

Subversive Masculinity in Children's Animation: *Hey Arnold*, *Avatar: The Last
Airbender* and *The Loud House*

by

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Abstract

Many existing studies of gender and gender representation in children's animated media focus on women. These studies tend to focus on breaking down and analyzing the strict binaries of the representation of female characters. Studies of masculinity are often limited to a discussion of toxic male behaviors, with masculinity relegated to a point of contention instead of a basis of study. Using hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical framework, this thesis examines the representation of masculinity in three characters in children's animated media—Arnold from *Hey Arnold*, Aang from *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and Lincoln from *The Loud House*. Each of these characters subverts hegemonic or toxic masculinity. This thesis examines how each character does so. Using frame theory, the thesis will examine both what is said and what is not said within each character's narrative. This thesis also analyzes what is seen within the narrative of the series that makes the characters' depictions of masculinity subversive or not, including what the characters *don't* do as well as what they do.

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Introduction

Two young boys sit atop a broken-down amusement park ride. From this vantage point, they can see the entrance to the ride where their classmates look up at the broken attraction and most of the park. The broken attraction makes it easy for the boys to see the entirety of the unnamed inner-city. Just below the ride, they can see a group beginning to form around their classmates. While both boys appear distressed, neither shows overt signs of fear. One of them points out a cherry picker being wheeled toward them with a fireman, who introduces himself as “Lucky”, comes up to try and rescue the boys. Before he can reach them, however, the machine breaks down, stopping the man just out of reach of the boys. While the man begins to cry, one boy consoles him through singing while the other finds a rope to bring the man up. The singing boy doubts if they’ll be able to keep themselves safe, let alone save the fireman. The boy with the rope appeals to his emotions and assures him that they’ll all be ok. They work together to get the fireman off the cherry picker and into the coaster’s seat.

In another scene, two boys and a girl wait by the shore of a river. One boy is smaller than both of his friends. The smaller one sits near the shore as he fiddles with string in his hands. The other male struggles with trying to catch a fish without his fishing line, while the girl looks over the water, occasionally looking back at the smaller boy. He jumps up with an exclamation and runs toward the girl. He holds up a hand-made necklace and hands it to the girl. The other boy saunters up to them and chastises him for working on jewelry when they need to plan for a war. The smaller boy shrugs and retorts with a simple, “Why can’t I do both?”

The last scene shows a young boy holding a flyer advertising a V.I.P ticket to a concert in his suburban home. Through the day, his ten sisters come to him to get advice on how to convince their parents to let them borrow money. The young boy can let each girl know what the best way for her to get what she wants. However, once he tries to and get his parents to buy the V.I.P tickets they let him know that they don't have the money for it. The boy knows that he gave advice to his own detriment but is unwilling to take from his sisters. Instead, he retreats to his room to solemnly deal with his emotions. He can hear music outside his window and sees that his sisters have all come together to make a song about how he is the best brother. He murmurs that his sisters' performance was better than any other concert that he could have gone to.

All three of these scenes depict actions from the main characters of different Nickelodeon series. The first scene comes from the 1990s series *Hey Arnold*. This series follows the adventures of the titular character and his life as a young boy in an urban, inner-city neighborhood. The series was created by Craig Bartlett in October of 1996. Arnold is the character who was able to console his friend and get the rope to pull the fireman up. Throughout the series, Arnold appeals to the emotions of his peers while also using intuition to solve their problems. The second scene is from *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. This series was created by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko in February of 2005. This series follows the journey of the main character, Aang and his group of friends as he simultaneously learns how to be the Avatar and bring an end to the 100-year that was instigated by the Fire Nation. The third scene was from a series called *The Loud House*. This series was created by Chris Savino in May of 2016. The main protagonist is Lincoln Loud, a kind-hearted, eleven-year-old boy. The series follows the

hijinks that he gets into with his ten sisters. With the lack of a central antagonist, the adversity that Lincoln faces stems from his interpersonal connection with his family and friends. In the scene, Lincoln is the young boy that gave advice to his sisters even though it was to his detriment.

Clearly, these shows differ. Each character is brought up in a completely different environment, and the characters' situations vary. However, there is one characteristic that these scenes highlight. The characters display a behavior or action that is subversive to hegemonic masculinity and is a concept that determines what is culturally considered to be masculine. This theory was created by R. W Connell who, along with James W. Messerschmidt, states that "hegemonic masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice... hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense... it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man," (p. 832). This understanding of this gender dynamic shows that masculinity and its portrayals have patterns, characteristics and behaviors that would make them gender norms. These include assertiveness, aggression, emotional distance, a position of authority and physical strength. Analice Pillar made note of these archetypes when she states that "... the hegemonic model of man related to force, brutality, rationality..." (p. 74). In the first scene, Arnold used his intellect while simultaneously appealing to the emotions of those around him. In the second scene, Aang is quite overt in his removal from the typical portrayals of masculinity. He is unabashed in his tendency to feed into a more feminine behavior. In the third scene, as opposed to being forceful to get what he wanted, Lincoln chose to put his sister's needs over his own. He is unwilling to assert himself and is even emotionally expressive with his sisters' attempt to remedy the

situation. Each of these characters displays behaviors and attitudes that subvert the gender norms and expectations set by hegemonic masculinity.

