CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

DISORDERLY MASCULINITY:

DOMINANCE, SLACKERISM AND CAMARADERIE IN "SURPRISE"

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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By

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ABSTRACT

DISORDERLY MASCULINITY:

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The current study adds to field of communication studies by examining male roles in a popular video game commercial. It asserts through textual analysis that the brief advertisement conjures up several salient masculinities that demonstrate a greater conflict, uncertainty and need for negotiation within the media. Context is provided to assist in the comprehension of this fractured masculinity. The first section of analysis explores the traditional dominant masculinity conveyed. The second examines the presentation of men as slackers. The third segment discusses the ways in which camaraderie emerges as a strategy to incite male solidarity. Together, these serve to bring about a new sort of disorderly masculinity in response to the various perceived challenges facing men in the 21st century. The ad ultimately exacerbates the crisis it claims to mitigate with such mixed male representations.

INTRODUCTION

Masculinity is not something given to you, but something you gain.

And you gain it by winning small battles with honor.

-Norman Mailer

Media today provides the world with an abundance of messages. Much of these messages contribute to the discourse surrounding the nature of gender. Such messages have become increasingly complex and multifaceted in a modern era containing proliferating amounts of information. We must look to the various kinds of media to determine their influence on discourse surrounding the ways in which we conceive of gender.

A necessary consideration with this work is background information regarding the author. I am a white young adult male with lots of exposure to video games from an early age. My interest in video games intensified during high school. During many of these teenage years, I became deeply involved with a formerly popular first person shooter video game known as *Counter Strike*. I played competitively in online and local in person competitions with various teammates. As such, it was an important aspect of my life. For these years I was deeply involved with the gaming culture. Within, I experienced an entirely male space in which various themes of masculinity were enacted. Reflecting upon this time, I realized that this period of my life was in large part driven by my own kind of crisis in masculinity. This virtual action packed world offered me a sense of power and belonging not always felt in reality. Ultimately, my experience with gaming proved to be largely related to the performance of masculinity.

In retrospect, much of my social ineptitudes of high school were mediated by this social world in video games. Furthermore, competitive online gaming was just becoming a prominent activity during this time from 2001-2005. Eventually, my relationship and involvement with the game entirely faded as I entered college, experienced several moves and discovered other interests. Perhaps as my needs in reality became met, my needs for gaming subsided. Yet, the impact of this deep involvement with gaming lingered with me. When the opportunity arose in graduate school to examine a topic, I jumped upon the chance to examine the impact of this gaming culture upon masculinity.

Since then, the culture of gaming has shifted to become prevalent on consoles and to involve extreme amounts of advertisements. Days before writing this, the front page of YouTube featured a major video game advertisement, which also made headlines on yahoo's homepage. Such commercials air on major television networks. Billboards advertising games can be seen around the greater Los Angeles area. It is evident that video gaming has become far more of a mainstream phenomenon. This was not nearly as prominent during my time as a serious gamer. Thus was my revelation of a necessity to study masculinity in a modern video game ad. The Call of Duty franchise is one that makes up a dominant part of the gaming market and this sort of marketing in the modern era.

Upon seeing such advertisements I cannot help but be drawn to them. Surely part of this appeal stems from my former experience with first person shooters. The bigger attraction for is the spectacular production of the ad. Such ads are humorous, action packed and visually stunning. On the other hand I find an absurdity to them. It is this attraction to this absurdity that drives this work in addition to personal connection. Most

of all, I find the enactment of an emergent and nuanced masculinity. Moving forward, this process in one specific ad will be investigated and explored in great detail.

The problematic displays of masculinity emerge as a central theme of this work. To begin with, a methods section pinpoints a specific salient artifact doing this rhetorical work and performing masculinity. This study then lays a foundation of literature providing context and background information regarding these types of masculinity in modern media. The first section of analysis explores the reaffirmation of traditional themes of dominant masculinity. The next finds a simultaneous emergence of a new type of slacker masculinity. Third, the importance of socializing is examined in the advertisement. As a whole, the advertisement presents viewers with an unconventional portrayal of masculinity. The on-screen conflict mirrors the conflicting masculinities shown. In all, a shift from masculine dominance, to what I later define as "slackerism" is mediated by way of camaraderie. This work determines these types of masculinity as representing a major shift in the world. Three key types of masculinity emerge and are examined as they represent a new disorderly masculinity rising in media. An important arena in which this occurs is advertising.

METHOD

This work proceeds in the discussion of these disorderly themes of masculinity through a textual analysis of a video game advertisement. The subject of this textual analysis is a seventy-second commercial for the video game *Call of Duty: Black Ops 2*. The video aired on television and was posted to the game's official YouTube channel (CALLOFDUTY) on October 29th, 2012. This video in question is titled, '"Surprise" - Official Call of Duty: Black Ops 2 Live-Action Trailer'. As of this writing, the video has over 38 million views on YouTube, and is the channel's most viewed video. The game that is being advertised ranks its sales among the most successful entertainment franchises of all time. It should be of no surprise that an advertising campaign promoting this product utilizes advertisement paralleling that of a blockbuster movie.

Activision, the game developer, created this big budget, albeit brief, commercial to promote their latest *Call of Duty* game. Guy Ritchie directs this video. Ritchie has made a name for himself in the movie industry with masculine movies including *Lock Stock* and *Two Smoking Barrels, Snatch, RocknRolla* and *Sherlock Holmes*. In addition, Robert Downey Jr. makes a cameo appearance. Other actors include the recognizable French actor, Omar Sy and prominent YouTube performers commonly referred to by their usernames, FPS Russia and iJustine. The video features an assortment of action including guns, explosions, vehicles and zombies. All of these features represent content from the game in order to attract viewers. In addition, the video game marketers responsible for the creation of this video have made a prolonged effort to project these themes throughout their advertisements. A previous edition of the game released two years earlier had a similarly themed commercial titled, "There's a soldier in all of us"

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featuring Kobe Bryant & Jimmy Kimmel. However, "Surprise" is the most suitable subject of analysis due to its prevalence, its cast and the significance of its content.

However, let me be clear to say that the game itself is not a direct subject of this study, rather the formerly mentioned video advertisement. This particular commercial is imperative to study because it represents specific masculine rhetoric aimed at promoting the game. It signifies a direct attempt from the game's makers to reach out to a particular audience and convey a specific message. The creators are representing gameplay in a way to attract the most possible customers so it is crucial to examine their reasoning and decisions in this process. This analysis advances with the view that more rhetorical work is being done in the ad than in the game. Therefore this commercial, "Surprise" is the most relevant artifact to study.

Specifically, this work will examine the performance of masculinity. This textual analysis seeks to determine what kind of male roles in the ad. Judith Butler describes the way that gender can be considered as being performed rather than being something that is innate (1994). Thereby, notions of gender may be altered, formed and contrived by media. It is within this feminist framework that the present study advances, specifically searching the ways in which masculinity might be performed in the video game advertisement.

In order to better relate and understand these themes of masculinity relating to the video, some other campaigning videos and interviews will be referenced. Rather than distracting from the core text, these are included with the aim to enhance the primary analysis of "Surprise". Altogether, the content surrounding this advertisement are meant to deepen the level of understanding regarding the themes of masculinity within

"Surprise". The significance of masculinity must be examined with the understanding that various masculinities may appear simultaneously. Masculinity is constantly moving, changing, shifting in flux. Therefore, it can be considered as being disordered. The following section will delve into precisely which cultural forces have contributed to this disorderly masculinity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>Hegemonic Masculinity</u>

The video game commercial to be explored presents various displays of masculinity and power. The types of masculinity seen in "Surprise" are multifaceted and complex. Hegemonic masculinity assists in the understanding of this process. Antonio Gramsci's initial theory of hegemony presumes that a dominant group maintains its power with the implied consent of subordinate groups (1971). There is widespread continuation of the hierarchy of power that plays out among us all. Scholars in gender studies have elaborated upon this notion with hegemonic masculinity, most notably from the work of R.W. Connell. There is not one fixed notion of masculinity, but rather a hierarchy of various masculinities with the hegemonic form being "the most honoured or desired" (2000, p.10). In other words, it is the dominant portrayal of masculinity in society. Connell elaborates on the theme, "[h]egemonic masculinity is culturally linked to both authority and rationality, key themes in the legitimation of patriarchy" (1995, p. 90). It is this 'legitimation of patriarchy' that becomes a central element of hegemonic masculinity. John Beynon deems hegemonic masculinity as "established either through consensual negotiation or through power and achievement" (2002, p. 16). The constant vie for power among men becomes a central tenant of the commercial and an important facet of this work.

This study seeks to examine how gender is given or taken away its power. Judith Butler's description of heterosexuality, "its privilege operates in many ways, and two ways in which it operates include naturalizing itself and rendering itself as the original and the norm" (1993, p.85). This notion is fundamentally related to hegemonic

masculinity. It is through this self-promotion that masculine norms are perpetuated. These elements serve the hegemonic masculinity, perpetuating its place at the top of a societal hierarchy. Connell has also supposed that dominant masculine structures in society serve to subvert subordinate groups (1995).

Connell and other's work in hegemonic masculinity has been discussed in the context of media. Nick Trujillo's 1991 essay outlines the, "features of hegemonic masculinity in American culture: (1) physical force and control (2) occupational achievement, (3) familial patriarchy, (4) frontiersmanship, and (5) heterosexuality" (p.291). Additionally, a variety of movies and television shows have been analyzed using hegemonic masculinity (Hanke, Ashcraft & Flores, Dyer, Mazzarella, Lindgren & Lelievre). These studies describe various aspects of hegemonic masculinity. Rather than seeing hegemonic masculinity as a static entity, this study seeks the ways in which it is represented today. The notion that masculine norms are strongly conveyed and thus reinforced through video game content will serve as a lens through which to view the video game commercials. Thereby, new themes may arise in modern media and must be considered accordingly.

Connell and Messerschmidt state that one of the latent functions of hegemonic masculinity is that, "it ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men" (2005, p. 832). One way that masculinity does this is by essentially creating an exclusively male environment by way of outsourcing any traditionally feminine traits. Robert Brannon and Deborah David describe the first of their four major rules of masculinity as being "No Sissy Stuff!" (1976). Eliminating traits such as caring, sensitivity or anything otherwise seemingly to be construed as effeminate is to be swiped

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clean in a masculine environment. Michael Kimmel describes, in his tireless exploration of the world of masculinity that he calls Guyland, the effeminate traits that men must avoid in order be accepted in this world (2008).

Essentially, the hegemonic masculinities often involve not only the inclusion of traditionally masculine traits but also a strict avoidance of anything to be perceived as feminine. Connell has also stated that dominant masculine structures in society serve to subvert subordinate groups (1995). Other scholars have investigated this using different media forms. Lindgren and Lelievre in 2009 note that the once popular MTV show *Jackass* demonstrates "…a means to free oneself from all that is considered feminine…" The removal of femininity is one major part of the larger overall portrayal of masculinity in the media that I seek to examine further in the video game ads. Another is violence.

