture. While in this instance she refers more specifically to the temporal constraints of *aging*, it also bears relevance to youth, as "being young" also requires the performance of particular "appropriate" gendered behaviors (as found within the empirical work of Cann 2014; Ging 2005). Therefore, if we consider gender to be relationally constructed, youth masculinities must therefore be situated in relation to adult masculinities, which carry with them their own "chronological proprieties," and thus performances of "being masculine." This leads us to the works of West and Zimmerman (1987) and Butler (1990), whereby we must understand gender as *performed* and thus contextually contingent. Masculinity in boyhood can therefore be understood as a contextually contingent performance, following the work of Chu (2014) and Corbett (2009). This understanding of gender can be problematized when placed within a postfeminist framework, as gender is simultaneously promoted as both equal and thus irrelevant, or irrevocably unequal and thus essential.

Within film, as discussed below, boyhood has been conceptualized as being extended, with the "moratorium on adulthood put back further and further" (Pomerance and Gateward 2005: 3). This mirrors the preoccupation with feminine youthfulness within postfeminist culture. However, we suggest that in the case of youth *masculinity* this preoccupation with youth can be understood as the *delaying* of adult masculine gender roles, more so than the

resistance of physical biological aging, which is often the case in postfeminist *feminine* gender cultures. The departure here from the postfeminist preoccupation with being and looking young as it has been described of desirable femininity, is that for masculinity, extending youth beyond childhood is a site of crisis, not of virtue.

In the case of *Superbad*, the understanding of where boyhood "ends" is informed both by age and the appropriate responsibilities signified in characters that are either entering manhood, or already constructed as "men." For Seth and Evan, their transition to manhood can only be navigated through rites of passage. This understanding can be seen within contemporary Hollywood comedy more widely, and one of the central ways in which boyhood is marked as ending in these narratives is through the completion of high school. As Gateward has noted, graduating from high school is marked as a rite of passage into adulthood within this genre (2005: 160-1) and so its centrality within *Superbad* makes the film a rich text for analysis.

Contemporary Youth Masculinities

It is useful to reflect upon young masculinities, their normalization(s) and reproduction within the shifting academic context of masculinity theory. As Benwell has noted, defining masculinity itself can be problematic (2003: 8), and compared to women's studies, critical men's studies and studies of masculinity are still somewhat in their early days (Roberts 2014: 2), particularly in the field of film studies (Shary 2013; Greven, 2009; Baker 2006: 1; Osgerby 2004: 147; Powerie, Babington and Davies 2004: 1). The timeliness of this examination into Hollywood representations of youth masculinity can be illustrated by the current academic context, whereby masculinity studies, and particularly *young* masculinity studies, are at a decisive moment in its history, with its central theory of hegemonic

masculinity being placed under ever increasing scrutiny by proponents of inclusive masculinity theory (such as Anderson 2009 and McCormack 2012).

Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory nevertheless remains pervasive within academia, and its application of hegemony as means of understanding how a particular form of masculinity is able to guarantee the dominant position of (particular types of) men (Connell 2005: 77) is appealing to many academics researching in this field. By using hegemonic masculinity theory we are able to make sense of the ways in which "traditionally masculine" stereotypes are used as reference points in a range of contemporary Hollywood films.

In this essay we deconstruct masculinity as an *essential* category and work through the ways in which it is nevertheless constituted as a *normative* category within these representations. As a result, we follow the argument that masculinities are both "constructed in discourse and used in discourse" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 842), arguing that these discourses can be contained both in and outside the texts offered by Hollywood. It has often been argued that masculinity has "been understood as meaningful only in relation to femininity and as constructed as through an interplay of opposites and alternatives" (Pattman, Frosh and Phoenix 1998: 125). Our thesis within this essay is thus that masculinity is not only relational to femininity, but importantly it is also *generationally* relational (in and between older and younger men and masculinities). Some of these temporal tensions of masculinity can be better understood through the lens offered by postfeminism (discussed above). Therefore postfeminism impacts not only the experiences of women and femininity, but also men and masculinity.

