

“I’m into this Woodworking Stuff”: Hipster Masculinity and Adam Sackler on HBO’s *Girls*

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HBO’s *Girls* was one of the most dissected shows of the 2010s. In a blog posting for the popular culture blog *Vulture*, Bryan Moynan snarkily writes that *Girls* “was less of a television program and more of an internet think-piece factory.” Nearly all of the critical, journalistic, and scholarly writing about *Girls* has (justifiably) focused on the young women from whom the show takes its name. In addition to the compelling way in which the show depicts these women as voices of their generation (or at least a voice of a generation), *Girls* offers portrayals of the men in these women’s lives as complex, provocative, and often unfamiliar. Adam Sackler is particularly worthy of critical examination because of the complicated and often contradictory ways in which the character inhabits a particular version of twenty-first century hipster masculinity in the US. The show’s protagonist is Hannah Horvath, and Adam is Hannah’s sporadically employed on-again-off-again boyfriend. He is searching for something real in his relationships, employment, and life, but ultimately seems befuddled as to how to attain that authenticity.

Adam stands in synecdochally for a version of white urban masculinity, visible in US culture in the 2010s, which conflicts with traditional iterations of masculinity. To varying degrees of success, Adam inhabits hipster masculinity, or a version of masculinity that takes up discourses and practices of hip,

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economically-privileged, mostly white urban Millennials who dwell in enclaves such as Brooklyn. Hipster masculinity encompasses both aspects of traditional masculinity as well as aspects of a new masculinity that emerged in the wake of second-wave feminism. The contemporary hipster of the 2010s exists alongside and intersects with myriad versions of masculinities that circulate in popular culture and in people's lived practices. In this article, I take masculinity to be a set of gendered discourses and practices that mark subjects as a particular kind of man, and suggest that subjects inhabit those discourses and practices through performative iterations.

Television studies as a field of study has provided fruitful ground for exploring the various versions of masculinity on offer in the twenty-first century. In addition to myriad scholarly articles and edited collections, Rebecca Feasey's *Masculinity and Popular Culture*, Amanda Lotz's *Cable Guys*, and Michael Mario Albrecht's *Masculinity in Contemporary Quality Television* provide valuable insight into the ways in which televised representations of men replicate, complicate, and at times challenge dominant assumptions about masculinity. Many of the characters these authors study are deeply conflicted about their position as men in the twenty-first century at a moment when discourses and expectations about masculinity are rapidly changing. Many of these characters demonstrate traits that reflect influences by discourses of feminism that have circulated widely in the last half century. However, these men often are unable to live up to the expectations of these feminist discourses and consequently perform a version of masculinity that is at times at odds with itself as it grapples with the complex expectations that accompany feminist-influenced versions of masculinity.

Girls itself has been the subject of a great deal of scholarly attention, particularly about its gender politics and its relationship to feminism. That scholarship including three edited collections from academic publishers: Meredith Nash and Imelda Whelehan's *Reading Lena Dunham's Girls*, Jocelyn Bailey *et al's HBO's Girls and the Awkward Politics of Gender, Race, and Privilege*, and Betty Kaklamanidou & Margaret Tally's *HBO's Girls*. Nearly all of the entries in these collections focus on the women of *Girls*, and my goal in this paper is to broaden the conversation and offer an analysis of Adam Sackler that reflects both the general work on masculinity in television and the more specific work on *Girls*. In the next section, I interrogate the figure of the hipster, and develop the notion of hipster masculinity, a category into which Adam certainly falls, albeit often

uncomfortably. From there, I offer a specific reading of the ways in which Adam inhabits and complicates the category of masculinity, first through his performance of masculinity and his relationship to labor and class, and then through his often turbulent and ultimately unsuccessful relationship with Hannah. Finally, I try to understand the multiple and conflicted reactions that Adam evoked in the show's audience. Many wanted to hate him for the moments in which he seemed misogynist or even abusive. Similarly, many watchers wanted to like Adam and understood Hannah's compassion and love for him. Often, those sentiments came from the same person. Ultimately, I suggest that Adam's version of masculinity is complicated, conflicting, and often contradictory. At times his character seems to offer the possibility of reshaping problematic versions of masculinity; at other times he seems to be an unredeemable misogynist who is intent on controlling Hannah and exerting power over her. Adam's character is fascinating because this tension is never neatly resolved. He is neither a caring boyfriend nor an unrepentant boor; rather he has characteristics that suggest that he is both, often simultaneously.

Hipsters

The Hipster and Race

The hipster as a figure was popularized by Norman Mailer in his 1957 essay "The White Negro." Mailer describes a particular kind of white, male New Yorker who was deeply invested in bebop jazz, which was popular in the African American community at the time. In Mailer's estimation, the hipster was not satisfied with simply enjoying and appreciating bebop; he had to inhabit the culture by adopting many of the affect, slang, and mannerisms popular with the black members of that scene. In a racially problematic formulation, Mailer argues that because of their marginalized position in U.S. society, "the Negro was forced into the position of exploring all those moral wildernesses of civilized life which the Square automatically condemns as delinquent or evil or immature or morbid or self-destructive or corrupt." On his reading, the hipster was fascinated by the ability of members of the African American community to avoid the stultifying conformity of white middle-class "Square" culture that pervaded the 1950s. For Mailer, Black culture offered a bit of danger for the hipster, though Mailer fails to identify the

privilege afforded to the hipster who could at any time return to mainstream white society.