Violence and aggression are important issues that contribute to the construction of hegemonic masculinity. Connell asserts, "'Hegemonic masculinity' is a concept which may function in a number of ways in analyses of violence" (2002, p.93). Violence is a powerful act. Determining whether video games may lead to real life violence is a main concern and studies have intensely debated the complex nature of this issue (Sharrer, Kimberly & Ronald). Violence is central to First Person Shooters such as the *Call of Duty* games. It is *the* point of the game. One's character kills other characters whether monsters, enemies, humans, animals and can now, with advances in technology, can destroy the environment and buildings to an extraordinary extent. In daily life, presumably, these are generally not desirable activities. It would not be acceptable for a person to shoot a neighbor whom has wronged them, or to throw a live grenade in their driveway. Then it must be explored what the draw is for millions of Americans who are

enthusiastic about joining in these violent activities in video games. Perhaps precisely because they cannot do so in their daily lives they seek to vicariously experience violence to the extent virtual technology allows. Kimmel gives the reason that "Rage is the way to displace the feelings of humiliation, to restore the entitlement" (2008, p. 55). The powerlessness that any gamer may feel can be expressed via their avatar and the controller by commanding ultimate power over their virtual world.

Masculinity in Crisis

In order to continue the study, it will be first necessary to explore the context in which the commercial was created. Scholars have debated the notion of there being a 'crisis' in masculinity (Beynon, 2002). Scholars might discount the notion of men being in crisis because men have always been in power and cannot thus be in a real crisis. Additionally, in some context men have always experienced insecurities in some form or another. However, a central theme in this work will be to describe how the modern crisis has evolved.

Various recent societal changes are responsible for this shift in masculinity. Kimmel describes American men as being in constant need to prove their masculinity to other men, rather than being considered as an endless pursuit of power over others (2011). For Kimmel, the force driving American masculinity is fear, not power. Additionally, Morgan has identified some work related challenges to masculinity including "the decline of many forms of employment which had strong linkages with masculine notions of strength and hard physical labour" (1992, p.99). Industrial and societal progress has largely changed gender roles in modern society. The modern era of white-collar jobs changes the way that men enact with the world. This creates the

potential for a problem among men in power. Karen Ashcraft and Lisa Flores describe this occurrence of a crisis among white-collar men, as displayed in movies of the late 90's (2000).

Furthermore, the validation of one's manhood through victory in war has been greatly upset since WWII. Susan Faludi describes this lack of validation through acts of war in the modern era (1999). This has occurred decades before now. After the Vietnam War, men sought to remasculinize themselves through hard bodies in the media, as Susan Jeffords describes (1989 &1993). Now, war presents even more uncertainty than during the previous generation. It has drastically changed to incorporate more technology. It is perhaps more distanced because of a lack of any mandatory draft. Also, far more distractions present themselves in media with so many options for entertainment from television and computers. The modern landscape presents even less certainty regarding the validation of masculinity through victory in war.

Moreover, Connell states that the crux of this issue "is that modern men are suffering from a psychological wound, being cut off from the true or deep masculinity that is their heritage" (2000, p.5). Men navigating the western world today must cope with this injury regardless of what factors may have caused this crisis. Perhaps confounding to this societal issue is biologically troubling research showing a serious decline in male testosterone levels in current generations (Travison et. al 2007). A decline in masculinity and maleness itself is seemingly evident. If it is true, as Richard Dyer says of society, that, "…we look at the world through ideas of male sexuality" (1985, p.111) then scholars must continue to explore the effects that new media are having on the upcoming generations of men.

Philip Zombardo, professor emeritus at Stanford, in a TedTalk entitled, "The Demise of Guys" explains, "Boys are 30 percent more likely than girls to drop out of school. In Canada, five boys drop out for every three girls. Girls outperform boys now at every level, from elementary school to graduate school". Modern societal and technological changes contribute to this rising disproportionate gendered effect in education. Zombardo continues that, "Boys' brains are being digitally rewired for change, novelty, excitement and constant arousal. That means they're totally out of sync in traditional classes, which are analog, static, interactively passive." His concern over the current generation of adolescent males echo sentiments that seem to convey a longing of opportunities for men to express and embody masculinity. On this note Kimmel states, "Guys are vulnerable, they're impressionable, and most of them are searching for a way to be that will leave them feeling in control" (2008, p.71). Evidently, there is an innate desire for men to reconnect with something that feels missing in the modern world.

Counteracting Equality

The portrayal of women in media has been of concern to scholars in various sources of scholarship. On the surface level, an obvious area of concern is the overt attempt to sexualize women. One article investigates how female characters are dressed in in comparison to their male counterparts in video games (2002, Beasley & Collins). Here the authors show the disparity between male and female characters in video games. Some background information is laid down regarding the prevalence of certain prior video game titles and the importance they have in young people's lives. The authors use a detailed coding system to numerate the use of clothing of in game characters to reach the conclusion that "… there is considerable gender role stereotyping in video games"

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(p.289). Furthermore, a concept that the authors use to support their study is the idea that ideas in video games create and influence attitudes in children. The authors remind us that, "As social learning theory and gender schema theory explain, children exposed to gender role stereotyping in the media, including video games, may develop those attitudes themselves" (p. 289). The messages in video games are important to study because of the potential impact they may have in young consumers of the medium.

Advertisements are constantly telling viewers how to relate to each other. Another important study aims to "discuss ways that games are marketed to women audiences and the problematic nature of these advertisements" (2011, Chess, p.231). The advertisements she analyses suppose gender roles and norms, often putting women in subversive circumstances. An important concept Shira Chess brings up is the video game marketers attempt to appeal more to women for the purposes of productivity and self-help. For example, Nintendo Wii marketers used a brain training game to signify personal improvement. This takes women out of the aggressive, competitive sphere of most games and limits them to particular facets of games. Various similar advertisements employ such techniques, marketing towards women but in a limited or otherwise disempowering way. Women are included but with various restrictions in video game ads.

Similarly, Ivory makes an attempt to examine video game reviews to determine the gender representation in video games. Ivory's study is particularly salient in that it examines video game reviews, rather than directly examining the video games. Accordingly, the author's findings indicate that, "Though female video game characters appear to be underrepresented overall, as active characters, and as playable characters, they are proportionally more likely than males to be portrayed in a sexualized fashion"

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(p. 111). Unsurprisingly, women were underrepresented and sexualized. An important concept or question the author brings up is that, "If this is the nature of female video game characters, should their number be increased after all?" (p. 111). Vigilance must be provided in making sure representations of women in video games are not done so in a 'sexualized fashion' as Ivory notes.

Erica Scharrer makes an important contribution to the field with this article delving into video game advertisements. As stated by Scharrer, "this study documents the types of messages that are being sent about gender roles and violence to video game fans (p.394)." This work seeks to similarly shed light into the potentially shady world of video game advertisements and marketing strategies. Unsurprisingly, the quantitative methods revealed an underrepresentation in female characters and frequent depiction of violence. A similar theme is being shown in many of these studies. It seems quite clearly that video game commercials are perpetuating these gender roles and stereotypes. An interesting concept that the author brings up is the notion of hyper femininity. This is an analogous term to hyper masculinity, but in which women are portrayed as exhibiting exaggerated undermining feminine aspects such as "dependence, passivity, and a view of women as sexual objects (p.397)." These are not good perpetuating forces for the future of society.

Valerie Walkerdine extends our knowledge with her main argument that "… many video games are one site for the production of contemporary masculinity" (p. 520). This is a common theme in the research as well as in this work. Simply stated, video games promote a hegemonic masculinity. Yet Walkerdine's research fills a unique gap in that it focuses on girls and the meaning derived from games by a careful balance of matching feminine ideals with the hyper-masculine tendencies of many games. As she

states, "I want to pursue the argument that many games are one site for the production of contemporary masculinity in order to think about what this means for femininity" (p. 521). This particular angle places more emphasis on female gamers, providing more balance to the greater body of research on video games. An important concept in this study is the investigation of the viewpoint that women are to like 'cute' and 'fluffy' subjects as opposed to violent ones (p. 523). Throughout video games, women are underrepresented and misrepresented.

Moreover, race is a concern in the media. Various scholars have discussed the importance of whiteness (Dyer 1997, Frankenburg 1993, Lipsitz 1998). It is also important to note that traditional white male spaces in society are lessened due to 'other' genders and races. Faludi astutely describes the sentiment that "No matter what the Angry White Males did, they always seemed to lose out" (1999, p.420). It is an important addition to the male crisis that white men are not recognizing the benefits of equality in the modern world. Whiteness and patriarchy are importantly linked. A loss of white power equates to a loss in male power. Whiteness works with patriarchy to establish contribute to the hegemonic masculinity. Thereby, the performance of masculinity is problematized.

The importance of race in the modern world cannot be overlooked. Winant asserts, "Imperialism's creation of modern nation-states, capitalism's construction of an international economy, and the Enlightenment's articulation of a unified world culture, I argue, were all deeply racialized processes" (2001, p.20). European and American power reaches over much, if not all, of the world. Europe and North America are white dominant societies. Thus, their influence around the world can be thought of as an

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influence, or a spreading, of whiteness. Media is one way that this is accomplished. Susanna George asserts, "Global media is to corporate capitalism what missionaries were to the colonial enterprise" (2003, p.87). The game commercial furthers this white dominance in its portrayal of military dominance. George continues to state of the media that they "have played a crucial role in normalising the culture of militarism (2003, p.88). The use of military technology, battle and weapons furthers this sense of white male dominance. Roger Stahl states, "the entertainment industries become the vehicles through which power reinforces dominant justifications for war" (2010, p.15). The western warring ways becomes a method for men to prove their whiteness and thus masculinity in the *Call of Duty* advertisement. It serves a response to the crisis and the push back from equality.

Responding to the Call of Duty

Ashcraft and Flores describe how some modern media spectacles represent a shifting response to the "imminent collapse of the corporate man, over-civilized and emasculated by allied obligations to work and women" (2000, p. 2). Perhaps this 'collapse' leads to a new generation of masculinity and male socialization where men turn to the available media for comfort and validation. Similarly, Kimmel notes, "Much of Guyland's media is restorative, designed to provide that sense of power and control that men do not feel in real life" (2008, p. 155). The media carry this out by featuring content such as sports, violence and sex as a means for escapism. John Kephart III details the trove of media and cultural movements seeking for a return to the nostalgic male ideal (2008). Male adults and children alike may use such avenues as a means to express their experience of a repressed masculinity. Another important aspect may be a move towards

camaraderie and male exclusive environments. Researchers found that people play video games for achievement, immersion and social reasons (Williams, Yee & Caplan, 2008). This all involves the performance of masculinity. This study focuses on this process through video games. The advertisement campaign of *Call of Duty* displays another way that men respond to this deep-rooted longing for what Kimmel describes as 'control'. Picking up a video game controller becomes a method by which men can reclaim some of their power.