Masculinity in Crisis?

Resulting from women's increasing "gains" through feminism, the academic literature has charted a number of changes in the ways in which men experience masculinity (Roberts 2014). Men are therefore said to be "in crisis," characterised by panic and/or anxiety, a perception of power or privilege lost and a broader sense of "powerlessness, meaninglessness and uncertainty" (Edwards 2006: 7-8). The fragility of masculinity places it under the threat of collapse, and is thus understood as an "impossible ideal" (Kirkham and Thumin 1995: 11).

Gill notes that while there have been many attempts to classify masculinities, "none have had the staying power of 'new man' and 'new lad'" (2003: 36) and these new incarnations of masculinity can be seen as, at least in part, embodiments of a new era of masculinity. While the "new man" is understood as a "consumer," a "narcissist," and "physically and mentally soft" (Benwell 2003: 13; Beynon 2002: 127), the "new lad" is meanwhile theorized as "a clear reaction to the 'new man,' and arguably an attempt to reassert the power of masculinity deemed to have been lost by the concessions made to feminism by the 'new man'" (Benwell 2003: 13). Benwell notes that there is an ethnic whiteness to the "new man," and he addresses women only as sexual objects (2003: 13). As we explore below, the tensions between the "new man" and the "new lad" are played out within the *Superbad* narrative through the characters of Seth and Evan.

However, in terms of boys' lives we question the extent to which this "crisis" is a new one. For example, Tebbutt writes that as boys grew to manhood during the inter-war years, they negotiated "areas of anxiety and vulnerability" (2012: 27). Meanwhile, in the representations of other twentieth-century masculinities, Doherty notes that the "teenpic hero" is more often a "hapless kid seeking direction, not a tough rebel fleeing restriction" (1988: 237). These are discourses that we argue can also be evidenced within the worlds and masculinities of the boys in *Superbad*.

For Faludi, the postfeminist environment places manhood as "under siege," and this is articulated through matters of virility, unemployment, and a demographic of male consumers dubbed "the Change Resisters" (1999: 7). For contemporary Hollywood comedies, the resistance of change, and particularly responsibility, is at the center of male protagonists' crisis states; their masculinity fails to live up to the post-war male ideal of being "masters of the universe" and seeks comfort in adolescent behavior and humor (Faludi 1999: 5). This comfort in adolescence has been described as "nostalgic retreat" (Benwell 2003: 14) with "cultures of prolonged adolescence" resulting from "male redundancy" (Rutherford 1997: 7). Thus, it can be said that "white American men cling ever more tenaciously to old ideals" (Kimmel 2012: 240), leading to what Rehling describes as a self-fulfilling prophecy of "masculinity in crisis" (2009: 3). The pervasiveness of discourses of masculinity as in crisis therefore require us to understand what this means and how it is represented as relating to *boys'* lives within cotemporary popular film— the latter being particularly pertinent as boys have often been overlooked in these theorizations of crisis and of postfeminism.

Representing Youth (and) Masculinity

Coming-of-age discourses are ones that have traversed Hollywood genres— comedy, drama, horror and musical— all using peer pressure, puberty and rites of passage to explore the human condition. Due to the nature of a narrative that considers the characters' emotional, physical and behavioral maturation, these movies are intrinsically linked to notions of the temporal: childhood, adolescence, adulthood and transition.

In the instance of the coming-of-age comedy, much of the comic business of these movies is derived from the discrepancy between the adult behavior the teens wish to engage in, and the restrictions placed upon them by their age and by authority figures. In terms of

narrative, these movies often depend on the struggle that occurs when the teens pursue their urges for (heterosexual) sex, alcohol, and desire for freedom, having to circumnavigate their own ages in order to pursue what they perceive to be "adult" behavior. The manifestation of this comedy stems from traditions of bodily humor, gross out comedy, and what King describes as "transgressive humor," where the body is described not as a finite or complete entity, but rather one that spills over and is out of control (King 2002: 65). Historically, this is a comedy based on subversion, where high and low are disrupted, not just in social hierarchies but on the body— the lower stratum becomes the driving focus for laughter (Paul 1994: 6). For films about puberty, comedies of transgression and subversion are central, and as we will see in *Superbad*, the urges that drive the boys, Seth in particular, can be understood as a manifestation of this.

