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## Of Masculinities, Men, and Mockery in the “Get a Mac” Campaign: Gendered Derision as a Rhetorical Tool\*

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In the cultural and commercial genre of advertising, brands signify powerful cultural ideas that do not merely publicize products but, more importantly, speak to familiar cultural icons, ideals, and values to construct a brand identity that can ultimately result in profits for the company behind the brand. In light of current concepts and theories in critical masculinity studies and critical humor studies, this article examines a renowned twenty-first-century US advertising campaign, Apple’s “Get a Mac” campaign, as a popular culture text that deploys ridicule to capitalize on subtle gendered relations. The campaign, featuring men as lead characters, taps into the contemporary Anglo-American gender order - particularly the notion of hegemonic masculinity - to reinforce a positive brand image. In doing so, I argue, the campaign takes much of its primary force from the punitive use of ridicule within a patriarchal economy of power, in which hegemonic notions of gender are exalted at the expense of non-hegemonic gender performances. As such, the campaign is informed by, and helps to inform, a subtle, hierarchal ideology of gender. In conclusion, this article briefly debates the implications of the main argument for further, related research, while also tackling the ensuing question of whether commercial advertising can ever be expected to resist hegemony effectively.

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In the cultural and commercial genre of advertising, brands are “evolving complexes of powerful cultural ideas” (MacRury 2009, 49) that do not merely publicize products but, more importantly, speak to familiar cultural icons, ideals, and values to construct a “brand identity” (Wharton 2015, 12) that can ultimately result in profits for the company through the formation of a positive image, or “the halo of feelings and emotions that brands inspire” (Fletcher 2010, 12). In mainstream media and advertising in particular, such familiar cultural values and icons are often “what advertisers take to be prevailing social values” (Schudson 1984, 220). In other words, mainstream advertising appears inclined to resort to culturally ascendant notions in a society in an attempt to secure ample favorable reception by insuring itself against serious objections or resistance on the part of the audience. My analysis of the Apple Incorporation’s “Get a Mac” campaign (2006-2009), a well-known and critically acclaimed twenty-first-century US ad campaign, confirms this observation. The campaign, it will be shown, is an example of a publicity text that subtly deploys gendered ridicule to construct a positive brand identity and form a favorable brand image.

### **The personified Mac and PC: a successful campaign’s story**

In 2006, Apple Inc. initiated an ad campaign called “Get a Mac.” A series of television commercials, directed by Phil Morrison, featured actor Justin Long as “the Mac,” or the Macintosh computer, and author and humorist John Hodgman as “the PC,” representing any computer using Microsoft’s Windows operating system. The simple core plotline of these ads relied on witty punchlines at the expense of the PC character. Quickly becoming a hit, the campaign ran successfully and continually for over three years. *Slate* writer Seth Stevenson outlines the template for the ads in his article “Mac Attack: Apple’s Mean-Spirited New Ad Campaign”:

Two men stand side by side in front of a featureless, white background. “Hello, I’m a Mac,” says the guy on the right (who is much younger and dressed in jeans). “And I’m a PC,” says the guy on the left (who wears dorky glasses, ill-fitting khakis, and a jacket and tie). The two men discuss the many advantages of using a Mac and seem to agree that Macs are “better” than PCs. (2006, n.p.)

Stevenson, a self-proclaimed PC-user, argues that Apple’s juxtaposition of the two oppositely constructed characters - that is, a “cool kid” (the Mac) versus a “nerd” (the PC) - might unintentionally and ironically work against the company’s intentions. “These days,” he asks, “aren’t nerds like John Hodgman the new cool kids? And isn’t smug superiority (no matter how affable and casually dressed) a bit off-putting as a brand strategy?” As revealed in his essay title, Stevenson thought that the ads were “mean-spirited.” On somewhat similar grounds, Charlie Brooker (2007) of *The Guardian* criticized the characterizations in the ads as potentially hazardous to Apple’s aims. While Stevenson critiques the American series of ads, Brooker focuses on the UK version of the campaign, which was very similar aside from the two men featured: comedians David Mitchell and Robert Webb. Intrigued by their juxtaposition, Brooker notes that the two actors

are best known for the television series *Peep Show* – probably the best sitcom of the past five years – in which Mitchell plays a repressed, neurotic underdog, and Webb plays a selfish, self-regarding poseur. So when you see the ads, you think,

“PCs are a bit rubbish yet ultimately lovable, whereas Macs are just smug, preening tossers.” In other words, it is a devastatingly accurate campaign. (2007, n.p.)