Video games have become a major medium consumed by Americans. Though television ranks highest among media consumption overall, adolescents are playing video games at an increasingly high rate. Young individuals are playing video games on handheld devices, cell phones and consoles more than they read books or watch movies and almost as much as they use computers for an average of more than an hour a day of gaming (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, p. 2, 2010). The Entertainment Software Association (ESA) shows that in 2011, consumer spending on the video game industry reached a total of 24.75 billion dollars (2012). These findings contribute to an estimated 10,000 hours of gaming that the vast majority of young men and women have played by the time they are twenty-one years old (McGonigal, 2011). Quite simply, video games are a new pervasive phenomenon and demand further investigation.

Another note of importance is a growing trend of evidence showing young men are, in respect to frequency and duration of play, heavier consumers of video games than are young women (Pew Internet Research, 2008, p. 9) and that 74% of adolescent male gamers play First Person Shooters, or FPS, in comparison to 17% of adolescent female gamers (Pew Internet Research, 2008, p. 18). Similar work done by Moller and Krahe

found that young men play more violent video games than do young women (2009, p. 85). There is, in essence, a gendered effect of video games. Male individuals tend to play more video games in general, and more specifically games involving lots of action. This information may help to explain why the sale of shooter genre games represented 18.4% of total video game sales in 2011 and the best selling video game of the same year was the FPS, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* (ESA, 2012).

This militarized game, as the name suggests, places users in a virtual battlefield taking control of soldiers from a first person point of view. The game is a formidable franchise with its latest edition, *Ghosts,* being the twelfth major game to be released under the *Call of Duty* name. Its first incarnation came under the title *Call of Duty* and was released in the fall of 2003. There has been about a one-year gap between each successive version of the game, with some minor variants being released in even less of a time gap. The company behind the franchise, Activision Publishing Inc., released one of its latest versions of the game, *Call of Duty: Black Ops 2,* on November 13th, 2012 to a highly receptive audience. Days after the game's release, Activision released a report estimating worldwide sales of the game within the first 24 hours to have reached more than 500 million dollars (2012). This far exceeds any theatrical box office opening earnings in history, allowing Bobby Kotick, CEO of the parent company, Activision Blizzard, to boast "[l]ife-to-date sales for the Call of Duty franchise have exceeded worldwide theatrical box office receipts for 'Harry Potter' and 'Star Wars,' the two most successful movie franchises of all time" (Activision Publishing Inc. 2012). The game held the record up until September of 2013 when the powerhouse title, Grand Theft Auto V was released, handily taking the lead in most entertainment sales in 24 hours (Thier,

2013, Forbes). The arms race of is further complicated as the *Black Ops 2* sequel, *Call of Duty: Ghosts,* was released on November 5th, 2013 to sales that topped the former in terms of total retail purchases but not in terms of actual consumer purchases (Jackson, 2013, Computer and Video Games).

The popularity of *Call of Duty: Black Ops 2* and similar games, and this gendered effect in gaming, warrant further investigation into the role this may have in our society. Kyle Kontour examines *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* to suggest that militarism may influence video games but is perhaps more so appropriating video game technology and virtues in war (2011). However it will not be the focus of this study to determine which event influences the other. Rather the focus will be to unravel the messages on masculinity being conveyed in the game's media campaign. A window into this world is provided by an official *Call of Duty* YouTube channel that provides hundreds of videos that have garnered hundreds of millions of views in total. Specifically, it is my aim to investigate how the game's marketing campaign contributes to the current state of masculinity among adolescents in the United States. Due to the success of the franchise and the current sheer number of sales, it ostensibly has a great appeal to audiences. However, the appeal of militaristic themed games is nothing new.

The history of militaristic themes in games far precedes video games. Ed halter gives an incredible overview of this historical progression in his work, "From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Video Games". As stated by Halter, "As long [as] humans have waged war, they have also played it; the relationship extends back to the beginnings of civilization, and no doubt before" (2006, p. 5). Specifically, he is referring to board games and their use of simulating battles throughout the ages. With the advancements of

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technology, this use of games to simulate war transferred over to being used with computers and monitors as soon as the technology allowed it. Perhaps the first example of this is one of the earliest video games to be developed, the 1962 game, *Spacewar!* (Halter, 2006, p. 74). By today's standards it is rudimentary, but since then the trend has proliferated to an incredible extent with droves of war themed games being released since.

War themed video games like *Call of Duty* can be considered a form of what Roger Stahl defines 'militainment'. Stahl defines this as "state violence translated into an object of pleasurable consumption" (2010, p. 6). The *Call of Duty* franchise turns real life horrors into virtual delicacies. The risk in this is that it alienates and distracts us in much of the same way as any media spectacle from the greater implications and justifications of the featured content. Stahl describes the danger involved as, "integration into a sanitized fantasy of war is a seduction whose pleasures are felt at the expense of the capacity for critical engagement in matters of military power" (p. 111). Everything the game developers do to make the game more entertaining may not adequately prepare gamers for the true complexities of war.

Besides visual displays of violence, another way video games accentuate violence is with music. The soundtrack of any video game is an incredibly important part of the overall gaming experience. Games that seek mainstream popularity go to great lengths to succeed on this battlefront. One can even purchase soundtracks of many recent games, including all of the major *Call of Duty* games. The vast fan base of the *Call of Duty* franchise is a welcoming avenue for any artist to want their song to be apart of it. On August 14th, 2013 a multiplayer *Call of Duty* trailer was released on its official YouTube

channel featuring an exclusive first release of Eminem's song "Survival" (2013, Gunderson). Prior to this event, Trent Reznor from Nine Inch Nails scored the main theme song for *Black Ops 2*. Using aggressive music to stress a desired response is used in other media such as sports.

Kembrew McLeod claims, "Typically, the music associated with most sports is sonically, rhythmically, and vocally aggressive—music that projects a stereotypically masculine image through tone, lyrical content, and performance." (2006, p. 536). Eminem's "Survival", Trent Reznor's score and much of the music featured in the *Call of Duty* games meet these criteria handily to project an aggressive and masculine image to recipients of the message.

This study has noted some of the incredible sums of money involved in the booming video game industry. What happens when war becomes involved? This concern in meshing the entertainment and war is well stated by Roger Stahl's in his concept of 'Militainment'. He defines the term as "state violence translated into an object of pleasurable consumption" (2010, p.6). Militainment, as the term would suggest, refers to the commodification of war. Though film and television are certainly big contributors, video games are unique in their ability to immerse consumers in the actions of war. Stahl warns us, "video games are increasingly both the medium and the metaphor by which we understand war" (2010, p.112). In such a way, the increasing popularity of games contributes to the significance they have in shaping gamers' worldviews.

Inherent in war themed video games the necessity of a discernable oppositional force. The first several Call of Duty games focused on World War II historical battles. Relatively unambiguous enemies, the axis forces, served as incontrovertibly bad guys to

fight against. Ethical quandaries are harder to find when fighting against Nazis. Yet, other battles become more complex. For example, Aaron Hess examines this trend in *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, a similar war themed game and competitor of *Call of Duty* which reframes the attack on pearl harbor and the subsequent historical events according to an American perspective (2007). This trend posits foreign soldiers as being oppositional and incompatible with American ideals. Hess states, "The construction of the ''other,'' including location within the story and settings of the gameplay, paints the Japanese enemy as a ruthless despot willing to torture" (p. 348 2007).

The game creates a mentality of us vs. them. Additionally, these themes valorize the U.S. soldier. Hess continues in his convictions that the game separates users from the other groups presented in the game (2007). Thus a narrative develops in modern war video games and distanciates gamers from enemy forces. Games can serve to undermine other nationalities or ethnic groups in their portrayals. They also may position women in this place of "the other".

The current study begins where previous studies left off. The novel approach of this study is that it bridges topics that have not been connected in quite the same way, as well as venturing into new territories that have not yet been studied. The three chapters of this study delve into masculinity, war, and advertising. The first section can be considered an application of previous scholarship to a novel text. The second section contributes to the definition of a new trope in media. The final section sheds light on the importance of sociability in relation to the topics at hand. Throughout, an important cultural text is explored.

MASCULINITY OF DOMINANCE

Mass explosions, gunfire and a city in ruins set the stage of this commercial. We see men and women battling it out in an incredibly chaotic scene. So much is occurring in a very short period of time that it can be hard to even interpret what is happening upon first viewing. The virtual experience of the game is brought to life in a live action video. Though, a close examination illuminates an array of themes. Most assuredly, men and dominators permeate this action packed ad.

Masculinity is a dominating force in our society. Accordingly, this ad presents masculinity in a typical patriarchal and domineering sense. One-upping is primary trope in the title of the trailer, and indeed is displayed throughout the ad. Aggression is also a major theme depicted in the images. Lastly, the video includes women only with its addition of objectified female characters. Collectively, the advertisement makes an attempt to appeal to a wide audience, but does so within the realm of a male dominant, aggressive and womanizing form of hegemonic masculinity. The study of this puzzling juxtaposition serves as a strong aid to scholarship serving to deconstruct core issues relating to media, society and gender.

For the purposes of this study, the notion that masculine norms are strongly conveyed and thus reinforced through video game content will serve as a lens through which to view the video game commercial, "Surprise". The emphasis of this chapter will be to bring more attention into the perhaps more common and prevalent aspects of hegemonic masculinity seen in video games. Research in this realm must be done to better understand the interplay between the media and representations of masculine norms. This contributes to the way in which men relate to women and to each other.

Scholars have noted domination as being a common feature of hegemonic masculinity. This is represented as a central theme in Connell's descriptions of hegemonic masculinity (1987, 1995, 2005). Moreover, examinations of a variety of sources present messages conveying dominance as the masculine norm. Trujillo notes domination as one of the aspects of masculinity portrayed by sports (1991). Other examples of a dominating hegemonic masculinity are demonstrated within television shows including *Two and a Half Men*, *The Dr. Phil Show*, *American Chopper* and *Thirtysomething* (Hatfield, Henson & Parameswaran, Mazarella and Hanke). But this process is possible only with the implicit consent of other groups. According to Messner, "hegemonic masculinity requires a 'buy-in' by subordinated and marginalized men, and by many women, if it is to succeed as a strategy of domination" (2007, p. 463). Indeed, hegemonic masculinity is deployed as a means for maintenance of its own power and it does this by depictions of domination. Thus is the importance of the analysis and deconstruction within this study.

This theme of domination is perpetuated throughout "Surprise". Underlying the entire ad is this idea of gaining power and control over the other players. "The concept is called, 'surprise'. It's that moment when you have somebody in your sights and you're just getting ready to pull the trigger and then you realize somebody else has you in their sights", says Tim Ellis, Chief Marketing Officer of Activision Publishing, in a behind-the-scenes video for "Surprise" (2012). This framing suggests a clear encouragement of competition and struggle for power. One way that the "Surprise" video does this is through the portrayal of competition.