  Superbad exists within a much broader culture of comedy films that deal with similar themes of pre-adult indulgence. College comedies that could be included here— *Animal House* (1978), *Back to School* (1986), *Road Trip* (2000), *Slackers* (2002) and *Van Wilder* (2002)— all feature male characters that are not quite young enough to be adolescent, but can still be considered "pre-adult." In terms of masculinities represented, these characters still have a lot of "growing up" to do, and so there is a pertinent crisis of the temporal in these comedies. However, the crisis of masculinity for the college-age male is quite different to that of the pre-graduation high school boy. This is because several of these films feature male characters that are acting in a way that is described as "too youthful" for their age. To exemplify, Thornton Melon, a father of a troubled student, enrolls in his son's college in *Back to School*; Tom Green's character Barry Manilow is separated from the other males of *Road Trip* not only because he stays home from the trip itself or his exaggerated weirdness, but also by his age; in the case of *Van Wilder*, the narrative centers around the eponymous protagonist's reluctance to leave college. Thus, in many of these films that represent youthful

forms of masculinity, it is in the gap between youth and adulthood that these males are attempting to bridge that much of the comedy is located. This further demonstrates the value of considering the temporal location of the masculinities represented.

Thus, to place *Superbad* within this context, we see that there are a number of films that consider young masculinities without necessarily having characters that are traditionally "young." Seth, Evan, and Fogell's comic exploits in *Superbad* take place just before one of the most significant American rites of passage has yet to take place: high school graduation. For the majority of the male characters within films exemplary of this tradition, such as *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), *Porky's* (1982), *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), *Dazed and Confused* (1993), *American Pie* (1999), and *Superbad*, the boys' "adolescent" behavior is justified by their age. The characters' inability to control their bodies or identities is the very condition of discourses of puberty that provide these movies' narrative motives and comic impetuses. This "crisis" is solved by the rites of passage that the characters are in active and in conscious pursuit of. In contrast, for post-millennial adult comedies, more in keeping with the college coming-of-age narrative, the incongruity between the male character's age and the adolescent behavior he enacts is a more difficult crisis to solve. This incongruity is one that evokes the act of regression and of looking backward. In *Superbad*, this is explicitly played out by the inclusion of the primary adult male characters, Officers Michaels and Slater.

The overriding narrative arcs in these films are ones where grown men (who are overwhelmingly white) exist within in a state of extended boyhood and are thus unable to engage with traditional responsibilities of adult masculinity (cultures of prolonged adolescence). The protagonist is immersed in a homosocial environment where he is able to maintain a state of little or no responsibility, or is able to reject the responsibilities expected of him as a result of his masculinity. The narrative is driven by transition, be that physical or metaphorical. Within such transformation, the protagonist must reconcile the crisis of his

youthful version of masculinity with the adult masculinity that is narratively forced upon him. This follows King's analysis of "the interface between adult and childhood" (2002: 83), but whereas King's analysis of Robin Williams's characters in films such as *Hook* (1991), *Mrs Doubtfire* (1993), and *Jack* (1996) are "overworked and neglectful adults rediscovering their inner child" (King 2002: 83), the masculine crises of more recent films are characterized by inner boyishness or a retreat into boyhood. Such adult masculinities are often marked by professional success, heterosexual romance, children, or a combination of all three. This can be seen prevalently across contemporary films such as *The 40 Year Old Virgin* (2005), *Knocked Up* (2007), *Step Brothers* (2008), *Funny People* (2009), and *This is 40* (2012)— all of which also were made by Apatow Productions, producers of *Superbad*.