Mailer's version of the hipster, as well as Mailer's complicated and problematic depiction of the figure, echo racial complexities that historian Eric Lott outlines in *Love and Theft*. For Lott, the history of popular culture in the United States reflects dominant white culture's concomitant fascination with and repulsion by Black culture. For Lott, this phenomenon is always more complicated than simple appropriation; the fascination always reflects a complicated mix of love for Black culture that strips that culture of some of its context in an act of theft. Even from its onset, the hipster exists as a duality. On the one hand, he may truly have a deep appreciation for the culture milieu he inhabits; on the other hand, the stakes are much lower for the hipster because he is not forced to bear the incredible weight of racism that shapes the culture that he adores, mimics, and seeks to inhabit.

While the figure of the hipster has a long history, the particular version of hipsterdom that characterizes Adam (as well as several other men on *Girls*) has its roots around the turn of the twenty-first century.² In *Hip: The History*, journalist John Leland offers a genealogy of the category of hip as a set of discourses running through US culture from the Civil War until the beginning of the twenty-first century. For him, hipness historically intertwines with racial issues, and the figure of the hipster provides a way for white culture to appropriate and appreciate African American culture while maintaining a safe distance. In his model, the character that Mailer describes has many antecedents and decedents. A descendent of Mailer's hipster, the twenty-first century version, embodied by the character of Adam Sackler, is usually a white male whose performance of hipsterdom explores the complexities of class in contemporary culture more than those of race.

The Hipster and Class

Leland's genealogy ends with this new iteration of the hipster, which has since emerged as the predominant form of hipsterdom in the US. He suggests that class mimicry has replaced racial mimicry in this version and writes that "after

² Future scholarship might examine other male characters on *Girls*, as many of the show's men are written with depth and richness.

generations of white negro hipsters, the trucker hat introduces the hipster as White Boy. He is a whiteface minstrel” (Leland 353). Writing at the beginning of the first decade of the 2000s, Leland was already able to identify this new figure and to locate the figure in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn (as well as other hip enclaves in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Portland, among others). In the years since Leland identified this hipster, the figure has proliferated in nearly every sizeable US city and has become a recognizable figure in mainstream US culture. Leland’s hipster adopts a playful orientation towards the white working class; the hipster occupies a class position that allows him to dabble in performances of working-class-ness while not being bound by the limitations of the class position. The adoption of the meshed trucker hat and an affinity for erstwhile cheap beer brands such as Pabst Blue Ribbon mark the twenty-first century hipster as a nonconformist, and creates distinction between the subculture and mainstream culture writ large.

The notion of cultural distinction evokes sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital. In *Distinction*, he argues that “taste classifies and it classifies the classifier” (6); cultural knowledge positions individuals within a classed hierarchy and this hierarchy does not necessarily correlate with economic capital. Drawing from Bourdieu, sociologist Sarah Thornton articulates the need for distinction that characterizes subcultures. She holds that subcultures “assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass” (201). Leland takes the importance of distinction that characterizes subcultures and applies it to the figure of the hipster, writing that “for hipsters of any bearing, the goal remains the same: to be not one thing but two, or three, or four” (355). The urban twenty-first century version of the hipster needs to be able to embrace the duality of the hipster scene; he needs to love cheap beer and old-timey moustaches, but he cannot ever really mean it. Leland notes that the twenty-first century hipster “explores symbolic *authenticity*” (350), and performs this authenticity by adopting styles and tastes that are distinct from the mainstream culture that he despises for its inauthenticity. However, the version of authenticity that hipsters embrace is one that exudes irony rather than sincerity. He drinks Pabst and wears trucker hats not only because he wants to distinguish himself from the mainstream by adopting unpopular consumption habits, but also as a sly knowing put-down of working class culture. The white working class drink cheap beer because it is affordable and wear mesh hats because they are comfortable when performing manual labor. The hipster knows

that he can afford expensive imported beer and does not need to perform manual labor out of necessity, so adopting those cultural practices is an inside joke for those who are able to understand the language of hipster culture.

The hipster distinguishes himself both from the conventionally fashionable mainstream consumer culture and the unfashionable working class by ironically adopting the markers of the working class in hip urban spaces such as Brooklyn. The hipster occupies a precarious position vis-à-vis class as he reimagines the environs of spaces such as Brooklyn that were once dominated by the working class. In *What Was the Hipster?*, cultural critic Mark Greif identifies a fundamental tension in the figure of the hipster, as an active member of a subculture who also occupies a space of relative privilege vis-à-vis class. For Greif, “the hipster is that person, overlapping with declassing or disaffiliating groupings—the starving artist, the starving graduate student [...] who in fact aligns himself both with rebel subculture and with the dominant class” (Greif 9). Thus, adopting the clothing and consumption practices of the working place suggests that the new denizens of Brooklyn are “slumming it” as starving artists or destitute graduate students, but their ostensible poverty is always undergirded by the privilege to leave if things become too difficult. Theirs is a poverty of choice rather than necessity.