Throughout the one minute commercial, the main narrative is that each character successively defeats the previous one while stating some varying pithy catch phrase, most often containing the word "surprise". For instance, the video starts out with the main character inputting a computer command for a missile attack, when suddenly he is in the crosshairs of the next character elating, "Hey buddy". Before this next character can shoot a female axe wielding character, played by YouTube star iJustine exclaiming, interrupts him, "Surprise". As she reaches back to throw a second axe shot out of her hand with a hefty rifle by the next apparently 'latino' male character announcing, "Surprise, mamacita!" Stereotypes aside, an additional seven instances of a character being surprised by the next person are displayed. Perhaps the most absurd of all is the final scene during which the main character is confronted by hundreds of zombies. It is as if to assume the domination of various genders, races and male subgroups is not enough, our main character must rule the domain of the living and of the undead. This rapid sequence of events places power and a fight for dominance at its core.

The actors chosen for this ad are also of salience. Robert Downy Jr., is perhaps most widely known by current media consumers, as Iron Man. The movie, based on a comic book, features his character as a billionaire playboy who fights crime with a virtually indestructible and powerful body suit. The fact that they deliberately sought him to be featured in this commercial demonstrates a willful attempt to attribute those themes to the game for the audience. It is also important that the game's marketers feature the prominent YouTube 'star' known as FPS Russia. His YouTube channel has millions of regular subscribers, and many of their videos have equally high numbers of individual

views. The inclusion of FPS Russia is another obvious attempt to propagate a violent hegemonic masculinity. His YouTube channel features him using exotic and extreme real weapons in ridiculous scenarios. For example, one video shows him shooting a door in half with a semi-automatic shotgun. His YouTube channel is on hiatus due to unknown details about the death of a person involved with the show. The YouTuber's addition to the advertisement is of salience and reinforces a need to examine the commercial further.

Placed in the middle, a familiar face enters the virtual battlefield. Robert Downey Jr., Iron Man himself, is shown flying to the scene in a jet fighter while stating, "Guess who just brought a jet to a gunfight?" It is significant that we see an actor who is most recently known for his role as one of the coolest of comic book characters. He played Tony Stark, playboy, millionaire, inventor and user of a superhuman body suit in the blockbuster movie series, Iron Man. Tony Stark, the character, represents much of what men want to have or achieve. He is good looking, powerful, rich, genius and happens to be a superhero. Recruiting Robert Downey Jr. exerts the type of appeal that the producers attempt to apply towards potential customers of the Call of Duty franchise. Furthermore, akin to Iron Man's militaristic body suit, the weaponry displayed in "Surprise" gets more and more extreme with each character.

We see a character with a gun overpowered by a character with two robotic tanks. Robert Downey Jr. then overpowers this character in a jet. Star power and technology become methods by which characters in the ad are dominated. The real message throughout the video is one of domination and subordination of others, exemplifying the concept of hegemonic masculinity. It will be of assistance to pursue the video creators' thought process regarding the making of this ad. Fortunately for this study, some of their

motivations are explicitly stated in a behind the scenes footage clip, also found on the game's official YouTube channel.

Elaborating on the concept in the behind-the-scenes trailer is Eric Hirshberg, Chief Executive Officer of Activision Publishing, "Every time you think you're on top, every time you think you have the upper hand, there's someone else who's better, who's got the upper hand on you" (2012). One of the primary individuals responsible for creating this message has made an explicit goal of eradicating notions of equality and collaboration. Somebody must be on top. Somebody must be better and have the upper hand. Somebody must dominate the subordinate groups. This is a narrative consistent with the hegemonic masculinities described in this study. The creators emphasize competition and subordination of others. The video invites you to join in the ephemeral quest to become the best and greatest. However, the search is futile. There is no top or end goal, only an unending process of attempting to best others. The video demonstrates these ideals as an arena for audiences to participate in. One crucial method by which characters in the video are dominated and the next theme perpetuating hegemonic masculinity is the use of extreme force and aggression.

A Portrayal of Masculinity as Mean

Violence and aggression are important issues that may be addressed with hegemonic masculinity. To be masculine is to be mean. Connell pronounces, "'Hegemonic masculinity' is a concept which may function in a number of ways in analyses of violence" (2002, p.93). It is in this way that I approach the advertisement, "Surprise". The short clip features an array of explosions, gunfire, aerial attacks and heavy-duty machinery highlighted with loud rock music. The very beginning depicts a

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man, whistling relaxingly, sitting behind an overturned burning truck in the midst of destroyed concrete, fire and rapid gunshots. The jet, with Downey Jr., is eventually followed by a missile and explodes mid air. Similar scenes are laced throughout the video, up until the final part during which the original character walks away from the truck while walking away from a wall of explosions, smoke and fire. The ways in which these instances, and many others, are used matter in the construction and development of an action-packed hegemonic masculinity.

It has been long theorized that video games may lead to aggression in boys (Sharrer, Kimberly & Ronald). Yet video games have never been conclusively pinpointed as a causative factor in gamers developing aggression. Regardless, men relate to each other in new ways through media technologies like video games. Therefore it is important to examine aggression and violence within video games. Additional scholars have delved into this subject. Kimberly & Ronald found that, "Aggression was significantly and positively correlated with exposure, as found in prior research" (Kimberly & Ronald, 2012, p. 53). This is a disturbing trend. Also, Erica Scharrer has shown that a majority of video game ads depict violence, "Violent acts, weapons, words, and threats were common elements of the video game ads" (2004, p.408). This fierceness is demonstrated to an exponential degree in "Surprise".

The sheer voracity in which action in the video displayed is extraordinary. It is a true visual sensory experience, but a very violent one. The opening scene shows an overturned semi-truck, broken buildings and general urban disarray partly in flames. It is a post-apocalyptic portrayal of Los Angeles in the not too distant future. The viewer experiences a variety of viewpoints going from character to character. Gunfire shots are

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seen and heard throughout the entire commercial. Dozens of explosions create chaos in the background of the various scenes. About a dozen flying vehicles race around the sky reigning danger from above. One of the characters is at the control of two robotic tanks, while another has control of remote control drone-like devices. The video clearly depicts violence and aggression in the form of a chaotic battlefield. With this, we are given images to depict masculine norms to complement other facets of the commercial.

The soundtrack to this commercial instantly strikes viewers. The hard hitting initial guitar chords strike at the exact moment of iJustine's initial axe hitting the wall. "Back in Black" by AC/DC is a bold and in your face song. The title serves as a nod to the title of the game, Black Ops 2 and also serves to energize the game's audience. This marketing ploy is used in other forms of entertainment, including sports. "Back in Black" conforms to this aggressive stance to project an aggressive and masculine image to recipients of the message.

Another important addition to the ad is that of YouTube star FPS Russia, shown wielding a remote control to air borne militaristic drone devices. His official YouTube channel, FPSRussia, has nearly 5 million subscribers and over 500 million total video views. He is a bona fide YouTube celebrity. In fact, an alarmingly high number of 47 thousand and counting text responses under the "Surprise" video comment in some way or another about the recognition of his presence in the commercial. It is noteworthy that so many gamers know FPSRussia, with the real name of Kyle Myers, because of the content of his YouTube videos. Throughout his two-year account activity, Myers has posted hundreds of videos featuring varying absurd scenarios involving him shooting real guns. For example, his most popular video shows him outside with multiple fully

automatic shotguns shooting doors and bottles rather haphazardly. At one point in the video he states, "Anyone can operate this weapon, a child could operate it" (2012). These are chilling words from an individual used to market an extremely popular game. Random sample views of his videos show other equally ridiculous scenarios including him shooting targets after being pepper sprayed in one video, and shooting a remote controlled aerial device with an automatic rifle similar to the ones he is seen using in the fictional computer generated commercial. Perhaps even more disturbing is that one of the individuals involved with the videos was found shot and killed, with a current police investigation into the matter, according to a January 2013 article on NYtimes.com. This is a violent role model to say the least, and one that extends the general aggressive tone in the commercial.

Subversion of Women

Implicit in hegemonic masculinity is a general tendency towards disempowering women in relation to men (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Thus, gender imbalance becomes a naturalized representation of masculinity that perpetuates itself as a dominating ideal. Gender imbalance becomes a crucial theme to the commercial in question. This comes despite the common targeting of video games for researchers seeking to interpret gender representations in media.

Beasley and Standley found, "… there is considerable gender role stereotyping in video games" (2008, p.289). Moreover, Dietz's results show that a large number of game ads do not have female characters, many times the female characters are posed as sexual objects, and often the games feature violence and aggression towards women (2000). Sexual message are constantly relayed through the medium of video games and their

advertisements. One study revealed that men who saw the hyper sexualized representations of women in video games tended to develop negative views towards women and were more tolerant of real-life instance of sexual harassment (Dill, Brown & Collins, 2008). A similar gendered imbalance of power is a common feature of "Surprise". Of the ten major characters whose faces are clearly seen in the ad, only two of them are women.

One of these featured women was recruited for her prior notoriety. iJustine is a YouTube user who makes popular entertainment videos on a variety of subjects. Her addition to the commercial may initially seem to indicate an attempt to reach out to female gamers but her attire and her weapon in the video paradoxically reestablishes male dominant, heterosexual and violent hegemonic masculinity. iJustine, real name Justine Ezarik, has a popular YouTube channel with nearly 1.5 million regular subscribers and 281 million total video views. One of the major forces bringing her to the limelight was a video entitled, "I WANT A CHEESEBURGER!!!!!!". Ezarik is evidently talented, intelligent and humorous. But the instant feature a heterosexual-male or homosexual-female might notice is that she is quite attractive and that the trait likely has a role in her ability to garner millions of views from a one-minute video about ordering a cheeseburger. Her inclusion into the commercial, "Surprise" is suspect in the way it portrays women in relation to men.

Furthermore, in "Surprise" the character is skantily clad in tight camoflauge pants and a seemingly impractical sports bra/bullet proof vest like shirt, showing considerably more skin than any of the male characters. Her hair and makeup happen to be flawless. In this instance, she is objectified and made into a sexual object. The character is subverted

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into an object of desire for the target audience of male gamers. Her addition to the video with militaristic equiptment does not empower her, it feeds into the ploy of the game's hegemonic masculinity and its sexualization of women.

Another important obvervation is that she appears to posess guns strapped to holsters, but is not using them and rather is seen throwing an axe. This is in contrast to every other male character seen clearly holding a gun or some powerful and technologically advanced device. She is given military garb as a whimsical attraction for men rather than as a move towards equality. The female character is not seen as being trusted with the weapons, as not deserving or not being worthy of holding equivocal power. The man at the beginning coordinates attacks on his wrist computer, and is cocking a shotgun in clear view, Downey Jr. is commanding a jet fighter, and Myers, in character as FPSRUSSIA, is controlling multiple attack drones. This is just to name some of the many male characters holding more powerful weapons than the female character.