Looking Back: Hollywood's Longing for Boyhood

What makes *Superbad* unique in this coming-of-age context is the way in which the nostalgic undertone of the narrative is made explicit through the boys' relationship with the adult males of the film. *Superbad* alludes to a fantastical autobiographical and retrospective view of the teen experience of which there is precedence within the genre.[2] What makes *Superbad* interesting as a case study is that while not expressly an autobiography, *Superbad* writers Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg began writing the script in early adolescence themselves, returning to complete the project as adults. As Rogen notes, "it's not an autobiography, but it's definitely inspired by our lives" (Callaghan, n.d.). Furthermore, this can be seen in the naming of the main characters Seth and Evan. In this film then we see an amalgamation of looking back and looking forward, with this evidenced not only in the characters but also in the stylization of the film more broadly. For example, the film alludes in many ways to 1970s America— *Superbad* as a reference to 1972 blaxploitation film

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[2] For example, *Animal House* (1978), *Back to School* (1986), *Road Trip* (2000), *Slackers* (2002) and *Van Wilder* (2002), all feature characters who are not quite young enough to be considered adolescent in *Superbad's* terms, but are still portrayed as pre-adult.

Superfly; the soundtrack featuring funk artists representative of the genre such as The Bar Kays, Jean Knight, and Sérgio Santos Mendes; and the costumes worn. Within the film we see Seth having to change into Evan's father's distinctively outdated clothes, an ensemble of a cowboy shirt and flared patterned slacks. Though the 1970s are too far back for these to be direct memories of the writers, it forces the narrative into the realm of nostalgia. This in itself can be seen as an articulation of the "crisis" of masculinity, what Benwell describes as "regressive and adolescent tendencies" (2003: 14), to a time before the gains of feminism. The obsession with '70s culture evidenced by Benwell (2003) in men's magazines can therefore be readily observed in the film *Superbad*.

Within this tradition, high school graduation in *Superbad* symbolizes the transition to college, which will ultimately end the boyish friendship between protagonists Evan and Seth. Evan's acceptance into college at Dartmouth means that he will progress into the next stage toward adulthood, without Seth. The extent of the crisis that this "end of friendship" signifies for Seth in particular is thrown into focus in a scene where Seth and Evan fight about their separation, both emotionally and physically, at the end of the summer. Seth exclaims, "You bailed on me!" turning Evan's acceptance into a prestigious college into an act of abandonment and rejection. Male teenage homosocial relationships here are characterized by loyalty and Seth feels let down by Evan's social and educational ambition, as it is indicated that he was never (nor ever will be) at the same intellectual level as his friend. Seth argues, "All we ever talked about was going to college together," illustrating the level of investment Seth has placed in this friendship. This is countered by Evan, who states, "I've wasted the last three years of my life with you," then declaring, "I'm not going to let you slow me down anymore." We can see here the juxtaposition between Evan, who views the transition into manhood as necessary, liberating, and something to be achieved as an individual, and Seth,

who sees their separation as unwanted, bringing with it the anxieties of rejection and loneliness.

Seth's resistance to adult masculinity in *Superbad* is complex, however: it is not that all adult behavior is bad and all boyish behavior is good, as age acts as a barrier to their desires. Seth's youth prevents him and his friends from doing many of the things that they would like to, such as enter strip clubs or buy alcohol. However, overcoming this barrier signals the acceptance of adult masculinity and thus loss of the "blissful freedom from the responsibilities of 'adult' behavior" (King 2002: 77). But there is a balance to be struck in what is desirable for the maintenance of boyhood activities: it is being able to temporarily assume an adult role, in order to gain access to age-restricted activities, and then to reject the associated responsibilities by abusing the access given.

As well as the balance between the realm of adolescence and the age-restricted past times with which the boys are so focused, the adult males in crisis within the world of *Superbad* try to pursue the same boyish rebellion but in their adult state. The two cops personify a great nostalgia for boyhood that typifies masculine crisis within the postfeminist condition.