Both critics, in other words, explain why they find the “Get a Mac” ads to be ineffective, even distasteful. Regardless, however, the campaign - including both the US and UK ads, as well as versions adapted into a Japanese campaign - proved to be highly influential. Described as “the most effective ad campaign [that] technology has ever seen,” it apparently contributed to a 42 percent market-share growth (Ulanoff 2008; Dahlén, Lange, and Smith 2010, 24). Put in more tangible numbers, “the highly successful campaign dramatically increased sales of the Macintosh computer by more than a million units between December 2005 and December 2007 alone” (Santa Maria and Knowles 2011, 83). Furthermore, “the campaign was seen as ‘culturally influential’ and achieved a prestigious American Marketing Association 2007 Effie Award in the process” (Dahlén, Lange, and Smith 2010, 24). Obviously, the “Get a Mac” ads served to successfully generate a positive brand identity – that is, the way a company wants to be perceived by its customers (Wharton 2015, 187). Where, we should ask, does this cultural influence come from?

One response could be the allegedly “shameless promotion” of the Mac product, as Brooker (2007) put it; in all of the spots, he points out, “the Mac” has both a conceited attitude and, ultimately, the upper hand. Another possibility, as Lance Ulanoff (2008) conjectures, is the ads’ construction of difference where little or no difference exists, by reintroducing as dissimilar two technically very similar products. Yet it would be hard to deny that the campaign primarily revolves around the construction of a striking contrast between the two brands, as personified characters, notwithstanding their shared technical aspects. Why and through which rhetorical techniques and mechanisms, we may ask, does Apple’s campaign establish such a difference? As if in response to this question, Kelton Rhoads enumerates what he sees as “the core influence tactics that forward the campaign” (2007, 6). Like Stevenson, Rhoads suggests that the Apple campaign capitalizes on an existing stereotype that the Mac and the PC are basically different; he also points to other contributing factors that deal particularly with the Mac and the PC as personified characters. Whereas the PC is depicted as an “aggressor,” Rhoads states, the Mac is portrayed as a “friendly and empathetic” person who also “shows humility” (7, 8). Equally important, the whole series hinges on a “witty and humorous” mode: “Apple’s GAM campaign is a form of gentle stand-up comedy, a ‘vaudeville comedy duo’” (9). Each spot is indeed intended to be taken as a joke, its punchline delivered at the PC’s expense (see Livingstone 2011b). Significantly, in these spots-as-jokes, the PC is almost always depicted as a humorless character, which can serve as a powerful rhetorical strategy given that a sense of humor is assumed to be an essential human trait.

As some scholars note, the campaign deploys “literal anthropomorphism” (Santa Maria and Knowles 2011, 84), in that it equalizes the Mac and PC brands with, and contrasts them as, human beings. Not unexpectedly, the critics mentioned above also foreground the contrasting characterizations of the two brands. Generally speaking, as Stevenson notes, the “ads pose a seemingly obvious question - would you rather be the laid-back young dude or the portly old dweeb?” (2006, 6). As if answering Stevenson’s rhetorical question, Livingstone, in his article on the campaign’s “messages of consumption and class,” poses yet another rhetorical question: “Why wouldn’t we want to be Mac?” (2011b, n.p.). Clearly, the ads’ creators intend us to think, the Mac is

the thing to be. In considering these ads in terms of gender, a vital yet seemingly invisible component of the campaign, we may discover an effective explanation as to how the ads present the Mac as the more desired character. As Diane Hope states, advertising is a principal genre of visual rhetoric, which,

like verbal rhetoric, [...] depends on strategies of identification; advertising's rhetoric is dominated by appeals to gender as the primary marker of consumer identity. Constructs of masculinity or femininity contextualize fantasies of social role, power, status, and security as well as sexual attractiveness. (2004, 155)

Santa Maria and Knowles (2011) clearly take this consideration into account in their attention to the gendered aspect of these ads; however, they focus only on the absence of women from most spots and the relatively insignificant roles occupied by those women who do appear. Such a focus is no doubt important in revealing the socializing power of the media, as noted by the authors. However, we gain further, valuable insight by looking at the already gendered relationship between the two brands (male characters) themselves and the implications of this relationship both for the rhetorical aspect of the ads and for their value as means of socialization.