Lastly, her big 'surprise' moment is when the next male character proclaims, "Surprise, mamacita". 'Mamacita' is a popular Latin-American slang word for an attractive woman, litterally meaning "little mother". The addition of this spanish slang is curious, given that it is the only explicit representation of non-white ethnicity. The name caller is thus portrayed as the master of the situation by way that he is a man, he has the gun, and he is calling her a little mother. It is an unbegetting representation of his cultural background to say the least, and posits him as the seen objectifier of the woman. Thus, Justine is disempowerd through being called little, by being portrayed as a sexual object and by not being shown holding an equalizing weapon. The power is figuratively and literally taken away from her in this ad.

The next woman featured in this ad is not quite represented in a way to redeem the gender. Just prior to her entry, we see two men high fiving with a grenade entering the scene. Making her way through the battlefield and jumping over the two men on her horse, she exclaims, 'Surprise, boys." Calling the men on screen 'boys' while jumping through explosives seemingly rebels against the notion of men being on top. She even gets to infantilize the men. Upon closer inspection however, the insinuation is that perhaps she threw the grenade, but we do not see her perform the action. Again, the woman is not seen yielding a weapon. Also, like Ezarik's character, this woman is showing more skin than the other male characters. She wears a tank top or vest as a top showing her shoulders and part of her upper chest. In this way she is made into an object of desire. She gallops away only to be confronted by Myers' character, exclaiming in a hackneyed Russian accent, "Surprise, Horse Lady." Again, the ad depicts women being explicitly identified as such with a gendered moniker.

It matters that the women are not seen holding or directly utilizing any weapon more than an axe and a horse. In the context of the video this equiptment hardly gives them equal footing. In the behind-the-scenes video, the actor playing 'Horse Lady' states in what might be a sarcastic tone, "Even though everyone's got these futuristic weapons, I still feel more badass because I have a horse" (2012). The video creators we see in this behind the scenes footage are all white men. They enact a purposeful subversion of women by giving them inferior weapons, revealing clothing, and belittling names. This perpetuates a hegemonic masculinity that sees women as weak and merely objects of masculine sexual desire.

The most ironic thing about this video is the caption at the end reading, "THERE'S A SOLDIER IN ALL OF US". The marketers are reaching out to all people here because of the clear demographic shifts in gaming towards people of all gender and age groups (Williams, Yee, & Caplan, 2008). Indeed they will gladly take all the new customers they can get. They used this technique in the past with their previous commercial featuring women in battle under the same caption. However in, "Surprise" the subversion reaches new heights as the video's creators invite everyone to participate in an artificial environment of equality. Women are portrayed in the video with the caption eliciting inclusion, but the ad is merely masquerading as an equalizer. Underneath it features an ingrained hegemonic masculinity whereby domination, violence and subversion of women takes place. Upon analysis, the video seems to portray a hierarchical model of soldiers with men being on top. Thus in actuality, "Surprise" portrays *a certain kind of soldier in all of us*. That is to say a powerful, aggressive, womanizing and masculine soldier.

This study reveals the perpetuation of a male dominant, aggressive and womanizing form of hegemonic masculinity while ironically inviting all groups to join. This faux notion of equality undermines other genders and subgroups. An ideal world in which all advertisements promote equality may not be possible. However, scholars must be vigilant in our response to such blatant misrepresentations as seen in "Surprise". Perhaps future incarnations of this ad will portray ideals of collaboration, nonviolence and gender equality. In fact, there is a kind of self-subversive masculinity to be discussed in the following chapter.

MASCULINITY OF SLACKERISM

Casually dressed, unshaven facial hair, and a non-athletic build are just some ways to describe the men in this ad. Men have responded to the growing influence of feminism in a variety of ways. Michael Kimmel offers a description of men's responses within the 20th century including antifeminist, masculinists, and profeminists responses (1987). In this section a new theme will be brought forth. Several scholars have discussed the emergent 'masculinity in crisis', noting the ways that this crisis has manifested itself in the representation of men in popular American media (Ashcraft & Flores, 2003; Lindgren and Lelievre, 2009; Messner & Montez de Oca, 2005; Rogers 2008).

Many nuances and subtleties comprise the depiction of men in the media. Masculinity is most recently presented, perhaps paradoxically, as somewhat self-deprecating. For example, Messner and Montez de Oca describe the illustration of men as losers in beer commercials (2005). This evolution of masculinity connects with Connell's notion of a shifting hegemonic masculinity. As Connell states, "there could be a struggle for hegemony, and older forms of masculinity might be displaced by new ones" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 833). Thus, the masculinity displayed in American media can be considered as being in perpetual flux.

This study seeks to illuminate an emergent depiction of masculinity in the media, focusing on the portrayal of slackers. For the purposes of this article regarding media, *a slacker is one who is depicted as avoiding mental or physical work or societal obligations*. Media criticism has discussed similar tropes. Sarah E. Dempsey describes something similar in *Wired* ads as the 'Average Joe' (2009, p. 43). Messner and Montez de Oca discuss characters akin to slackers in a variety of beer commercials, pegged as

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"Losers" (2005). Kim Edwards calls the main character of the satirical zombie movie *Shaun of the Dead,* "An unlikely hero". She elaborates on the attributes of the male character "A brain-dead deadbeat in a dead-end job, with a social life that is gasping its last" (2008, p. 100). These commentaries make an important distinction among recent images of men in the media. Delving into these tropes, this work seeks to elaborate on such notions by identifying the portrayal of slackerism in "Surprise".

In his important work *Guyland,* Kimmel includes video games as one of the forces serving to construct modern masculinity (2008, p. 154-158). *Call of Duty* exemplifies the portrayal of masculinity in the media. Its annual game releases have spawned concurrent live action-advertisements with big budgets and entertainment values. The following section describes how "Surprise" demonstrates masculinity's shift to slackerism. Throughout the video, each male character contributes to the construction of this masculinity of slackerism.

Three major themes contribute to the slackerism presented in this ad. First, the ad depicts men as soft-bodied, nonathletic and seemingly ordinary. They are "Average Joe's", or worse, "Losers". Next, the ad shows the men as being deeply integrated with technological devices, relying on their gadgets rather than their physical abilities. Their innate capabilities are obfuscated by technology. Third and finally, the men in the ad are shown as being rebellious in nature. They need not abide by the rules of society and are free to slack off as they please.

Millions of individuals are exposed to this ad in addition to participating in the multibillion-dollar industry. These representations contribute to the ideas and discourse society cultivates regarding gender, and in this case masculinity. Collectively, this section

shows, contrary to the previously discussed themes of domination, that the ad *also* defines a masculinity of slackerism via soft bodied, tech reliant and rebellious representations of men. Further, this new formation of masculinity responds to contemporary social structures leading men to become slackers.

<u>Soft Bodied Slackers</u>

Soft-bodied slackers are one element of a slacker masculinity. Surprise" shows men who are out of shape and white collar. The soft-bodied men in this ad are a far cry from the hyper-masculine heroes of the 1980s like Sylvester Stallone or Arnold Schwarzenegger. Susan Jeffords links the hyper-masculine trend of the 80's to a need to re-masculinize the country due to the follies of the Vietnam War (1989). Messner extends this examination of evolving masculinities. He details the "ascendant masculinity" displayed by Arnold Schwarzenegger during his run for office and eventual political career. The actor turned politician's carnivalesque roles in film during the late 70's and 80's shift to a more empathetic and caring figure in *Kindergarten Cop* in the 90's and his eventual run for governor. Messner describes another shift that takes place following the aggressive 80's masculinity. This change in masculinity is exemplified by Schwarzenegger's transformation to a gentler political figure. Here is a celebrity who embodies masculinity in America becoming softer, though ultimately erring on the side of aggression and domination (2007, p. 451-480).

Characters akin to Stallone or Schwarzenegger's roles in *Predator* or *Rambo* lack the ubiquity they once had in 21st century media. The images of hyper-masculine men in the media were strongly tied to social forces of the time, and as time has changed so has the representations of masculinity. Thereby modern slackers now eclipse the hard bodied

heroes. Albeit the movies, *The Expendables 1 & 2* attempt to rekindle the hyper-masculine glory of the 80's with many, if not all of the, masculine actors from the period including Schwarzenegger and Stallone. But this attempt to rekindle hyper-masculine figures now competes with the portrayal of men in "Surprise". The latter advertisement can be seen as being in conflict with such previous depictions of hyper-masculinity.

The first person shown in the ad, "Surprise" is a white male between the ages of 25-35, dressed casually with long curly hair akin to an Afro, and mustache. He can be considered as the main character in the ad. This mustached man is the first and last person we see in the advertisement. He is visibly average looking, not seeming too skinny or fat, but certainly not athletic. He's clearly not dressed professionally in any sense, except that he's covered in body armor, guns and militaristic technology. This speaks to the joystick warriors that may find themselves engaged in virtual battle in the comfort of their living rooms. Thus everything about him pervades a sense of irony. He's white with a typically African American hairstyle, he's a millennial with facial hair typically associated with baby boomers, and he is dressed for the living room outfitted with modifications for war. He's a walking contradiction, a representative of slackers.

Other male characters in the ad exemplify the soft bodies in contrast to hard bodies of the 80's. The second guy featured in the ad is a white heavyset gentleman, perhaps in his thirties. He is visibly unshaven. Dozens of comments under the video mistake this random actor for Jack Black, an actor/comedian/musician known for his unkempt style. The next character is another large man in his thirties stating, "Surprise, mamacita". His size is emphasized in the next scene, "Surprise, fat man". These two characters are out of shape and clearly so.

Characters lacking athleticism, but also those who are intellectual rather than physical, promote slackerism in this ad. The next character is of African descent, a French actor named Omar Sy. Perhaps more fit than anyone else in the video, but still dressed quite casually as if without a 9-5 type of job. He is certainly not dressed for battle, perhaps a fancy dinner or club instead. He represents a man of intellect rather than being of brute strength. Then Robert Downey Jr. enters the video in a CG fighter jet plane saying, "Look who just brought a jet to a gunfight." Robert Downey Jr. is currently best known for his role as the comic book based movie, *Iron Man*. Tony Stark, an entrepreneurial genius with a heart condition, designed and becomes a super hero in this suit. Tony Stark is a superhero due to his intellectual inventions, rather than by force. Potential gamers view these characters knowing this, and perhaps identify with these characters more as intellectual. The following "Surprise" moment comes with a missile attack on Robert Downey Jr.'s plane. This jet flies off in to the distance and visibly explodes. Robert Downey Jr. and Iron man represent the complex meeting and contrast between hard the bodied super hero suit and soft bodied intellectual inside. The fact that his jet is visibly blown up exemplifies the problematic nature of these conflicting masculinities.