In the case of feminine gender cultures Ascheid illustrates that use of nostalgia in film allows "focus on romance and their advocacy of primacy over professional ambition" (2006: 4). This regression to "pre-feminism" within a postfeminist context has implications for the representation of masculinity, particularly in returning men to overtly authoritative and aggressive roles – the hegemonically masculine. However, we suggest that the ways in which nostalgia is drawn upon in *Superbad* demonstrates tensions with this, and is constructed instead in relation to fraternity and "the end of boyhood," rejecting in part elements of hegemonic masculinity. We can therefore see that regression in *Superbad* posits itself in

relation to yearning for lost boyhoods, thus illustrating that the limits of boyhood can be avoided through the regressive performance of "youth masculinity" by adult males.

The "Crisis of Masculinity" in *Superbad*

When adult males perform youth masculinity, we also see a connection to what has been conceptualized as the "crisis of masculinity," central to discourses of postfeminism. The "crisis of masculinity" pertains that through the emancipation of women, men have lost something, that power is finite, and that if women have gained power men must therefore have lost power. This relocates masculinities in a "victim" position.[3] As Lea and Schone have argued, "to speak of a 'masculinity in crisis' hints at a somewhat elegiac pose of regret, suggesting that to attempt a remedial reconstruction of a masculinity as we know it might be a stance much more preferable to expectantly accepting its impending demise" (2003: 10). However, we do not see the "remedial reconstruction" of masculinities in *Superbad*, but instead regressive performances of (youth) masculinities lost. This is evident in the form of the adult male characters that interact with Seth, Evan, and Fogell throughout the film. This crisis of adult masculinity informs our understanding of youth masculinity as it creates a clear juxtaposition between the "men" and the "boys." This highlights the importance of relationality in terms of both gender and generation. For example, the liminality of youth discussed above is seen to be problematic in the sub-narrative that surrounds the two cops. Tied down by their job and their wives, Officer Slater and Officer Michaels spend more of the film enacting the "blissful freedoms from adult responsibility" than the cultural expectations associated with officers of the law. The main aim of the cops' regressive

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[3] Due to the relationship it has with postfeminism, some academics have argued that there has been no male loss of power through the feminist movement, and thus there is no 'crisis of masculinity' (see Heartfield 2002).

performance is to show the youthful Fogell that they too can be "cool."[4] This narrative comes to a head when they say to Fogell:

> When we were your age we hated the cops, and when we saw you in the liquor store we saw a bit of ourselves […] We just wanted to show you that cops can have a fun time too, y'know? In a way, I suppose we wanted to show ourselves.

In this scene the disjuncture between boyhood and manhood and their masculinities is elucidated. It also in this scene where the autobiographical leanings of *Superbad* are offered; co-writer, Rogen, appears on screen to articulate to Fogell his crisis of masculinity. Through the presence of Fogell, the cops are able to nostalgically remind themselves of what it was like to have fun, to be a "boy." Further to this, through their "adult" position they were able to reconcile the problems faced by the young Seth in wanting the luxuries (such as alcohol) that come with adulthood by "*acting* young" as adults. In understanding adult masculinities as distinct from youth masculinities we can also see from the cop narrative that in their transition to adulthood they have lost their sense of fun. A range of scenes between the cops and Fogell indicate that this loss of fun is related to women. For example, in the cops' opening scene they joke that Officer Slater's wife insists on him being an organ donor, showing how even after you're dead, women "still want to rip your heart out." This dichotomizes the differences between the men and the boys, as the boys' main aim in the film is to form a (sexual) relationship with their female peers, while the men seek to regress to boyish homosocial relationships, away from women.