#### **“Get a Mac”: a not-quite-visibly gendered text**

Gender would have been raised frequently, perhaps even too often, had the campaign creators personified one product as a man and the other as a woman, not least because gender is more often than not associated with femininity (Kimmel 1993). In terms of the market, however, such a strategy might have produced rather unpleasant results for the company. Three obvious alternatives are possible: the Mac as a woman and the PC as a man, the Mac as a man and the PC as a woman, and both brands as women. Depicting the Mac as a man always getting the upper hand over a female PC would likely have aroused suspicions of male chauvinism, thus damaging Apple's brand image and producing negative reactions to the campaign. On the other hand, considering the different “quality content” (Schippers 2007, 90), or prevalent characteristics, associated with the social constructs of femininity and masculinity in contemporary US society, it would be difficult to predict how the company's target audience might have reacted to a female Mac versus a male PC. The third scenario – i.e., both brands portrayed as female – would have likely proved risky, too, given that femininity arouses inevitable comparisons with its more powerful, yet absent, other: the culturally superior construct of masculinity.<sup>1</sup>

The choice to personify both brands as men allows the campaign to seemingly avoid blatant discourses of gender while still incorporating subtly gendered messages. In their man-versus-man format, the ads can compete for different degrees of identification by male audience members while also (though the assumption underlying this second point obviously naturalizes heterosexuality) competing for the attention of female audience members. In its shrewd utilization of the gendered aspect of male-male relationships, the campaign raises an important point unfortunately neglected in previous critical assessments. As Raewyn Connell cautions, “not all gender relations are direct interactions between women on one side and men on the other [...]. Relationships among men, or among women, may still be gender relations -

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<sup>1</sup> A similar case could be made about using non-white characters as either or both of the lead characters in the ads.

such as hierarchies of masculinity among men” (2009, 73). Such a hierarchical relationship is, as we will see below, at the heart of the “Get a Mac” campaign.

Since the late 1980s, but especially from the mid-1990s, a growing number of gender-sensitive studies of media and communication have analyzed and critiqued representations and constructions of gender in media, including advertising, mostly with an emphasis on women and femininities (see Abel, deBruin, and Nowak 2010; Barthel 1988), while more recently, increasing attention has also been paid to media depictions and constructions of men and masculinities (e.g., Luyt 2012; Nixon 1996; Vokey, Tefft, and Tysiaczny 2013). The latter strand of research exists in the thriving field of masculinity studies, one of whose primary aims is to make visible men *qua* men because, as masculinity studies theorist Michael Kimmel reminds us, men as gendered subjects have often remained invisible throughout history, especially - and ironically - after the appearance of feminism. While feminism identified gender as an essential part of debates on human identity, Kimmel argues that “gender” also tended to become synonymous with women, with men increasingly located outside the reach of gender studies (1993, 29). However, as Judith Gardiner (2002, 9) points out, feminist involvements will simply remain incomplete if they are inattentive to masculinity.

Aiming to contribute to this latter area of research, the present article focuses on the nexus of gender and humor in advertising that features men as gendered subjects, examining the topic from an under-recognized perspective – that is, with a focus on the punitive aspect of ridicule as both a form of humor and an advertising trope. Advertising has often employed humor as a tool with which to solicit positive responses from the audience (Weinberger and Gulas 1992). Such ubiquitous use of humor has attracted the attention of numerous scholars from a variety of disciplines who have an interest in gender studies (e.g., Eisend, Plagemann, and Sollwedel 2014; Gulas and Weinberger 2006, 176–83; Kostro 2012; Scharrer et al. 2006) and masculinities in particular (Benwell 2004). Little attention, however, has been paid to the role that gendered ridicule in advertising can play in reinforcing dominant gender norms in society at large (see Meân 2009, 147–48). Elsewhere, I have conceptualized this role as the disciplinary function of mainstream gender humour (Abedinifard 2016a). Below, focusing on how mainstream advertising can capitalize on this function of ridiculing humor, I show how Apple’s “Get a Mac” campaign - comprising sixty-six spots that ran on television from May 2006 to October 2009 - draws on hegemonic notions of gender, particularly masculinity, in contemporary Anglo-American society and culture to enhance the rhetorical power of its message.

### **Joking at PC’s expense: gendered derision and bodily normativity**

The “Get a Mac” campaign seeks effectiveness through the introduction and maintenance of a hierarchical relationship between its two male lead characters; hence, the concept of hegemonic masculinity as the culturally ascendant, yet idealized and thus often unattainable, form of being a man in a society is relevant and useful (Connell 2009, 183–88). In her oft-cited model of gender hierarchy in post-industrial Western societies, Raewyn Connell (2005, 76–81) conceives of hegemonic masculinity as a configuration of gender practices that rests atop a patriarchal gender order within a hierarchical inter- and intra-relationship with femininities and other non-hegemonic forms of masculinity, e.g., those featuring subordinated and marginalized attributes along lines of bodily normativity, race, and sexual orientation. This hierarchical gender order is in fact “a social structure that advantages men, as a class, over women,

as a class; and that privileges men who possess or demonstrate certain characteristics over those who do not" (Buchbinder 2013, 69). Therefore, a patriarchal gender order involves an economy of power featuring differential and unequal distribution of power between and among men and women in their relations (71). An essential feature feeding into this unjust economy is bodily non/normativity. Given the applicability of this concept to our analysis of the ads, some theoretical clarification of the concept as well as its relevance to humor, and particularly ridicule, is in order here.