Two guys high five in celebration of the success. These men are Caucasian and wearing plaid shirts. They look quite average on the whole. One is skinny with messy hair, and the other overweight with longer hair and a beard. The two men reinforce this notion of soft-bodied slackers. Neither of the men is dressed for professional work or battle. They are wearing clothes one would typically see at a bar. Plaid could be attributed to the grunge movement of the 90's, a group of people in time epitomizing

slackerism. So these men appear to represent the soft-bodied masculinity that has been described. One is overweight, and the other perhaps underweight. Both are dressed unprofessionally. These two men are also depicted as being killed in a vast explosion with an explosive grenade thrown by the woman on the horse. These two guys and their slacker mentality are destroyed. The next male character, hired YouTube star FPSRUSSIA, also demonstrates such unprofessionalism. He uses a mock Russian accent and is dressed in casual attire including jeans, flat shoes and a branded t-shirt. The general impression given is one of men possessing a dispassionate and casual demeanor. Throughout the ad, the men are shown as average, lacking athleticism and relying on other faculties to cope with their shortcomings as slackers. This character also gets this large bomb dropped on him, the final explosion in the scene setting the entire place ablaze. Each of these complicated portrayals of slackers are demolished in this explosion.

Virtual Boys

Men and technology are inextricably linked in this advertisement. The implied bond between guys and their devices is repeated over and again. This echoes Sarah Dempsey's 2009 observations of ads in *Wired* magazine, **"**When compared to portrayals of women, men regularly occupied the central focal point of technology advertisements and were much more likely to be directly engaged with the technological product featured" (p. 43). The theme in "Surprise" is that men have a reliance on technology in place of physical capabilities. The technologies are used to bolster male power, but in doing so male power becomes diverted from the physical plane to the virtual. Men become slackers by using technology rather than their innate abilities.

Tracing the word 'virtual' back to its roots emphasizes its contribution to hegemonic masculinity. A word with the same root, 'virility' relates to manhood and masculinity. Both words borrow from the Latin word 'vir' meaning man. Put in context of this ad, it is no surprise that themes of masculinity pervade the virtual elements of this commercial. The men are the ones wielding technological power. The following list represents the trope of men using advanced technology: The mustached man's forearm GPS device, the Jack Black lookalike's rifle scope, the Fat Man's digital gun display, Omar Sy's robot tanks, Robert Downey Jr.'s jet, the high fiving plaid guys projectile rocket, and FPSRUSSIA's drone-like devices. These instances reiterate the integration of men and technology in the ad.

Why display the men with such over the top technologies? It will be helpful to look at other research dealing with the virtual world and masculinity. Diane Marie Keeling describes how football graphics "advance a hyper-masculine transhumanist rhetoric" (2012, p. 134). There is something similar happening in this advertisement. But instead of the ad advancing "hyper-masculine transhumanist rhetoric", things are reversed. Men use technology because they are slackers. They must rely on futuristic devices to make up for their lacking abilities as a result of the crisis in masculinity. Why navigate life manually when more convenient virtual technologies exist? This sums up the credo of slackers represented in the commercial.

The first character is seen operating his GPS device in the first seconds of the commercial. He is whistling casually, as if to convey nonchalance. Part of the intensity of the scene is in the contrast between his unworried demeanor among fire and explosions. The insinuation is that his technological device will do the work for him. He can sit back

and relax. This represents the modern generation of gamers that spend many hours online playing games, surfing the web or watching T.V. at home. Such portrayals in the commercial reflect and perpetuate this attitude among viewers.

The next male two characters have advanced gun scopes. The Jack Black doppelganger has a rifle with a great scope, with which he uses to put the previous guy in his sights. "Hey Buddy!" He says, while eyeing through the scope. An underdressed woman interrupts him with an axe, comparatively crude technology. The 'Latin Fat Man' then sights her. His gun has an advanced display too. His image is digitized. It replaces a regular image with a blue and green image of the woman's outlined body.

Omar Sy's character comes into the scene with large automated tank-like machines that he seems to be controlling with a remote device. He just taps one in the same way 'The Fonze' taps a Jukebox in *Happy Days* to evoke their activation. No other action on Sy's part is required; a simple tap completes the task. He has the remote control preventing him from needing to do anything in a physical sense. Next comes Robert Downey Jr.'s scene. He says, "Look who just brought a jet to a gunfight." He is not intimidating due to his physical stature, but by his technological stature. Thus technology becomes the means by which the men in this ad conquer.

This occurs yet again when the two plaid fellows high five after blowing up this jet with a projectile missile. The characters have big guns and ammunition attached to their bodies. They have accompanying headsets for communication, something that gamers also use to communicate. The insinuation is that they just coordinated this missile attack on the jet. Moments later a grenade enters the frame shocking the men. A young woman on a horse jumps over these guys while saying, "Surprise boys." Again the

female technology is cruder than the men's. They have heavy weaponry while she has a comparatively old fashioned horse. Her attack requires the most activity of the bunch, certainly more so than the next character. FPSRUSSIA says, "Surprise Horse Lady" as he's controlling a tablet device with two drones at his sides. He is clearly technologically advantaged in the scenario. He simply stands there using his thumbs to lead the attack via drones. He need not take a single step or action other than pushing buttons on his tablet. Thus his high tech gadget can do all the work for him.

The climax comes when an enormous missile comes from above to blow up FPSRUSSIA. The scene transitions to the whistling warrior from the beginning of the ad, suggesting his GPS device enabled the attack. He stands up casually as if not having a care in the world. In these instances, the men have technological power and the women do not. In line with Keeling's 2012 work, the men here are repeatedly shown as being the main possessors of technology.

Furthermore, the continual one-upping comes with bigger and more advanced technology as if to suggest a typically male-associated sizing contest gone awry. But the real take away from these examples is a reliance on technology. The men rely on the additional power through technology shifting the dependence on physical fighting to simply using their competitive nature, their intellect or humor to outmatch their predecessor. This leaves them free to continue in their slacker ways, avoiding physical labor through the use of their technological devices. The immaturity associated with this is reminiscent of a phrase used to name a short-lived Nintendo gaming console of the 90's, the Virtual Boy. Immersed in technology, the men in this ad remain stuck in an adolescent stage of slackerism. They remain 'Virtual Boys'.

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<u>Rebels Without a Cause</u>

This advertisement furthers the character's slackerism in its chaotic setting. Los

Angeles is in ruins, cars are overturned, buildings are in rubble and fire is all around.

Ashcraft and Flores observe the link between masculinity in crisis and the urban life in

their analysis of two different films. They assert, "Whereas In the *Company of Men*

marks the corporate world as the space in which real masculinity can emerge, the players

of *Fight Club* treat corporations as the very site that tames, emasculates, and so, must be

destroyed" (2003). "Surprise" reifies the latter theme, akin to *Fight Club*. Los Angeles is

destroyed to reclaim masculinity, but a different kind of masculinity, one of slackerism.

Rather than submit to the rules and responsibilities of society, the game posits an

anarchistic world where those rules do not exist. The men in the ad rebel against society

and are thus free to play video games indefinitely.

Kimmel's background on the response to feminism brings forth a relevant theme

that is repeated again in "Surprise". He describes anti-urban sentiments in various early

20th century masculinists' texts (1987, p. 261-283). The modern sentiment in the ad

"Surprise" is similarly anti-urban, but rather than retreating to rural life the retreat

happens in the virtual world of the game. The destruction of urban life in the video is of

importance here. All of the responsibilities associated with the city: work, school, family,

and government become lifted as a result of the city being in ruins. The final image of

zombies taking over really exaggerates this apocalyptic feel to the scene. Richard

Benjamin describes a genre of "Youth Apocalypse Films" of the 90's in which "The

white youths depicted are pathologically violent and shockingly indifferent to the present

or future" (2004, p. 34). A similar effect occurs in "Surprise". The majority of white

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characters are blowing up the city with fierceness indicative of a state of mind that is "indifferent to the present or future." It is this response of indifference that becomes a central component of slackerism.

The ad also presents a clash between white men and their counterparts in race and gender. The white male characters are rebelling against this encroachment upon their power. The competition between men, women and ethic groups is acted out in the various battles. The language used with women is gendered such as, "Surprise mamacita" and "Surprise Horse Lady". The horse riding female character matches the competitive talk with the statement, "Surprise boys", pointing out their immaturity as less than men. The Hispanic and African individuals participate in the ad to evoke a sense of faux equality. Yet they are included only in a great battleground between whites and women in what can only be seen as a hostile environment. A caption marks the end of the commercial with "THERES A SOLDIER IN ALL OF US". The commercial makes an attempt to represent diversity, but fails in doing so. Perhaps because it is such diversity the chaotic scenery attempts to resist.

Ten characters are discernable in the ad. Various other soldiers appear in the background but are not the focal point in any scene. Of the ten main characters, only two characters are women. The other eight are men. Additionally, eight are Caucasian, including the women, with one man of Latin background and one man of African descent. The great majority is presented as white. Whiteness becomes the norm. Nakayama and Krizek declare that this process, "functions to resecure the center, the place, for whites" (1995, p. 295). The white men in the ad fight to secure their dominance

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in society, but in losing this battle they succumb to an apathetic state of slackerism facilitated by the game world.

The final scene of chaos comes when the main character happens across a huge wave of zombies right at the end of the ad. The character says, "Zombies, Groovy" with a sense of nonchalance that can only be attributed to an overconfident slacker. Zombies in media can be said to represent many themes. Edwards provides a synopsis of the comedic zombie film, *Shaun of the Dead,* suggesting, "The film becomes simultaneously a satirical social commentary on the drudgeries of modern life and a witty validation of the sedentary lifestyles of young males refusing to grow up" (2011, p. 455). Certainly this supports the theme of slackerism in masculinity. The present study focuses on the additional use of zombies to convey a sense of chaos allowing men to rebel against society. All of the male character's frustrations over the crisis in masculinity and gender and ethnic clashes can be vented with the destruction of masses of zombies. The zombies represent the huge groups of people found in cities, anonymous bodies that are subject to destruction without moral ambiguity. Unlike reality, zombies require no need for political correctness.

Lisa Keränen illuminates recent depictions of apocalyptic scenarios by describing how public rhetoric advances "a perceived need for technological solutions to our perceived bio(in)security" (2008, p. 99) "Surprise" offers a solution in highly advanced technological weapons directly used to shoot the zombies. The feature is in the commercial as a direct reference to zombie killing game modes. One can directly have the simulated experience of killing zombies in the game. This speaks to the frustrations of men in crisis. The ability to participate in a battle against society, by killing zombies,

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contributes to the construction of slackerism in the ad. In being disobedient and rebellious, the men in the ad refuse conformity to society. They are rebelling out of dissatisfaction with work, school, family life, political correctness and all that is associated with life in the city. In this way, another feature of slackerism is provided by the commercial.