Other adult males also reinforce these regressions to boyhood in their performances of masculinity. This is represented in the character Francis, who drives Seth and Evan to the adult house party to help them get alcohol instead of facing the police for knocking Seth over

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[4] This is interesting in itself, as in the context of boyhood, Fogell is considered far from 'cool' by his peers.

in his car. This rejection of adult responsibility therefore highlights that there *is* an expected adult masculine behavior, one from which this character deviates. In juxtaposition to the young characters, this also reaffirms the *generational* differences between the men and the boys: the adult male characters that are "in crisis" and the boys who have yet to reach this nostalgic "crisis" state. However, Seth, Evan, Fogell, and the other boys represented are not entirely untouched by these discourses of crisis.

Homosociality and Masculinity in *Superbad*

Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman have noted that the "crisis of masculinity" associated with postfeminism "reflects and contributes to the production of a parallel developmental 'crisis' for boys, engaged in the process of identity construction in a context in which the surrounding images of masculinity are complex and confused" (2002: 1). The crises faced by the young male characters can be found at the level of loss of boyhood, as discussed above, and also at the level of sexuality.

The rise of queer politics that emerged alongside, and often in convergence with the feminist movement, has led to the questioning of the perceived heteronormative accounts of masculinity. However, as Connell has noted, "hegemonic masculinity forbids the receptive pleasures of the anus and opposes assimilation" (2005: 219), and therefore hegemonic masculinities are "bound up with hegemonic sexualities" (Hearn and Morgan, 1990: 10). Seth and Evan's relationship represents the respective embrace and rejection of the end of boyhood. However, it also offers representation of a key homosocial relationship through which to analyze how young masculine friendships are articulated and worked out in relation to wider social and cultural gender norms.

Seth and Evan are best friends, and this is signaled by key moments of intimacy, such

as the way in which they talk on their mobile phones until they are standing right in front of each other, and through Fogell's presence, which acts as a reminder of how they interact with "regular" friends. Their closeness is made explicit in the "I love you" scene toward the end of the film, where Seth and Evan accept the fact that they love each other while drunk. This scene is perhaps only possible because they are visibly drunk, signaling to the audience that their inhibitions are lowered, and that they are saying things that they wouldn't normally say. This recognized lowering of inhibitions, coupled with the words that they say, such as, "I'm not even embarrassed to say it, I love you," and "Why can't we say it more often?" illustrates the ways in which homosocial male intimacy is regulated by a range of social and cultural gender norms that do not permit the proclamation of love in (heterosexual) male friendships. Closeness such as this shows us how "contradictions to hegemonic masculinity posed by male homosexuality […] are suppressed when homosexual masculinity is consistently rendered 'effeminate'" (Bird 1996: 121). This fear of perceived homosexuality in heterosexual friendships is reigned back by the film not only through explicit recognition of the codes that regulate it, in scenes such as the one discussed above, but also through the pejorative reference to homosexuality and femininity elsewhere within the film. For example, Troyer and Marchiselli argue that use of words such as "fag" and "you fems" "reconfirm[s] a homosocial bond that is also heteronormative" (2005: 271). This type of language is used frequently within *Superbad*, and almost always by the males, young and old, that are reluctant to accept adult masculinity. Heterosexuality is also reconfirmed within *Superbad* through groin-centered humor. Through characters such as Seth, who thrusts his groin behind girls and constructs phallic objects out of kitchen utensils, we are constantly reminded of his (hetero)sexual desires. Ultimately, the potential crisis of homosexuality posed to young masculinity within the film is narratively minimized by the sheer lengths that these adolescent boys will go to "get [heterosexually] laid."

Evan as "New Man"?