The Hipster and Masculinity

By simultaneously embracing and distancing himself from the working class, the hipster troubles any easy distinctions between class distinctions while also reaffirming his position of status in a classed system. Similarly, the version of masculinity that the hipster performs complicates the notion of masculinity while reintroducing masculinities of the past that have considerable cultural baggage. While there are certainly women who fit the description of the twenty-first century hipster, the archetypical figure of the hipster remains one that is predominantly male in the popular imagination. Writing in his blog, sociologist Tristan Bridges maintains that “hipster masculinity is associated with a specific group of men: they’re young, straight, and white. But they are also different from other young, straight, white guys—at least they seem to want to believe they are.” In other words, hipsters are men who do not want to completely destroy the category of masculinity, but rather hope to occupy a special distinguished position vis-à-vis masculinity.

Rather than essentially stable, the category of masculinity is precarious and consistently evolving, and performances of masculinity evoke both assumptions and expectations about gender in the present as well as gendered discourses from the past. In the introduction to *Debating Modern Masculinities*, sociologist Steven Roberts asserts that “the shifting and complex nature of masculinity as a gender category belies and unsettles fixed normative definitions of masculinity” (4). The hipster both unsettles and reinscribes normative assumptions about masculinity. Historically, masculinity has been aligned with labor and productivity; traditional masculinity values certain forms of work, self-sufficiency, and the potential to be a breadwinner. In “Working on Masculinity at Home,” cultural geographer Rosie Cox maintains that “there is labour that takes place in the home which has traditionally been done by men and has, at some times and in some places, been embraced by them as contributing to certain culturally-valued versions of masculinity” (228). She lists “home repairs, renovations, car maintenance, gardening and woodworking” as having “been particularly important to the performance of masculinity at certain times and in certain places” (Cox 228). Masculinity has deep roots in an ethos of production that distances men from practices of consumption, which society marked as feminine.

More recently versions of mainstream urban masculinity have centered on practices of consumption, rather than production. In “A Pedigree for the Consumerist Male,” his historical account of the complicated relationship between gender and consumption, sociologist Bill Osgerby notes that traditional distinctions between masculine production and feminist consumption had a long history, but also a great deal of overlap. According to his narrative, the post-war rise of middle class consumption in urban and suburban areas brought about a new figure of the consuming man. He writes that “as this cosmopolitan and hedonistic middle-class faction came into its own, models of masculinity rooted in personal consumption and an ‘ethic of fun’ increasingly came to the fore [...] within the culture of the new middle class, masculine identities posited on consumerist appetites became more pronounced and acceptable” (Osgerby 76). The contemporary hipster seeks to transgress the ethic of consumption by producing products through an ethic of DIY, or purchasing the discarded remnants of consumption from second-hand stores. In “The Twenty-First Century Hipster,” cultural studies scholars Ico Mali and Piia Varis note that “hipster fashion is one of the major markers of hipsterism, with an enormous emphasis on style, fashion and a particular ethic of consumption” (4). The hipster uses his

particular ethic of consumption to differentiate his performance of masculinity from mainstream men who might prefer to furnish their apartment with new artifacts from big box stores. However, in the process of disavowing consumerist masculinity, he reinscribes a version of a productionist masculinity that no longer characterizes middle-class urban life, but continues to hold considerable purchase in rural and working-class communities.

One of the strategies that the hipster adopts is a logic of pastiche. In “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” Frederic Jameson popularized the term pastiche, which he defines as “the mimicry of other styles and particularly of the mannerisms and stylistic twitches of other styles” (113). He pessimistically argued that critique and innovation in postmodern society is no longer possible, because the logic of pastiche is neutral rather than political. He avers that “in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in an imaginary museum” (Jameson 115). The hipster offers a more optimistic understanding of the logic of pastiche; he embraces the dead styles of the past in order to critique the consumerist culture of the present, and ostensibly the problematic version of masculinity on offer in a consumerist society. As Bridges notes, hipsters do not adopt the masculinities of the past, or of the working class in total, but rather “they borrow bits and pieces, like styles of facial hair or dress or very particular cultural artifacts.” Specifically addressing gender, he notes that “hipster culture is popularly presumed to be more gender and sexually egalitarian” (Bridges). However, by adopting masculinities of the past, the hipster also reinscribes “a great deal of hipster style plays on a cultural nostalgia for masculinities of old—what I like to call ‘vintage masculinity’” (Bridges). This description of hipster masculinity highlights a contradiction that pervades in hipster masculinity. On the one hand, the hipster adheres to more progressive gender norms and eschews conformity; on the other hand, the “vintage masculinity” that often serves as a template for hipster masculinity carries with it a great deal of sexist and anti-egalitarian baggage.