The message of slackerism clearly benefits the video game company. In conjuring up this type of masculinity, the ad attracts gamers to their product. As a response to feminism and in conflict with a dominant patriarchy, slackerism arose as a ploy to sell games. Thereby, money flows to the game creators. What is the societal cost of this? The viewers of the advertisement "Surprise", and the many similar ads, are subjected to a complex array of themes. This paper has discussed the elements of slackerism in a video game advertisement.

The depiction of men as out of shape, unable to rely on their physical abilities gives rise to a mentality that avoids manual labor. Next, the use of high technology by male characters promotes a standard of convenience to men. Lastly, the rebelliousness depicted in the ad becomes a way for white men to reject the city and become slackers in the virtual world. Such representations reflect and contribute to slackerism pervasive among white male millennials. Additionally, the ad succeeds in reifying gender stereotypes and furthering distinctions between men and women. Rather than empowering any group, "Surprise" proves detrimental to ideals advocated by feminism while also supporting an unhealthy type of masculinity by conveying men as slackers. In such a sense it marginalizes both genders by holding the men to such distinct, slacker roles.

The emergent hegemonic masculinity presented in the ad is one seemingly conflicting with masculinity of dominance. Men are simultaneously in power, yet fighting for power. Due to the conflicting representations of masculinity how are men to reconcile this conflict? The third theme discussed brings about an attempt at a proposed solution to the conflict within masculinity.

MASCULINITY OF CAMARADERIE

Camaraderie, the third feature of masculinity discussed here, is demonstrated in "Surprise". Various displays of male centered bonding in one way or another pervade the 70-second video. The previously discussed matters of hegemonic masculinity and slackerism may be thought of as manifestations of the inner conflict within modern masculinity. On the one hand, men still hold most positions of power and society is largely patriarchal. Yet on the other hand, there is a sense that men have become less masculine in a traditional sense. I have elaborated upon these two former aspects of masculinity in "Surprise" throughout the previous chapters. This power struggle presents a problem that demands resolution. The depiction is that slackers fighting for dominance can take solace among one another through communal game play. The current chapter describes the advertisement's attempted reconciliation of this disorder within a masculinity of camaraderie.

The promise of camaraderie provides viewers with a superficial resolution to the seemingly opposite forms of masculinity. The word itself connotes, "a feeling of good friendship among the people in a group" (Merriam-Webster 2014). Implied is a kinship and sense of belonging. This phenomenon can be rationalized by Kimmel's description of those living in Guyland as he describes, "Many of these young men, poised between adolescence and adulthood, are more likely to feel anxious and uncertain" (2008, p.3). Such an anxiety and uncertainty may exist in many male gamers of the age that Kimmel describes living in Guyland, between sixteen and twenty-six (2008). Part of the process involves conflicting messages of masculinity that they receive. The message conveyed is that conflicted gamers will regain a sense of camaraderie with their male peers.

Throughout "Surprise", several important themes contribute to this manner of persuasion. First, I will describe the ways in which the advertisement appeals to men's desire to be around other men. Then, I explain the significance of including women in the advertisement as a ploy to strengthen male relationships. Finally, the ad's false sense of diversity will be discussed as it does so while reifying whiteness for consumers. In all, the ad sends a mixed message to unite male gamers but concluding with an ultimate image of isolation. This occurs in the midst of a self-conflicted masculinity through gaining and losing camaraderie as a player in the game.

<u>Male Bonding</u>

The notion of 'Homosocial Desire' will assist in the development of this analysis. A crisis within masculinity opens up a hole that homosocial desire attempts to fill. Men seek and maintain relationships with other men whether or not the bond is sexual in nature, as described by Eve Sedgwick in her work, *Between men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire*. Sedgwick uses the term 'Homosocial Desire' to encompass the ways in which men bond and seek to be with each other in a way that is separate from homosexuality (1985). Though not necessarily devoid of erotic desire, Sedgwick describes the way that this occurs on a continuum, with such homosexuality being at one possible end of this homosocial desire between men. This overall concept of homosocial desire will be recurring throughout the discussion of male camaraderie. Sedgwick looks at the notion within literature. Similarly, the notion of homosocial desire can be readily used to make sense of messages in modern media. The men in this video game ad are shown as having a time of bonding throughout the action taking place.

The representations of men in the short video give viewers the sense that this game will allow them to connect with other guys. The eight male characters bond in the great action that takes place in a virtual battlefield. Fehr suggests gender differences in relationships in that men bond with each other more so with activities rather than talking (1996). The game brings forth the perfect mechanism for such bonding via an activity in the modern era. Moreover, headsets are commonly used in the game. A headset, essentially a microphone and earpiece connecting to the game console, allows players to speak to each other in a similar fashion as in the ad. Gamers are able to engage in conversation relating to the action in the game, in contrast to a more intimate sort of direct conversation for its own sake. It is significant that the ad shows a diverse variety of characters, corresponding to a diverse variety of potential fellow gamers. This indirect form of communication lends itself well to male gamers who most easily bond through doing things rather than just being with other people.

The appeal of camaraderie heavily relates to the online features of the game, as shown in the ad. Multiplayer gaming is becoming far more central to video games. A massive amount of the time-spent gaming is in online games. The rise in popularity of the Call of Duty franchise correlates to its implementation of online play. Williams makes this assertion more generally, "Humans, whose need for social contact has never changed, find themselves with a desire for community and social interaction but with fewer and fewer real-world outlets" (2006, p. 3). Thus male gamers are being attracted to the game through the display of online play. In this ad the attraction is accomplished with the fun atmosphere of guys interacting with each other in the fictional commercial world. Guys can connect and play with other guys in the game.

It is relevant that the camaraderie takes place online. Much of the advances associated with modern society have lessened opportunities for face-to-face interactions, especially civic engagement (Putnam 95). A displacement of sort has taken place in society, leading many to Bowl Alone, in Putnam's example. Another factor is the extended adolescence of modern men. Kimmel describes the delays in marriage, a career and family life for guys (2008, p.30-32). These previous barometers of adult male life have been largely altered in young men. If this is the case, then where are young men to turn? Skoric, Ying and Ying posit that the rapid transition towards technology and virtual media might lead to positive results in the community (2009). Perhaps it is not that socializing has decreased, but that it has been diverted to online media. As such, the ad reconciles this shift and a perceived need for male interaction by offering a virtual and male privileged space. It will be helpful to begin by looking directly at the ad.

After the opening scene, the male character seen is preoccupied with his wrist GPS device when the next character, also male, says, "Hey Buddy". This happens to be the first dialogue in the entire advertisement. It is telling that it is a term of endearment as if they are competing as friends, peers or in a friendly rivalry. This term 'buddy' is defined by Merriam-Webster's dictionary as, "a close friend, used to address a man who you do not know, or a person who does some activity with you" also assumed to stem from the term 'brother' (2014). Therefore, the implication is that they are engaging in an activity in a friendly manner, they are bonding in a way that caters to men's homosocial desire, their longing for each other.

This is further exemplified when two characters are shown in a celebratory high five event after seemingly destroying a combatant plane through the use of teamwork.

Jon Mooallem writes about the origins of this primarily male activity in his 2013 article "The History of the High Five". In the article, Mooallem describes the celebratory use of the high five in male sports. It can be thought of as a show of solidarity, of unity among men in competition. Though clearly not limited in use by men, its claimed origins point to male origins and perhaps explain the tendency for modern men to continue the unattached display of affection, as seen in in the text. This is what viewers see in the ad. The two men succeed, if only for a moment before their defeat, and celebrate in their victory with a masculine kind of high five.

Another aspect to the male bonding that takes place is the kind of ribbing that we see throughout the competitive nature of the game. Even the previous 'Hey Buddy' is stated with a sarcastic, competitive tone right at the moment of attacking the very individual that he is referring to. The continual one-upping, as was spoken of earlier, relates to this competitive feature of the male bonding taking place. Another example of this male-to-male ribbing is when one says to the other, "Surprise, Fat man". Joking and offensive remarks are an important part of male bonding. Kimmel describes the supposedly good-natured hazing that is so common around college campuses that may serve to validate masculinity (2008, p. 100-102). Likewise, name-calling is a sort of hazing process whereby the men are constantly proving their masculinity to each other in competition and in verbal quips. Right after the previous comment comes the next male character stating, "Look who just brought a jet to a gun fight". It is stated similarly sarcastically, in a standoffish sense that captures the competitive banter that becomes part of this male bonding.

In total, plenty of male bonding occurs in this ad. The men enact this disorderly masculinity by trying to relate, connect and engage with all of the characters in the ad. This occurs in line with Sedgwick's notion of homosocial desire. The friendly banter between characters on screen depicts an inviting atmosphere. Also, the competitive twinge to the dialogue gives men the pleasure of denigrating each other in the game. These two strategies must be mediated by an essential reason to engage same sex bonding without being perceived as feminine in any way.

Straight Fun

A fundamental aspect of male bonding involves validation through sexuality. Masculinity often serves to reinforce heteronormativity (Kimmel 2008, Trujillo 1991, Connell 1995, Sedgwick 1985). It is this through masculine activities that men are given way to deflect their fears of homosexuality. The advertisement subject to this analysis demonstrates this affirmation of heterosexuality in multiple ways. But the unique feature in *this* ad is that it is done in an attempt to reconcile men's confusion regarding masculinity. It is ironic that the term, heterosexual, did not exist until 1892 but is currently the standard by which all men are held (Katz, 2007). Then how is this played out in, "Surprise"?

One part of the discussion that has yet to be fully explored in this section thus far is the inclusion of the two female characters. The women certainly partake in this back and forth macho dialogue, are deeply involved with the fulfillment of homosocial desire. Moreover, in order to recapture their masculinity, men must find some excuse to participate in activity with each other without any inclining of homosexuality. The fundamental fear of being thought of as gay, strikes men at their core and results in the

many creative ways that the ad attempts to ameliorate this fear of homosexuality. The new Internet phrase 'no homo' perfectly encapsulates this concept, as many men online must include this caveat to clarify that whatever statement they made that might be construed as implying homosexuality is unintended and untrue. However, despite the ads attempt to reject such traits, it does so while reinforcing some aspect of homoerotic desire among the men. Thus, the ways in which the video justifies male bonding is by the negation of femininity and homosexuality. Part of this is the inclusion of women.

Women are incorporated in the advertisement as a ploy for men. Sedgwick describes the erotic triangle that takes place in English literature between two male rivals competing for the affection of a female (1985). The ad clearly does not have any love story in the same way as the literature analyzed by Sedgwick. However, a dynamic of sexual attraction exists. The female characters in 'Surprise', referred to only as 'mamacita' and 'horse lady' are positioned between the male characters. Interestingly this is done symmetrically in the ad. Two male characters appear, then one female, then four men, the next woman and closing with two men. The women are outnumbered in a four to one ratio. This occurs so that the male characters might fully reclaim masculinity among each other.