Evan's character offers us a nuanced departure from the masculinities normalized within the film and is simultaneously Othered and rewarded for this. Evan's sensitivity and respect for women is placed in stark contrast to Seth's largely crude and misogynistic behavior elsewhere in the film. Evan's emotionality signifies the move within postfeminist culture to the emasculation of men, in their attempt to "catch up to women emotionally" (Salzman, Matathia, and O'Reilly 2005: 40). However, within *Superbad* this does not lead to the "crisis of masculinity" in the same way that the end of boyhood does. This is because despite Evan's effeminate behavior, he ultimately "gets the girl." Conversely, Seth is punished throughout the film for his lack of sensitivity: he is knocked over by a car on two occasions, is hit on the back with a baseball bat, and ends up in a fight for dancing with a girl who is engaged to someone else. It is only when Seth adopts some of Evan's "effeminate" behaviors that we can see how he begins to win the affections of his crush. It is through his embrace of these more sensitive emotional displays ("new manhood") that he is allowed to end the film with Becca, the "hottest girl that's ever talked to [him]." However, we are ultimately reminded of his traditional hegemonic masculine identity at the end of the film when he sexually licks his lips behind Becca's back when she is not looking.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Through analysis of *Superbad* in relation to postfeminism's "preoccupation with the temporal" we can begin to grasp the complexity of (re)presenting youth masculinities within the context of "masculinity in crisis" in film. Extension of boyhood can be seen in both older

and younger characters; Officers Slater and Michaels illustrate a nostalgic longing for the return to boyhood, while Seth is reluctant to accept the jarring effects of transition from "boy" to "man." This is reinforced by further male adults such Francis the driver, who refuses to accept the responsibilities of traditional adult masculinities. Adulthood is therefore constructed as almost fully problematic for males within the film. One departure from these discourses can be seen in the character of Evan, who embraces differing masculinities and accepts transition into adulthood. Narratively, it is only through performance of these "new" masculinities that both Seth and Evan are able to "get the girl." Simultaneously, through the positioning of girls as the "ultimate goal," heterosexuality is reaffirmed. The governance of hegemonic youth masculinities through the fear of homosexuality is both recognized and normalized within the film. Through scenes such as the "I love you" moment, transgressive humor highlights the norms that govern homosocial relationships, constraining performances of masculinity that could be perceived as homosexual. Conversely, we can see regressive humor normalizing [heterosexual] youth masculinities through pejorative references to homosexuality and femininity. *Superbad* therefore provides us with a highly complex, and at times contradictory text in terms of the representation and construction of boyhood. This contributes to a wider cultural context in which hegemonic masculinities prevail, and while Anderson (2009) and McCormack's (2012) theories of "inclusive masculinities" have been found to have rising prominence, we do not see this translated within the context of contemporary American high school comedies from Apatow Productions, such as *Superbad*.[5] The relational aspect of youth masculinities is paramount, and while we have chosen to focus on postfeminism's preoccupation with the temporal, one could also analyze the ways in which youth masculinities are constructed in relation to femininities. This essay has

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[5] However, it could be argued that "inclusive masculinity" may be identified within contemporary films from other genres such as *Fame* (2009) and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012). Similarly, high school comedies that focus on girls' lives as well as boys' may also be said to feature a broader range of masculinities, such as *Easy A* (2010), *Kids in America* (2005), and *Mean Girls* (2004).

highlighted the importance of considering gender generationally, urging future research to examine the representation of gender at the intersection of age. Through the analysis of *Superbad* we can therefore see, due to the complexities of youth masculinities, further academic work must be undertaken to garner a far richer understanding of youth masculinities.

Further research could examine the ways in which these crises have been translated and are represented in the emergence of other Apatow Productions that feature female protagonists, particularly given the success of *Spy* (2015), *Bridesmaids* (2011) and *Girls* (HBO, 2012–present), as well as interest in the forthcoming female-fronted *Ghostbusters* movie. Nevertheless, these films remain in the minority in the context of contemporary Hollywood. Additionally, due to the prevalence of whiteness within Apatow productions, the masculinities that we have discussed here are performed by white cis male characters, and further research could examine the nuances that the intersection of race plays for characters of color in terms of generational masculinity.

This essay has highlighted the importance of exploring youth masculinities in generational forms, placing emphasis on discourses of postfeminism. It is through thinking about the representation of *masculinity* in terms of postfeminism's preoccupation with the temporal that we are able to explore gender identities within contemporary Hollywood comedies. Discourses of postfeminism are therefore not only crucial to the development of our understandings of femininities, but masculinities too, particularly as they are understood as "in crisis."

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