In the hipster’s framework, the logic of pastiche shifts from neutrality to ambivalence. Rather than offering no point of critique, the hipster is able to offer a critique of the present, but he cannot shake the specter of the past. Bridges argues that hipsters purport to disavow the very category of masculinity through their refusal of consumerist masculinity. However, through their disavowal they constitute a new version of masculinity that may be an improvement over the

consumerist version, but that also bears traces of the past. Bridges states that “as an identity, hipster masculinity seems to simultaneously—if contradictorily—claim: ‘Real men don’t care about masculinity,’ ‘I don’t care what people think of my masculinity, and, more subtly, ‘This (practiced) indifference is why I’m more of a man than you!’” Prominent feminist journalist Susan Faludi argues that the shift to consumerism as the dominant mode of middle-class masculinity creates a feeling of ennui or malaise among men who feel trapped in the confines of a stultifying life. In *Stiffed*, she asserts that because of economic shifts such as deindustrialization and cultural shifts associated with second-wave feminism, men in contemporary US society are struggling with the role of masculinity in contemporary culture. Faludi writes that “men of the late twentieth century are falling into a status oddly similar to that of women at mid-century. The fifties housewife [...] could be said to have morphed into the nineties man, stripped of his connections to a wider world and invited to fill the void with consumption and a gym-bred display of masculinity” (40). Film scholar D. Gilson specifically locates this desire for a pre-industrial masculinity and affinity for physical craftwork in performances of hipster masculinity. In “Buddy Holly Glasses, Tube Socks, and Angst,” he asserts that “if the postindustrial United States has simultaneously seen an actual loss in ‘hard-labor’ jobs and a perceived loss of power for white men, then a return to the value of masculine handicraft under hipster aestheticism [...] should not be surprising” (Gilson 88). The desire to reconnect with physical labor through hobbies such as woodworking evokes an older version of masculinity based upon physical labor. This version of masculinity also bears traces of the pre-feminist world in which this masculinity dominated.

Adam as Reluctant Hipster

By the time that *Girls* premiered in 2012, Adam Sackler is easily identifiable as a hipster of the twenty-first century variety. However, Adam’s version of hipsterdom is not enthusiastic, though this is not uncommon among the hipster population. One of the tropes of hipsterdom is to deny one’s position as a hipster; in an article for *Millennial*, Daniel Allan snarkily argues that while hipsters are an identifiable group, “it actually has zero self-claimed members.” While few may confess to being a hipster, many are invested in adopting a style and set of

performative markers that identify the person as a hipster to others. Though Adam adopts many of the traits of the hipster, he seems uncomfortable with any public performance thereof, and instead leads a relatively hermetic life. The anxiety that Adam feels about his position within a hipster enclave reflects the complicated ways in which masculinity and class intersect in such an environment.

Adam's conflicted hipster identity points to conflicts and contradictions in his performance of masculinity, and the ways it intertwines with class issues. These complexities and contradictions emerge upon his introduction in the series pilot. The audience meets Adam as Hannah visits him at his apartment. The apartment is disheveled, but it projects an ethic of consumption that eschews mainstream consumer culture by reusing artifacts from the past. His affinity for the past similarly manifests in his proclivity for woodworking, a necessary skill for survival in industrial past, but a hobby made possible only by his position of relative privilege. Woodworking provides a lens into Adam's complicated relationship to work and money. In the pilot, he reveals that he majored in comparative literature in college, "and it hasn't done shit" ("Pilot"). Here, he is questioning the value of a college education, one of the bedrocks of middle-class life and masculinity. Though Adam has not actually tried to find work by using his comparative literature degree, Hannah tries to validate his other achievements. She refers to him as an actor, though at the time he does not seem to be working at all as an actor. His identification as an actor (or at least Hannah's identification of him as such) situates him outside of middle-class norms and suggests that he has an affinity for a more Bohemian lifestyle, beyond the uncomfortable confines of the traditional capitalist rat-race. Further, the profession of acting does not comport with dominant expectations about heterosexual masculinity; acting is often marked as feminine or gay rather than normatively masculine. Further, heteronormative masculinity is deeply intertwined with the ideal of a breadwinner, an unlikely position for an actor to find himself in. However, perhaps to quell any doubts about his heterosexual bona fides, he elaborates, saying that "I'm really into this woodworking stuff. It's just more honest." Woodworking may be outside of the confines of dominant expectations of middle-class comfort, but it definitely marks Adam as a heterosexual man and evokes a working-class masculinity, which he sees as more authentic, or honest.

However, the honesty that Adam expresses about his woodwork is undermined by his inability to survive on his own financially; he is certainly not in a position to play the role of a breadwinner who must provide for others. Adam

confides that his grandmother gives him \$800 a month, noting that “it gives me the feeling that I don’t have to be anyone’s slave” (“Pilot”). Here, Adam is performing an ironic critique of the capitalist system. On the one hand, he does not need to labor in the service of an employer; however, this luxury only comes about because of his financial stability. As Marx was only able to critique capitalism from a position of comfort because of his sponsor Engels, Adam can only challenge the capitalist system because of his grandmother’s allowance. However, Adam seems unfazed by his financial dependence. When Hannah mentions that she feels embarrassed because she is unable to earn a living for herself, Adam rebuffs her, pointing out the ostensible freedom that accompanies by financial dependence. I suggest that Adam’s seeming self-assurance about his dependence on his grandmother masks a deeper anxiety about discourses of masculinity. Further, it reflects the fundamental tension outlined by Greif about the classed contradictions that characterize the hipster as he navigates the privileged world of economic stability while working to disrupt many of the norms that undergird that world of privilege.