If gender is a set of practices or performances (West and Zimmerman 1987), and if one's success or failure in doing or performing gender is exposed to evaluation within interpersonal and social interactions (Gerschick and Miller 1997; West and Zimmerman 1987), then the body's role in displaying gendered acts, and the degree to which one may succeed or fail in performing such acts, cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, interconnected with hierarchical gender relationships in a patriarchal gender order is also a hierarchy of bodies. In societies, numerous norms are associated with different types and features of bodies, which are then valued, or devalued, based on the extent to which they approximate the culturally sanctioned ideals. Such evaluations and devaluations rest on characteristics as "race, ethnicity, class, age, physique, weight, height, ability, disability, appearance, and skin color" (Gerschick 2005, 371). One's body could pass or fail such social appreciation tests in a number of ways, because each culture, at a given moment and based on its own criteria for normativity, stigmatizes those bodies deemed as deviant. "People," Gerschick states, "can be less normative by being too light, too dark, too fat or too skinny, too poor, too young or too old, too tall, too short, too awkward, or too uncoordinated" (2005, 371). Thus a hierarchy of bodies comes into existence, in which each body is granted a different value within the patriarchal economy and also claims a different place on the gender performance ladder. One's body becomes "a type of social currency that signifies one's worth" (Gerschick 2005, 372), in that the body directly affects what a person is capable of obtaining from their social interactions as symbolic transactions. An often underestimated way in which gender hegemony in general, and the bodily hierarchy in particular, is maintained in a culture is the deployment of ridicule as an informal, yet powerful, social control strategy within social relations (Abedinifard 2016b). Such control can be exercised through mainstream gender humor. In this type of humor – which in heteronormative societies often targets such social identities as women, effeminate men, and homosexuals – "the disciplinary effect can occur through the derision of certain gender-transgressions [in that] while certain hegemonic gender norms or normative acts are presumed or implied, violations of them are stated or are clearly derisive" (Abedinifard 2016a, 241).

Ridiculing humor as an intended response to bodily non-normativity comes to the fore in the "Get a Mac" ads' humorous treatment of the contrasting embodiments of the Mac (as the advertised brand) and the PC (as the negated brand) characters - a subtle ridicule obviously aimed at increasing the likelihood that the target audience will identify with the desired brand's character, the Mac, who occupies a more normative body. Some ads, as we will see, refer either explicitly or implicitly to the two characters' gender performances. Explicit gendered references are, significantly, made when our male brand-characters are in the presence of female characters. In such ads, the humorous, ridicule-based deployment of hegemonic gender norms in Anglo-American societies becomes particularly obvious. Yet, many other "Get a Mac" ads also advance implied or stated comparisons, from various vantage points, between the

two brands as male human beings. Such comparisons - which often revolve around issues of bodily normativity, including ability/disability, age, fitness, and illness/health - while not always directly concerning gender, do tend to frame the brands-as-men's gender performances in other spots. In such comparative scenarios, the upper hand is always granted to the Mac character: he puts on a more stable and confident social and gender performance.

The different embodiments of the two characters are suggested through the numerous, visible, bodily characteristics of the Mac and the PC, that is, of Justin Long and John Hodgman (in the US campaign). While both characters, in their appearance, are intended to evoke younger versions of former Apple CEO Steve Jobs and former Microsoft CEO Bill Gates, the PC obviously looks older, is slightly overweight, and is less conventionally attractive. The Mac character, noticeably more physically fit, is assumed to represent a very light and desirable product. Age and weight also seem to find further resonance in those ads that centralize the topic of health. In fact, as Livingstone (2011a, 219-23) has noted, the healthy-versus-sick dichotomy is among the major thematic binaries brought up in the ads. Being older and slightly overweight, the PC is also shown as more apt to develop viruses or diseases as well as to run more slowly than the Mac. Certain ads - titled "Viruses," "Trust Mac," "Biohazard Suit," "Surprise," and "Top of the Line" - obviously foreground the PC's susceptible body. In "Accident," the PC is in a wheelchair, shown in his most abject and vulnerable state. Due to his user having stepped over his "cord," the PC has broken his arms and legs. Similarly, in the spot titled "Stuffed," we face an extremely rotund PC who simply cannot function or act normally. Other ads - specifically, "Restarting," "Surgery," "Computer Cart," "Party Is Over," "Group," "Calming Teas," "Bean Counter," "V Word," "Trouble Free," "Time Traveller," "Broken Promises," "PC News," and "Teeter Tottering" - either plainly emphasize or suggest the dysfunctional state of the PC character compared to the Mac, while ads such as "Tech Support" show that the PC character is physically deficient in comparison to the bodily robust and vital Mac.

