Family Guy Promotes Gender Inequality

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For almost twenty years in the making, a popular and seemingly harmless animated television series has crept its way into the homes of thousands of families in America. *Family Guy* is known for its dry humor and twisted comedic style. Women are the butt of many of the show’s roles, highlighting inequality between genders. *Family Guy* compromises the integrity of women and promotes a hierarchy of men above women using stereotypical anecdotes and derogatory humor.

Ricke (2012) conducts an experiment investigating the frequency and types of derogatory statements made on the show. “In the structure of *Family Guy*, the use of derogatory speech allows for a social structure where unequal treatment of individuals is permissible.” (Ricke, 2012, p.121) This experiment revealed that *Family Guy* promoted feelings of inferiority and facilitates unequal treatment of groups though the use of hate speech. Hate speech targeted at women is sexist speech; defined as speech that promoted “an unfair or patronizing attitude towards a person of the opposite sex” (Ricke, 2012, p.124). *Family Guy* celebrates men’s great attributes and ridicules women’s inadequacies, therefore widening the gender gap and promoting gender inequality. The influence that these derogatory statements and sexist ideas have among audiences is significant due to the show’s impressionable audience. Ricke (2012) states that:

While witnessing derogatory speech across a few episodes of the show is not likely to have a cumulative impact upon the viewing audience, the collective frequency of such language could lead audience members to believe that using this type of language, especially in humorous contexts, is not only acceptable but desirable. (p. 122)

If this type of humor becomes a staple in everyday conversation, the gap between gender
inequalities will continue to grow. As a result, hate speech and unequal treatment of women will be exploited even further.

A common stereotype that promotes gender inequality is the role of women as mothers and homemakers. Feltmate (2014) discussed preservation of traditional gender roles in the shows *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, and *Family Guy* – animated shows that are all similar in humor. As a television show focused on typical family life, *Family Guy* has a well-defined standard for the stay-at-home mom. Standards for mothers and women in “domesticoms” are at the core of this program (Feltmate, 2014). The mother of *Family Guy*, Lois Griffin is unemployed and limited to few domestic activities, for example: cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, taking care of the baby, etc. Throughout the progression of the show, Lois has changed her integrity towards this subject, as she would eventually cease questioning her role as a stay-at-home mom. “Early in the series, she was a doting housewife who wanted respect from her buffoonish husband Peter and, occasionally, a chance to work outside the home. Lois has since become a much more ambivalent mother” (Feltmate, 2014, p. 146) Lois’ unwillingness to break the “homemaker” stereotype causes audiences to believe that a woman’s place is in the home. This representation of mothers in the home immortalizes the standard that *Family Guy* has set, and as a result, promotes gender inequality (Feltmate, 2014). Peter Griffin, the patriarch of the family, has a full time job and often commands his wife to tend to his needs and belittles her as a woman. The gender roles in this show are extremely evident throughout the entire series, placing the man above the woman in the hierarchy of the family (Feltmate, 2014).
Family Guy sets itself apart from other animated television shows that are similar to it in genre and humor. Crawford (2008) stated:

Although Family Guy’s comedic style does not completely dispense with narrative structure, it does not place as much importance on plot as some other shows have done, such as South Park, King of the Hill, and The Simpsons. Instead, Family Guy takes a more fractured approach, relaxing or completely deconstructing the rules of narrative structure to allow for pop-culture references. (p. 58)

This show is sporadic in its plot and does not always follow a clear storyline. Family Guy “cut[s] away from the main story to another place or time, as the plot is interrupted and segues into unrelated, self-contained sketches of variable length” (Crawford 2008). Since there is no definite narrative structure, the jokes made on Family Guy are rarely relevant to the situation at hand and more often than not, extremely far fetched. When jokes are made at someone else’s expense, it’s usually uncalled for and serves no other purpose than to make a humorous (if not offensive) remark (Crawford, 2008). Seemingly, these jokes make light of a greater situation; they don’t serve the plot or carry the story any further. As aforementioned, Family Guy is fond of making jokes attacking women. Making light of topics, such as gender inequality, causes audiences to incorporate similar humor into their own daily conversations and, as a result, widening the gap and perpetuating stereotypes (Crawford 2008).

Although comical in nature, Family Guy has been found offensive to numerous audiences (Ricke, 2012). Penetrating audiences’ perception on controversial topics, this show is more influential than is immediately apparent. Family Guy sets a traditional
standard for women in its show and represents them in a negative light. The jokes made on this show are superfluous and cause audiences to think that it is acceptable to preserve stereotypes about women and heighten the supremacy of men over women.
References