If traditional masculinity was closely aligned with one’s occupation, then Adam’s masculinity is characterized by his ability to exist as a man with no full-time occupation but only hobbies that evoke erstwhile masculinities. In the pilot, Adam even seems proud to be mostly unemployed, stating confidently “I haven’t applied for a job in a long fucking time” (“Pilot”). Adam is ultimately uncomfortable inhabiting many aspects of hipster masculinity, particularly the aspects that require public presentation and performance as part of everyday existence. However, he craves the authenticity that accompanies the more bohemian aspects of hipsterdom. His ultimate dream is to be an actor unencumbered by the conventions of theater or the dictatorial impulses of the director. He yearns for an irreverent authenticity that characterizes many bohemian conclaves. However, Adam is only able to pursue his dreams to the fullest because he is bankrolled by his grandmother. He wants to inhabit a working-class experience, but like many hipsters, is only able to achieve this because of his financial security. Adam is searching for value in woodworking while living in a tiny apartment that does not require woodworking skills for survival and an urban US mainstream that does not value production in the era of consumption. Adam inhabits an urban cultural landscape in Brooklyn, historically a working-class borough, which seems to have forsaken many of the tenets of the erstwhile masculinities that he values, especially those that accompany manual

labor. Adam is fascinated by the ostensible authenticity of traditional manual labor, but is ironically only able to perform this kind of manual work because of his privileged class position.

His performance of masculinity is deeply imbricated with his ambivalent position vis-à-vis class. While he takes up many of the traits of hipster masculinity, Adam is at times uncomfortable with the version of masculinity that often circulates within hipster culture. Specifically, the urban hipster often adopts an air of ironic distance that allows him to enjoy a handlebar moustache and a trucker hat without really being invested in those trappings. Adam wants to explore what he considers to be a more authentic version of masculinity that does not need to put on airs for public performance. Especially in the early seasons of the show, Adam feels constrained by the limits of his gentrified urban environment and instead evokes a more traditional blue-collar masculinity in his affinity for woodworking and his search for something more real. Throughout the show, Adam seems intent on disrupting a familiar version of white urban masculinity; however, he is haunted by specters of traditional masculinity.

One way in which Adam creates a distinction between himself and the larger hipster community is by refusing to adopt a curated version of style. The hipster may abhor middle-class sensibilities, but he is often particular about his presentation of fashion in clothes, music, and domicile. Adam first appears on *Girls* in the pilot as Hannah goes to visit his apartment; he answers the door shirtless, and he is often shirtless throughout the show. In fact, his proclivity for not wearing a shirt becomes an inside joke for the writers of the show. In the series' seventh episode, "Welcome to Bushwick aka the Crackcident," Hannah remarks that: "I've never seen him outside his house. I've never seen him with his shirt on." This quote is telling because it shows the ways in which Adam eschews the fashion aspect of hipsterdom. If part of performing the part of the hipster is putting oneself on display as an urban dandy, Adam utterly refuses to do that by existing half-naked in his own home. Adam is unable to function within either the social framework of mainstream consumption or the ironic version of consumption on offer by most hipsters. Instead, he is most comfortable working with wood while not wearing a shirt.

The show's first shot of Adam's apartment in the pilot shows a messy assemblage of vintage items: a mid-century typewriter, a 1970s television, a work bench with tools for woodworking. The second shot of the apartment reveals two old bikes in need of disrepair, a vintage alarm clock, and a couch from the 1960s

or 1970s. Nothing from the apartment seems new, suggesting that Adam rejects mainstream consumerism and the version of masculinity that accompanies that lifestyle. The lack of mainstream consumer products and the vintage nature of the objects in the apartment identifies Adam as a hipster. However the lack of curation and general messiness shows that Adam is not completely comfortable inhabiting the part of the hipster. Or perhaps, Adam's particular performance of chaos and filth suggests that his version of hipsterdom is a performance of apathy.

His apartment demonstrates a refusal to take part in the bourgeois comforts that should accompany his college degree and his income from his grandmother. The apartment is sparse, filthy, and devoid of any markers of middle-class comfort. In her description of the space in "Girls: An Economic Redemption through Production and Labor," television scholar Laura Witherington writes that "nails, dust, discarded boards and buckets litter the floor. In other scenes, Adam uses power tools in his carpentry, and the result of work is strewn about the place. His bed is a mattress on top of wooden pallets" (Witherington 135). The dirty apartment aligns Adam with a working-class aesthetic and seems to distance him from both mainstream and hipster modes of consumption that is tightly curated and self-consciously performative. If the traditional hipster seeks to revisit the consumptive practices of the past through thrift stores and irony, Adam wants to find a version of masculinity that is historically prior to the era of consumption.