Still more ad spots put forth topics of bodily normativity and health in the more overt form of bodily fitness. While the Mac always enjoys a healthy, fit, functional, and agile body (e.g., "Out of the Box"), the PC is at times in need of a yoga trainer ("Yoga") or a personal trainer ("Trainer"), both of whom are dissatisfied with the PC's performance and confirm, to his dismay, the superiority of the Mac. In "Touché," the PC is depicted as a moronic character who is unable to cope with the Mac's superior performance and popularity, leading the PC to develop mental and moral issues, too. In "Angel/Devil," the PC is shown to be neurotic, and in both "Counsellor" and "Breakthrough" he is literally being taken to a therapist by the considerate Mac. In accordance with these ads, many others also feature instances in which the PC resorts to immoral, competitive solutions (see Nudd 2011, ad spots 18-20, 33, 35, 45, 48, 51, 52, 60).

The spots described above are not gendered in themselves; their references to the hierarchical relationship between the two characters' embodiments are rarely, if ever, obviously framed within gender relations. However, these spots develop scripts that prove necessary for other ads that follow, which explicitly compare the gender performances of the two characters. In these later ads, in which the PC and the Mac obviously represent contrasting modes of gender performativity, bodily normativity features (those mentioned above and others) serve as some significant form of capital, or lack thereof, thanks to which the Mac and the PC advance their gendered battles -

almost always over female characters. The PC character, due mainly to his normatively inferior body and, hence, lesser patriarchal capital as a man, is made the butt of a joke and presented as incapable of competing with the Mac in a “patriarchal economy” (Buchbinder 2013, 68–70); consequently, the campaign intends us to assume, the PC as a brand will be similarly inept on the computer market. The gendered comparison between the two characters is clear, for instance, in such spots as “Elimination,” “Top of the Line,” “Network,” and “Teeter Tottering.” These spots feature competition between the brands-as-characters over a female client; not surprisingly, the Mac always wins.

The spot titled “Elimination,” following the usual brief self-presentations of the Mac and the PC, introduces a conflict: the two computers-as-men are on either side of a young woman who wants to choose the better device. Behind the PC we see a long line of standing men, whom the PC describes as “the whole range of [PCs]” he has brought along “to help find the one that’s best for her.” The PC then turns to the woman, and the spot’s main dialogue launches:

PC: So, what do you want?  
 Woman: Well, I want a computer with a big screen.  
 PC [Points to his men]: OK, small screens, beat it. [Two of the men leave the line.]  
 PC [Turns to the woman]: What else?  
 Woman: Well, I want it to have a fast processor.  
 PC: OK, slow PCs, go. [We see a few other men leaving.] What else?  
 Woman: I just need something that works without crashing, or viruses, or a ton of headaches.  
 PC: Did you say no viruses, or crashes, or headaches?  
 Woman: Yeah.  
 PC [Frustrated]: Ah! [Addressing the Mac] She’s all yours.  
 Mac [To the woman]: Hi, how are you?  
 Woman: Good.  
 Mac: I’m a Mac.  
 Woman: I’m a Megan.

While the spot, on one level, advances the campaign’s regular humorous comparison between the nifty “Mac” and the ham-handed “PC” as computers/characters, on another level a gendered scene is set in which the aforementioned health-sickness binary is linked to emotional aspects of gender. This linkage Connell (2009, 111–12) deems as cathexis, that is, how one’s bodily features can affect the nature of others’ emotional investment in oneself. The woman in the ad desires a machine/man with a normally functional “body.” The PC’s body fails, and so the woman is coupled with the Mac: “She’s all yours.”

However, significant visual rhetoric is also at work in the spot. The woman is clad in casual clothes that obviously echo the style of the Mac rather than the solemn appearance of the PC; also, the men lined up behind the PC are all more or less the same age as, if not older than, the PC and wear similar suits. In this sense, the spot relates intertextually to many others in which the Mac’s appearance – as an obvious marker of his casual and leisurely approach to life – is prioritized over PC’s business-formal look (see Nudd 2011, ad spots 2, 16, 17, 19, 25). Given the assumed target audience for the campaign, which presumably includes students, one could take the appearances of the Mac and the woman as representative of contemporary, young

students. Their informal style is clearly opposed to the PC, who appears to represent the more traditional, suit-wearing academic or businessperson, probably a representative of past, and some present, generations of fathers, teachers, and businessmen. This opposition, hinting at the advertiser's preference of the Mac's appearance over the PC's, is strongly suggested in the spot titled "Pep Rally," in which the PC is turned down by a group of teenage cheerleaders who prefer the Mac over him.