Women do appear in the ad, but this is merely accomplished for the men. In such a male space, the inclusion of women is necessary to divert any inclination of homosexuality. Another recent example is the popular YouTube series with billions of views, "Epic Mealtime". It depicts men cooking absurd dishes and always manages to show a woman eating the dish, or sexual references to the food as a way to verify their heterosexuality with each other. In a related, if more subtle way, 'Surprise' accomplishes

this too. Rather than serving to attract female gamers, the women are merely included as a mechanism to reinforce the male relationships. Perhaps if the men in this ad were seen as interacting with each other without any women, they might be perceived as being homosexual. Thus, the male relationships and their masculinities are validated with the inclusion of women to create opportunities for heterosexual interactions.

A new theme in modern media is this notion of the woman who plays the role of 'one of the guys'. Rather than being a position of equality, this caters to male expectations of women that they be physically attractive according to their demands, but mentally capable of participating in activities just like their male friends. In an ironic sense, the women in the ad fulfill men's homosocial desire for other men. The erotic triangle is truncated, simplified with a masculine woman. A woman who becomes one the guys is one who might be desirable and yet also relatable. 'Surprise' dictates the 'guyness' of the 'girls' in their engagement in the action, one throwing an axe and another on a horse jumping over a car. They have similar quips to the guys. Yet this does not serve to equalize the genders, only to reinforce men's desires. Therefore, the presence of women merely becomes a way for the ad to affirm masculinity through heterosexuality.

This occurs throughout modern media. An interesting feature of the women in this ad is that they are shown as being somewhat empowered. They are competing among the men. But how is this shown? Similarly, in other media, "White male struggles to master "overly-empowered" white femininity, a trope of film noir, emerges here as white men both fear and desire white women" (Carrillo Rowe & Lindsey 2003). The women in this ad could be considered as playing the role of the femme fatale type of characters, which

can be empowering, although they run the risk of reifying the possibilities for sexual objectification by the men. In this ad, the first shown female character is dressed in camouflaged cargo pants, with gun holsters and holding an axe. Her dress and masculine aggression is more similar to a dominatrix than a soldier. The next woman arriving on a horse is similarly shown in mock military garb, showing considerably more skin than the other men. She submits two men at once while stating, "Surprise boys". The empowered woman submitting men could be becomes a thrill for the 'boys'. The women are visibly feminine, but in personality display masculine features. They are competitive and aggressive, but for whom?

It has been shown that the women are shown as being fun and attractive. Another important feature in the ad is that the women do not interact with each other. The ad would promptly fail what is known as the 'Bechdel Test' whereby a movie must have at least two female characters that speak to each other about something besides a man (Bechdel, 1985). Though provided in a comic strip, the point remains for critics to realize how few media outlets portray true gender equality. The women shown in 'Surprise' are only seen interacting with other men, demonstrating the importance of their relationship to other men, rather than to each other. By not showing women interacting with each other, it strengthens the notion of them being included for male purposes. This is added to their limited representation of being the femme fatale, of being one of the guys, and furthering the notion of heterosexual norms among men. John Berger describes this recurring trope in a seemingly timeless sentiment that men act while women appear (1973).

It's White Alright

The third important theme to consider in the discussion of a masculinity of camaraderie involves race. A development occurs in which male relationships are solidified via the reinforcement of whiteness. This is important to discuss, as Crenshaw's commentary on intersectionality states, "The idea is to understand how race and gender overlap so that we can both inform our ongoing attempts to understand the nature of each category and link their intersections to their political consequences" (1997, p.223). Thus, in this commercial it is important to see the way that whiteness is portrayed in relation to masculinity.

Yochim's description of whiteness in another game, Tony Hawk's Underground, does much to illuminate the racial elements ultimately centering whiteness in a video game (2006). Video games have been examined for their depiction of a majority of white male characters (Burgess, M. R., Dill, K. E., Stermer, S., Burgess, S. R., & Brown, B. P. 2011 & White Man's Virtual World 2012). 'Surprise' makes a clear attempt to broaden their possible market demographic with the inclusion of actors portraying diversity. Actors of multiple genders and races appear in the ad. The female and minority characters, along with the caption "THERE IS A SOLDIER IN ALL OF US" clearly serves as a marketing tool to attract all gendered and raced gamers. Presumably the broader their market, the broader their profits. However, such a narrow representation may prove futile in motivating people to become self-identified gamers, as Shaw remarks (2011). Conversely, the argument presented here is that the ad promotes solidarity of a dominant culture of whiteness and masculinity.

Relatedly, seven of the nine characters are white. That makes up a vast majority of representation. The ad demonstrates a normality of whiteness in response to encroachments from 'other' groups. White women threaten male superiority the ad. Two non-white men appear in the ad. Yet the inclusion of a black and brown character does not detract from the reinforcement of whiteness. In fact, such an inclusion can strengthen whiteness by displaying non-whites as enacting social constructions of whiteness. Critics need not convolute the fact of having a white body with embodying whiteness per se. Carrillo Rowe & Malhotra deliver a strong case for the separation between having a white body and whiteness (2006). In doing so, whites become capable of anti-racism and non-whites become capable of participating in the norms associated with whiteness. When taken as an idea rather than as a physical characteristic, whiteness can be furthered by the likes of "Surprise".

In fact, the two men of color in this ad should be considered as enacting whiteness. The first character appears to be Hispanic. Additionally, he is wearing a leather jacket conjuring up images of a Native American wardrobe. His line, "Surprise mamacita" invokes the appearance of being Hispanic. However, these are very superficial enactments of race. By far, whiteness permeates his performance of masculinity. He is participating in the violence and hegemony. This affects the performance of race. Next, the man of African descent appears stating, "Surprise fatman". The previous character's race is taken out of the picture. He is stripped away of his ethnic presentation and simply made light of for being fat. Obesity should be linked to whiteness through industrialization, urbanization and privilege. These are the conditions that often contribute to a person being overweight. Moreover, the character played by Omar Sy is

dressed white. He is using technology and enacting the patriarchal and military hegemonic masculinity. He is dressed in evident white-collar fashion. He is wearing a sweater vest over a collared dress shirt. He is wearing slim fitting and newly worn clothes and flat shoes. These comprise the performance of a white male individual. Thus, the two men of color in the ad do not include diversity into the picture.

Shome describes part of the process, "In contemporary times, such markings of whiteness, especially white masculinity, is clearly seen in representations of whiteness in popular media" (2000, p. 369). bell hooks' brings up the important issue that, "When race and racism are the topic in public discourse the voices that speak are male" (1995, p.1). Insidious as these forces may be, "Surprise" caters to this whiteness and maleness. In order for any counterhegemonic process to take place, such forces must be brought to light and addressed appropriately. Nakayama and Krizek note, "White males, by occupying a more strategic position than white females, have been accorded essentially a label-free existence" (1995, p.302). The aim of this section is to look deeper into this process, as 'Surprise' manifests camaraderie through whiteness. Another way that this is enacted through neocolonialism.

Western military domination has been a central feature of American and European politics for centuries. The continuation of war themes in this ad furthers this trend. This is a way that the ad incites male solidarity, through the reaffirmation of whiteness. The images of war and domination place viewers in an imagine battle akin to real war. But the battle takes place in Los Angeles. The total state of chaos is given a home in the U.S. This mirrors the conflicted masculinity described throughout this work.

It is important that at the end of the advertisement we see the entire scene blow up. The main white character from the beginning launches a rocket that seemingly blows up everything. This demonstrates a desire to destroy everything. This represents the chaotic nature of this masculinity. All of the themes discussed previously are destroyed in this final massive explosion. This massive explosion gives rise to a zombie apocalyptic scenario in which the character is by himself against these zombies. This shows disorder at the highest level. All of society is gone and all the themes of masculinity self-destruct. This gives rise to one man alone against an indiscernible crowd of undead. The camaraderie set up by all of the previous scenes is negated. Viewers are simply given the image of this one man acting alone against zombies. An important mixed message occurs here. Though the game is meant to incite camaraderie and socialization, the final scene is one of utmost isolation and loneliness. The last man standing humorously says, "Groovy". Thus, the commercial concludes by exemplifying disorder amongst masculinity, a need for camaraderie amongst a world of isolation.

As such, a masculinity of camaraderie manifests itself in "Surprise". The ad offers men a world in which they might regain a sense of male connection and power. Women become part of the ploy with their inclusion in the ad. Finally, a white-male normalcy is upheld despite the inclusion of non-white characters. The democratizing goals of gender studies require such scrutiny of the media landscapes. This study attempts to illuminate contemporary gendered processes in the media so that consumers are fully aware of the cultural impact of such products. Therefore, the ad offers viewers with this video game as a means to regain homosociality, heterosexuality, a white-male space, and ultimately promise back their masculinity via camaraderie. So what if it fails?

CONCLUSION

As a Teaching Associate at CSU Northridge, one of my service assignments is to assist with a public speaking program for youth participants. During a recent discussion about the importance of language in public speaking, the students were asked what they considered to be the most beautiful word. One student instantly yelled, "COD". The instructor replied, "Like the fish?" To which the student replied, "No, Call of Duty!" Laughter erupted for just a moment in the class, as the other students were seemingly privy to the comment from the moment he blurted it out.

The boy making the remark was in a combined 5th and 6th grade group, meaning he was probably twelve years old, give or take a year. Developing minds are immersed in video games, and the messages they receive matter. I was certainly engaged in a similar atmosphere in my youth. It matters that marketing campaigns are actively designed to reach out to such gamers. The themes of masculinities discussed here matter in the formation of young minds.

The various themes of masculinity discussed here represent something of great significance, a greater conflict of masculinity beyond a mere 'masculinity in crisis'. Men are in a perpetual state of crisis. In "Surprise" this is presented as a disorderly type of masculinity. This disorderly type of masculinity allows for various opposing features to occur simultaneously. The male representations are in a sense fractured. The chaotic video demonstrates itself as an impactful metaphor for this process. Men are seeking power and dominance, yet at the same time they are seen and described as slackers. The final component of camaraderie makes an attempt to mediate this uncertainty. But this

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attempt is self-destructive. The male representations may occur simultaneously but represent a disorderly masculinity.

This analysis of "Surprise" provides a valid contribution to the greater field of communication studies. This work has sought to discern the messages relayed in this specific video game ad. The study reveals several prominent themes of masculinity in "Surprise". A masculinity of dominance is portrayed in the reaffirmation of traditional hegemonic masculinity. The power struggle is shown so that men can reclaim their sense of domination in the world. Simultaneously, a masculinity of slackerism is brought forth. The men in the ad are regaining their power in a nuanced and subtle fashion. Finally, a masculinity of camaraderie invites gamers to reclaim their manhood in the virtual sphere. Though this occurs, the inherent isolation of the nature video games becomes apparent. Collectively, these masculinities may seem somewhat contradictory. This conundrum merely validates the fluidity of gender and the ways in which it can be conflictual. Thus the chaotic action depicted on screen mirrors the self-destructive nature of male norms. It responds to the crisis and perpetuates it. The themes presented in "Surprise" give rise to this newly determined disorderly masculinity.

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