His obsession with woodworking gives him a sense that he is doing something that is more real than the standard choices on offer in contemporary society. Woodworking provides an authenticity that supersedes both the mainstream consumerist ethos and hipster masculinity in its realness. Adam does not want to participate in the ironic sensibilities that often characterize hipsterdom; he does not want to enjoy woodworking superficially as a hobby while simultaneously critiquing the working-class masculinity that he is performing. Instead, he proclaims to enjoy woodworking because it's more "honest," but does not seem to make the connection between manual labor and income. He wants to transcend hipster masculinity and strive for something more primal; however, he seems oblivious to the fact that the only reason that he is able to aspire to such a pure version of masculinity is because he has the privilege of backup finances. Adam believes himself to be different from other men while simultaneously benefiting from the cultural position of straight white guys. He can refuse many of the comforts of the middle class because he ultimately does not need to worry about financial security.

Adam and Hannah

Adam's performance of masculinity is often on display through his schizophrenic relationship with Hannah. Though his version of masculinity often feels regressive and speaks to what pre-feminist understandings of the role of men, Adam is more than simply a nostalgic figure yearning for a simpler time when men did physical labor and aggression towards women was the norm. Adam seems torn between the appeal of this pre-liberationist version of masculinity and a version that aligns with what Faludi refers to as a "nineties man," but which continues to maintain purchase in the 2010s. The "nineties man" that Faludi outlines is a similar figure to the new man who television scholar Amanda Lotz suggests is the precursor to the more complicated masculinities that proliferate in contemporary television. In *Cable Guys*, Lotz locates her new man in the television shows of the 1980s and 1990s, and notes that many characters on these shows "exhibited masculinity either changed by the women's movement or at least less antagonistic toward women's changing social roles than counterparts who were characterized as deeply committed to patriarchal masculinity" (Lotz 43). Hipster masculinity aligns with the new man that Lotz outlines, while remaining sympathetic to some of the performances and practices of more traditional pre-liberationist masculinity. For example, Bridges writes about the ways in which hipsters have incorporated traditionally masculine practices such as beard-wearing and bacon-eating as part of their performance of masculinity. In his performance of hipster masculinity, Adam bears traces of both the new man as well more traditional pre-feminist masculinity. This more sensitive version of masculinity comes out in his love of acting, and Adam consistently seems torn between the shirtless woodworker and the sensitive actor. This more sensitive version of masculinity emerges only sporadically in his relationship with Hannah, in those few moments when he demonstrates tenderness and affection, rather than trying to control her.

This tenderness is on display in "Together," the second-season finale in which Adam literally runs while Facetiming with a mentally distraught Hannah. When Hannah remarks, "You're here," he responds, "Well, I was always here" ("Together"). This interaction demonstrates the tension between Adam's usually gruff demeanor, which points to a traditional version of masculinity and a moment in which he expresses actual compassion and affection, evoking the new man discourses. These multiple masculinities exist within the character of Adam

and are indicative of the multiple versions of masculinity that exist in televised versions of twenty-first century contemporary masculinities. Further, Adam seems unable to reconcile these versions of masculinity; instead he exudes an anxiety about masculinity and gender that speak not only to Adam's internal struggles but also to a larger cultural anxiety about masculinity that circulates in contemporary US culture, or at least the version of US culture inhabited by relatively well-off white millennial men.

The contradictions and complexities of Adam's masculinity often manifest in his behavior towards Hannah. At times, Adam seems completely indifferent towards Hannah, and he often treats her with disgust or disdain. At other moments, he believes that the two are soulmates and that their relationship can transcend the banality from which Adam hopes to escape. The complexity of his relationship with Hannah emerges in the pilot, when he refers to Hannah as "doll," which immediately evokes a vintage masculinity ("Pilot"). Hannah is, at least nominally, a character with feminist sensibilities, who might ordinarily bristle at the word. However, she seems unfazed by this pet name, and this suggests that Adam is using the term ironically; he knows very well that the term is sexist, but he believes his connection to Hannah is great enough that she will know that he doesn't really mean it. Adam and his masculinity often present a cipher, as Hannah and the audience are unsure about when he's being serious and when he's adopting an ironic stance. He might like woodworking because it feels more real, but he seems unable to find authenticity in his relationship with Hannah.

As he does with his privilege of being unemployed, Adam extols his desire for freedom and autonomy. In the pilot he quips that "you should never be anyone's fucking slave...except mine" ("Pilot"). While Adam is espousing the virtues of freedom, he undermines Hannah's potential freedom by insisting that she be his slave. Adam problematizes this dynamic as his seemingly unredeemable misogynist comment is mitigated by subsequent flirtation and sexual activity. Just as the writing plays on the word "you" as both a stand-in for a more generalizable "one" and a direct address of Hannah, the word "fucking" takes on a dual meaning in the tension between its adjectival and gerund forms ("Pilot"). Perhaps he just wants Hannah to be his slave for the purposes of fucking. The clever writing plays on polysemy and further marks Adam as a cipher; Hannah and the audience are left unsure about what Adam actually means, and perhaps Adam is unsure of this as he grapples between two competing versions of masculinity. On the one hand, he believes that everyone should have

complete freedom and should avoid having to be a slave. On the other hand, he feels a desire to control Hannah and to stifle her freedom

Adam's performance of masculinity is an amalgam of previous iterations of masculinity that are seemingly incompatible. In Adam—and by way of synecdoche in white, hipster, millennial masculinity in the US—multiple versions of masculinity circulate including a traditional version of masculinity that assumes that men have power over women in relationships and the new man who maintains a more egalitarian notion of masculinity and the power dynamics of heterosexual relationships. The hipster masculinity that Adam struggles to inhabit encompasses both the gruffness of the pre-feminist man as well as the sensitivity of the new man, and Adam remains unable to reconcile the contradictions that characterize masculinity in the twenty-first century. At times, Adam wants to assert his dominance, while at others he is uncomfortable doing so and these different versions of masculinity manifest as confusion and anxiety at different moments in his relationship with Hannah, especially in their sex life.