Where "Elimination" revolves around a comparison of the Mac's and the PC's style and appearance, another, almost identical spot, "Top of the Line," focuses on a comparison of their masculine identities. In lieu of the long line of men in "Elimination" is one good-looking man (played by Patrick Warburton); otherwise, all narrative features - including most of the dialogue - are the same in both spots. In "Top of the Line," upon seeing the "top of the line" PC-as-man, a woman turns to the Mac and says, "Oh, cool!" When the woman specifies her need for "a really fast processor," the sexual connotation of the man's utterance - "Some say I'm too fast" - cannot be missed. However, the good-looking man is also ultimately rejected, for health issues of an immunological sort, perhaps suggesting that he is too concerned with his business affairs ("Look, lady, any PC you get's gonna have those problems") and thus unlikely to be capable of balancing his love life and career. Before leaving the woman to the Mac, the good-looking man offers her a business card, saying, "When you're ready to compromise, you call me." Given the ad's gendered aspects mentioned above, it seems to suggest that the good-looking PC-as-businessman - depicted as the idealized species of the PC-as-male genus - is supposed to embody an outmoded, if not undesirable, masculine identity for (heterosexual) female members of the ad campaign's target audience.

It is only fitting to close with an analysis of the "Better Results" spot, the gendered implications of which are quite comprehensive, particularly in terms of the complexity of gender relations noted by Connell (1987, 2005, 2009), as discussed above. The spot opens with the Mac and PC characters just meeting and expressing surprise about the fact that both had just been making home movies. Mutual prompting moves each to show the other his film. The Mac's live home movie appears first. To the PC's blatant consternation - his mouth remains agape for several seconds - the Mac's home movie turns out to be personified by a highly attractive and sexy woman (played by well-known model Gisele Bündchen), "dressed and made up as if she is going on a date" (Santa Maria and Knowles 2011, 92). As if manifesting a complete change of mind, the PC utters a defeated "bye" and is about to leave when the Mac and his "home movie" insist on seeing the PC's movie, too. The PC's hesitation makes us more eager to see his own result - which turns out to be in the form of a cross-dressing person with troubled gender expression. The person's facial features as well as much of their bodily features evoke maleness, yet they are "dressed in the same low-cut mini-dress Gisele Bündchen wears . . . [with] a long flowing wig of similar hair. He is [mostly] unshaven, however, [and] has visible chest hair and a deep voice" (Santa Maria and Knowles 2011, 92). The spot closes with the Mac's punchline: he calls the PC's "home movie" a "work in progress," which we may also take as a subtle reference to the transitioning transgender - here a male-to-female trans person - as a troubled, but also troubling, gender identity.

The spot literally summarizes the main inter- and intra-relations in a patriarchal gender order. As understood in light of Connell's (2005) gender hierarchy model, such relations, to start with, presume sexuality or sexualness (as opposed to asexuality) as well as heterosexuality. I am using asexuality not to refer to "dysfunctional or repressed sexuality" but as a separate sexual orientation or identity dimension (Cerankowski and Milks 2010, 651). Like almost all other systems, the Western gender order presumes sexualness; that is, it assumes that all humans are necessarily sexually attracted to other human beings. A growing number of studies, however, question this assumption (see Bogaert 2012). Like all of the earlier, gendered ad spots, "Better Results" also interpellates, or hails, the audience into a subject position in which asexuality is irrelevant. The ad assumes that one must have some sort of sexual desire for others; however, the desired other cannot be of the same sex. Hence, the spot presumes heteronormativity and naturalizes heterosexuality.