"Vagina Panic," the series' second episode, starts *in media res* while Adam and Hannah are engaging in sex ("Vagina Panic"). They are playing out a fantasy in which Adam finds an eleven-year-old junkie Hannah who is donning a Cabbage Patch Kids lunchbox. Adam, who controls the narrative of the fantasy, proclaims, "You're a dirty little whore and I'm going to send you home to your parents covered in cum" ("Vagina Panic"). He then insists that Hannah touch herself, but wants to control her orgasm, telling her: "From now on, you have to ask my permission whenever you want to cum. If you're touching yourself and you think you're going to cum, you'd better fucking call me first" ("Vagina Panic"). Here, Adam wants to control Hannah's sexuality even when he is not around; he is performing a version of masculinity that replicates traditional power dynamics of the heterosexual relationship.

Whether these controlling impulses are really part of Adam's sexual desires or just sexual fantasy is ambiguous. In either case, the scene works to demonstrate a desire to control his sexual partner that evokes a version of masculinity that seems incompatible with the more moderated, caring version of masculinity that characterizes the new man. Instead, Adam's possessiveness points towards pre-liberationist versions of masculinity. Bridges contends that "hipster masculinities rely on a specific interpretation of their performances of gender. They rely on a sort of 'when men used to be men' understanding." Adam's performance of masculinity in this scene especially aligns with Bridges' description, though the

performance seems to evoke more anxiety and ambivalence than satisfaction for Adam. Adam's version of masculinity seems devoid of the hipster irony that might soften his aggression towards women. By striving for something more honest," Adam is unable to evoke a sense of play conducive to navigating the powerful sexual dynamics that the couple is exploring.

However, the show complicates the power dynamics of Adam and Hannah's sex life in later seasons. In the third season, *Girls* revisits the idea of roleplaying in an episode titled "Role-Play." At this point, Adam and Hannah are now in a more serious relationship, but at least from Hannah's perspective, their sex life needs a spark. She tries to persuade Adam to have sex "the way they used to," telling him "you used to have all these ideas about me being like a little baby street slut, or like an orphan with a disease" ("Role-Play"). Adam suggests that he is no longer able to enjoy the type of fantasy talk that used to arouse him; the bawdy talk was part of his past, "but then we fell in love, and I just wanted to have sex with you as us. Just fuck and be sweet or whatever" ("Role-Play"). For Adam, intimacy is incompatible with dirty sexual talk; once he perceives Hannah as his girlfriend, he is no longer able to inhabit the violent version of masculinity that allowed him to degrade Hannah previously.

The differences in Adam's ability to successfully and willingly perform abusive versions of masculinity demonstrate the competing versions of masculinity that constitute Adam's conflicted subject positions. He seems unable to integrate his competing desires about control and sex into a version that works for him; he consistently fails and flails and seems lost in his efforts to perform masculinity in a satisfying and successful way. He seems to experience a profound ambivalence between two competing versions of masculinity. On the one hand, he wants to play the part of the new man who is more sensitive and egalitarian in his romantic and sexual relationships. On the other hand, he enjoys the individual freedom of more traditional versions of masculinity, when woodworking was important, and guys referred to women as dolls. His ambivalence towards these two versions of masculinity and his inability to articulate what he really means as he vacillates between powerful earnestness, confused reclusiveness, and hipster irony are ultimately what keep Hannah from choosing a life with him at the end of the series, and why the show presents this romantic refusal as an act of empowerment for Hannah.

Conclusion

Ambivalence towards Adam, especially in his relationship with Hannah, runs throughout many critiques of the show and the question of Adam's appeal recurs throughout the series. In a blog for *Entertainment Weekly*, Sarah Caldwell asks "how are we supposed to feel about Adam?" Because of the multiple iterations of masculinity that circulate in contemporary discourses and Adam's ability to engage multiple discourses of masculinity in his performance, the show invites an ambivalence towards Adam, and subsequently to the version of hipster masculinity that he represents. The myriad versions of masculinity that exist in contemporary US culture—including the version of hipster masculinity with which Adam wrestles—arguably reflect both accommodation of and resistance to women's gains in the public sphere. A generous reading of Adam maintains that he desires to perform a version of gender that is palatable to the sensibilities of a feminist-inspired 2010s Brooklyn, but is unable to navigate this terrain as his actions often belie any ostensible commitment to post-liberationist gender relations.

Any feminist understanding of Adam needs to account for not only his often abhorrent behavior towards women, but also the continued sympathy that the character evokes in both Hannah's willingness to give him multiple chances at a relationship, as well as the sympathy that Adam's character evokes in readings of the show. The problematic nature of Adam's character is especially on display in "On All Fours" in which Adam performs a frightening version of masculinity with Natalia, a girl he is dating while he and Hannah are on one of their many breaks. A drunken Adam orders her to crawl on his filthy floor, throws her aggressively onto the bed, roughly mounts her from behind, and deposits his semen against her wishes on her dress. Immediately afterwards, Natalia remarks that "I like really didn't like that" ("On All Fours"). In her blog for a community of HBO viewers, M. J. Snow asks "did we witness a rape?" On my read, the scene amplifies a lack of consent, and should consequently be viewed as an instance of rape. However, Blow disagrees, maintaining that "what he inflicted upon Natalia wasn't rape at all, but a kind of test to see if she could actually handle the *real* Adam." Thus, in her understanding, the authentic Adam, which seems to be what he is striving for throughout the show is angry and horrible, but not a rapist. The scene definitely presents Adam as inhabiting a version of masculinity that is unacceptable in any feminist-informed performance of masculinity. Yet Adam is

not immediately disqualified as an acceptable character, and readings such as Snow's sympathize with a person who may indeed have committed rape. Why is Adam able to redeem himself in the eyes of the viewer, when his true self performs in such a way that is arguably rapacious?

Perhaps Adam is able to be palatable or even desirable in spite of his flaws because he is ultimately a tragic figure; he wants to be enlightened and challenge the system, but he seems unable to figure out how to do that. His natural habitat would seem to be that of the hipster, but hipster masculinity requires too much pretense for a person intent on interrogating what's real. He wants to work with wood because it's real, not because it's ironic. Similarly, he wants his sexual performance to be real, but when he tries to negotiate sex on a register that he's comfortable with, he reinforces the virgin/whore dichotomy at the heart of many feminist critiques. Adam wants to have sex in an authentic way that jibes with his understandings about freedom and autonomy, but that reality is often at odds with the feminist sensibilities to which he might strive. The discourses of masculinity that Adam inhabits reflect an anxiety about men's loss of power and status, and sympathy for the complicated character reflects a tragic nostalgia for a bygone era of unquestioned masculine power.

As the show ends, Adam is left with an unfulfilling relationship with Jessa while Hannah moves to the suburbs to raise the child alone. The final episode, "Latching," features no men and suggests that Hannah's newborn boy will be raised by various configurations of women. If Adam's performance of masculinity evoked a constellation of anxieties about masculinity in the twenty-first century, the erasure of men from the final episode would seem to exacerbate those anxieties. The show remains ambivalent on the question of "how we're supposed to feel about Adam," but it does clearly articulate that Adam (and perhaps men in general) are unnecessary in Hannah's life. In a television landscape that focuses on men and masculinity, *Girls* displaces men and the heterosexual romantic dyad by removing Adam from the final two episodes. Adam remains a frustrating, complicated, intriguing character, and the version of masculinity for which he stands in similarly confounds and eludes easy conclusions.

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Introduction to the Special Issue

BERNADETTE MARIE CALAFELL

White Walkers. Hosts gone awry. Undead wrestlers. We are surrounded by monsters. Whether it is in horror films, children's movies, video games, or even in the form of our politicians, monsters inundate our everyday life. They teach us lessons, convey ideologies about what is socially acceptable, and they tell us who or what to fear. Whether through folklore, myth, or film, monsters have always been present. Monsters come to represent collective anxieties around difference (Calafell; Cohen; Levina and Bui; Loza; Phillips; Poole). They also have the potential to resist oppressive ideologies or stereotypes (Abdi and Calafell).

In this current political climate monsters provide us with a site to work through collective fears and address issues that we have yet to have forthright public discussions about. Thus, in this moment, monsters have become increasingly important. They demand our attention. They ask us to hear their screams. Each of the essays in this special issue provide us with an opportunity to consider the role of monstrosity in not only popular culture, but as meaning makers, and as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, pure culture. Monsters tell us who we are. The essays included in this issue critically unpack representations of monstrosity intersectionally through the lenses of race, class, gender, ability, and sexuality. They also demonstrate how monsters are symbolically made or constructed in the practice of every life. Scholars from Political Science, Communication Studies, Performance Studies, Rhetoric, and Literary Studies bring their unique lenses and methodologies to bear on monsters to offer interdisciplinary perspectives that mirror the wide ranging approaches of the fields of horror and monster studies. This special issue brings together established scholars, as well as new voices, to reflect on the cultural significance of monsters and monstrosity.

This issue also includes the voices of practitioners as we pull back the curtains to hear from the up and coming Vancouver based Latin themed horror production company, Luchagore Productions, as Caleb Green interviews them about their history, motivations, and their most recent projects. We round out the issue with

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interviews with leading scholars in the fields of monster and horror studies; Marina Levina and Kendall Phillips.

This special issue would not have been possible without the vision and support of Norma Jones, as well as the labor of the editorial board for the special issue. Thank you to each of them. I am also grateful to Luchagore Productions, Marina Levina, and Kendall Phillips for their willingness to be interviewed. This special issue would not have been complete without them.

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