Moreover, the embodiments of the desired subjects, as also seen in our discussion of bodily normativity, need to meet certain gender norms before they are deemed appropriate targets for one's investment of emotional energy or cathexis (Connell 2009, 111–16). In doing so, therefore, all of the gendered "Get a Mac" spots also presume a binary sex system, any violation of which would render one accountable for their gender performance (West and Zimmerman 1987, 135). In fact, in "Better Results," it is hoped that our jeering laughter at the revelation of the PC's incarnated home movie – obviously incongruous with the Mac's embodied movie – will arise from the sheer violation of a sex dichotomy in their gender-confused body and appearance. That the PC's home movie is represented by a man in women's clothes – and that he is deemed a "work in progress" – cannot but evoke notions of transitioning transgender as well as hermaphroditism, both abject positions that transgress the taken-for-granted order and clarity of the binary sex system. Such abjection is strongly suggested by the intended ridiculousness, if not repulsiveness, of the gender-confused embodiment of the PC's home movie. Alternatively, if taken as a female – as done by Santa Maria and Knowles (2011, 92) – the PC's movie, with her strongly suggested undesirability, evokes and reinforces a "beauty myth," as promoted especially among women in patriarchal cultures (see Wolf 2002). Within a patriarchal economy, the body of the PC's female home movie would, at best, be labelled by medical discourse as displaying hirsutism. Such a socially stigmatized body would be unable to compete with Gisele Bündchen's oppositely valued body, which is an exemplary embodiment of what Connell (1987, 183–88) conceptualizes as "emphasized femininity." This exaggerated and idealized form of femininity – a form with which women struggle and that is essential to gender inequality – is defined around the overall subordination of women to men and is concerned with accommodating the interests and desires of heterosexual men (Connell 1987, 183, 187).

To return to the central theme of compared masculinities in the "Get a Mac" campaign, we should also note that the "Better Results" spot, as its title suggests, also implies that the Mac, as a man/product, would get better results than the PC – hence the spot's coaxing its audience into identifying with, or desiring, the Mac. The Mac as a man capable of producing better results is also evocative of two other spots, "Network" and "Teeter Tottering," both of which similarly stage a Mac-PC competition over female clients; in both, the Mac is suggested to be comparatively more (re)productive (or fertile) and virile.

It will be helpful prior to concluding this section, and in anticipation of a possible objection from some readers, to further clarify the concept of hegemonic masculinity as it has been applied to the Mac character. In many masculinity studies sources, hegemonic masculinity is represented by and associated with traditional forms of masculinity. Three decades ago, for instance, Connell (1987, 184–85) exemplified hegemonic masculinity via such “fantasy figures” as Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne, and Sylvester Stallone, and such “real [yet unattainable] ideals” as the former Australian Rules football player and coach Ron Barassi and the boxer Muhammad Ali. In the “Get a Mac” ad campaign, we do not have a similarly clear-cut contrast between masculinities. Instead, the campaign contrasts hierarchically two versions of masculinity that could, at first sight, be considered almost identical. It should be borne in mind that no relationship necessarily exists between hegemonic masculinities and traditional forms of being a man. In fact, Connell’s definition of the concept anticipates transformations in the content of the hegemonic masculinity in a society and culture: “Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies *the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy*, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (2005, 77; my emphasis). In other words, over time, changes are expected to occur in the hegemonic masculinity, yet in such a manner that the overall subordination of women to men who embody hegemonic masculine ideals remains intact. In line with this observation, Apple’s campaign seems to be drawing on the changing patterns of gender in contemporary Anglo-American society to establish a positive brand identity and secure the success of its publicized brand, the Mac. Compared to the character of the PC, that of the Mac is more metrosexual, probably because the target audience, presumably including educated and computer-savvy individuals, does not endorse or embody a traditional rough-and-tumble type of masculine performance (as suggested of PCs in the ads “Boxer” and “Top of the Line”) nor is likely to monolithically sanction marginalized and subordinated masculine performances. Such careful characterization in the ads, moreover, reveals the relative nature of hegemonic masculinity, too. Conceivably, although his masculine performance is preferred within the narratives of these particular ads, the Mac’s gender performance could imaginably prove abysmal in certain other campaigns, such as one centering on the effectiveness of bodybuilding supplements as means of vitalizing male athletes’ bodies.

### **Commercial Advertising, Hegemony, and Resistance: Questions to Ponder**

As we saw, in the ads, it is only hegemonic gender norms, and not those associated with subordinated gendered identities, that contain enough rhetorical and persuasive power to promote the desired brand over its competitor. Indeed, the non-hegemonic norms are deemed worthy of ridicule. As James Herrick puts it, “The ‘privileging’ of some voices or points of view over others means that they are awarded preference or superiority in the persuasive transactions that shape public beliefs and attitudes” (2008, 20). In other words, the creators of the Apple campaign would want to subscribe to hegemonic notions of gender in their society because that is where they would expect to find significant cultural capital and value. For them, non-hegemonic articulations of gender would lack the cultural value needed to attract a wider audience, given that advertising’s main aim is to appeal to the majority of its target audience members in order to enhance benefit. This observation, as exculpatory of the

advertising industry as it might seem, encourages at least two promising research questions.

First, it can lead us to an important inquiry about gender humor and its relation to hegemony and resistance. The fact that the “Get a Mac” campaign finds rhetorical power in ridiculing non-dominant cultural notions confirms Christopher Wilson’s (1979, 230) remark that ridicule is the prerogative of the powerful, not a tool at the disposal of the powerless. It looks promising to further examine Wilson’s observation by investigating the empirical effects of the type of humor that Joanne Gilbert calls “marginal” (2004, 172) – that is, humor “which attacks the dominant culture” – or, in specific reference to gender, that which Rebecca Krefting deems and debates as “charged humor” (2014, 2) – that is, humor that is intentionally produced to challenge social inequality and cultural exclusion. Examples of such “charged” humor include feminist humor (see Bing 2004) and certain in-group lesbian humor (see Bing and Heller 2003).

Moreover, the observation about the greater rhetorical power of hegemonic gender norms brings us to an important, and more general, inquiry about the relation between commercial advertising, as an instance of the production and dissemination of popular-culture texts, on one hand, and hegemony and resistance on the other: Can commercial advertising – and, by extension, popular culture—ever effectively resist hegemony? In a chapter on gender and advertising in her book *Controversies in Contemporary Advertising*, Kim Sheehan provides a critical contemplation of the advertising industry’s treatment and representation of gender. She ends the chapter on an advice-giving note to advertisers, inviting them to be more responsible toward issues of gender inequality when they encounter gender stereotypes in their work (2004, 111–13). Regarding such stereotypes, and aiming to persuade advertisers, Sheehan draws on “research [that] has shown that realistic portrayals can have positive results for advertisers and that certain types of imagery, including objectification of women, cause negative responses from consumers” (111). It remains unexplained in her text, however, why mainstream advertising, as attested to by her own chapter, seems reluctant to take such advice. She offers another piece of implied advice that also reveals a similar tension. Asking advertisers to “rethink [their] ideals of beauty,” Sheehan remarks that “the overwhelming majority of respondents to a *Psychology Today* study wanted models in magazines to represent [... a] natural range of body shapes” (112). Interestingly, however, Sheehan notes that while the “majority of women in this study said they were willing to buy magazines featuring heavier models [...], most believe that clothes look better on thin models” (112, my emphasis). This apparent tension, which may be partly responsible for the prevalent resistance by the advertising industry to welcoming fully gender-democratic strategies and techniques in creating ads, should also be explored by scholars.

When companies draw on gender humor as a rhetorical strategy in their ads, they generally do not want to risk losing sales by investing in or endorsing culturally inferior or abject notions of gender and sexuality. Therefore, while we may expect advertisers to develop more responsible habits in their treatment of gender, we should not forget that they would likely be more motivated to do so if they could expect prospects of increased sale. Touching on a similar topic in an article on hypermasculinity in magazine advertisements, Megan Vokey, Bruce Tefft, and Chris Tysiaczny conclude by conjecturing that “perhaps the most effective influence on advertisers would be consumers declining to purchase products” (2013, 573)

advertised in a way that perpetuates non-gender-democratic relations. This advice is valuable for any inquiries into the responsibility of the advertising industry towards gender equality, not because it is a completely plausible recommendation but because it is attentive to the fact that commercial advertising is, above all, about making a profit.

## Conclusion

This article was a foray into the relationship between gender hegemony and commercial advertising that features gender humor; more specifically, it tackled the strategic use of ridicule in such advertising. Focusing on the Apple Incorporation's renowned "Get a Mac" campaign, I argued that many ad spots in the campaign tapped into hegemonic notions of gender, particularly masculinity, within contemporary Anglo-American society and culture to augment the persuasive aspect of the campaign's manifest message: that is, that Macintosh computers are preferable to those manufactured by Microsoft. These hegemonic notions – all of which assume sexualness, as opposed to asexuality, which is left out as an option – in particular include a binary sex system that necessarily gives way to heteronormativity, as well as a hierarchical relationship among masculinities; in this hierarchical relationship, one form of being a man dominates other forms while at the same time reproducing a subservient, emphasized form of femininity. Non-hegemonic masculinities are marked by, among other things, their violation of culturally dominant masculine ideals. One such ideal – as discussed in terms of the theme of health in many of the "Get a Mac" ads – concerns bodily normativity, which includes such topics as ageing, illness/disability, fatness, and body aesthetics. By advancing an anthropomorphic comparison between the Mac and the PC as two men with hierarchical (masculine) performances, the campaign privileges one over the other. In doing so, the ads subscribe to and reproduce the culturally privileged notions of gender on which they draw.

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