As noted by R. W. Connell, hegemonic masculinity is a concept that, "... presumes the subordination of non-hegemonic masculinities... cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and the marginalization or de-legitimization of alternatives are widely documented features of socially dominant masculinities" (p. 846). This is indicative of the pervasiveness of this concept within society and how it impacts the depiction of masculinity in media. As noted, by Mary Jiang Bresnahan and her co-authors, "... attitudes about gender are often reinforced by stereotypical depictions of gender in the media" (p. 209). This is also noted as Jobia Keys states that the most represented group in children's cartoons are white males (p. 354).

Arnold, Aang and Lincoln are examples of characters that represent subversive masculinity. All three of the characters' pattern of behavior tends to subvert the expected characteristic of hegemonic masculinity. The characters upbringing and the environments that they interact with impact how that subversive representation came about. The way the shows' narratives treat subversive masculinity is indicative of how "normal" subversions are. This is seen in how the other characters react to Arnold, Aang and Lincoln.

This thesis breaks down the analysis into three main categories. The first category is a section called "what makes a man." This section entails an analysis of the characters in each series that adheres to hegemonic masculinity. An analysis of these characters is a juxtaposition to Arnold, Aang and Lincoln's subversive representation of masculinity. The next section is called "the man and the camera." As will be further explained in the

theoretical framework section, this section uses Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory to analyze how Arnold, Aang and Lincoln are presented to the camera. The next section is called "hegemonic characteristics." These characteristics are further separated based on what was pulled from the research surrounding hegemonic masculinity. These characteristics are assertiveness and aggression, position of authority, emotional dismissiveness and physical strength. These characteristics are used to analyze the pattern of behavior of Arnold, Aang and Lincoln. The final section used in the analysis is called "environments and masculinity." This section studies how the environments that Arnold, Aang and Lincoln interacted with represent gender norms and how that, in turn, impacted their representation of masculinity.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis focuses on the subversive representation of masculinity in *Hey Arnold*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *The Loud House* using the theoretical lens of R. W. Connell's hegemonic masculinity. Framing theory, as understood by Robert Entman and Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory, also aid in examining the representation of subversive masculinity. Frame theory makes it possible to analyze what is being normalized within the narrative of the three shows and how subversive that is within the context of hegemonic masculinity. While male gaze theory is used to examine the representation of women in cinema, it is also indicative of how men are expected to be represented. This is especially poignant in discussing the representation of subversive masculinity. In this section, I will explain each of these theories as it pertains to analysis of these shows.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Antonio Gramsci's cultural theory, hegemony, is necessary for understanding hegemonic masculinity and how normative it is in gender representation. Hegemony is the foundation for societal norms. Gramsci presents two main arguments, each focusing on class. The first one is the difference between the ruling class and the lower class and what it is that makes these separate classes. Regarding the ruling class, Gramsci states that it is "the fundamental historical unity, concretely, results from the organic relations between State or political society and 'civil society'" and as for the lower class, he refers to them as the subaltern class and states that they "are not unified and cannot unite" (p. 34). With this social power imbalance between the two groups, Gramsci notes that it is often the class that has social and political backing that becomes the determinant of dominant ideologies. He describes ideologies as "the science of ideas" (p. 35). Within the context of this thesis, hegemony examines what representation of gender is upheld, as is the case with Connell's theory.

Connell uses her theory to examine men's pervasive dominance, typically over women and indicates a pattern of behavior that is normative for men who are hegemonically masculine. Connell notes that "hegemonic masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice... that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" and further states that "hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative." Connell noted that the original application for this concept was "to explore relations to the curriculum and the difficulties in gender-neutral pedagogy." This statement showed that she created hegemonic masculinity to use within feminist theory. It spoke to the norms

that was set on both genders, though specifying the more toxic norms set on men in media. Connell further states that “the concept was also employed in studying media representations of men” (p. 832-833). Given that this thesis will analyze the representation of males in three different animated media, this concept is most certainly relevant.

Hegemonic masculinity has been criticized for its strict binaries, however, this too has been addressed by Connell. In her article with James Messerschmidt, they state that “... ambiguity in gender processes may be important to recognize as a mechanism of hegemony” (p.838). These binaries show how this representation of masculinity has persisted.

Framing Theory

This theory is used to examine the significance of what is shown from Arnold, Aang and Lincoln and how it reinforces the norms of hegemonic masculinity. Robert Entman states “framing essentially involves *selection* and *salience*. To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/ or treatment recommendation for the item described,*” further stating that “the *text* contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence if certain key words, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (p. 52, italics in original). David Tewksbury states that “a frame is what unifies information into a package that can influence audiences... if audiences already have the frame available to them, the mere presentation of a frame in a new story can exert an effect” (p. 19).

Framing theory is significant to this thesis because it is an example of the pervasiveness of hegemonic masculinity and how this framework is prevalent in animated males, thus making subversion a necessary concept to study. This is further noted when Entman states that “the concept of framing provides an operational definition for the notion of *dominant meaning*... from a framing perspective, dominant meaning consists of the problem, casual, evaluative, and treatment interpretations with the highest probability of being noticed, processes, and accepted by most people” (p. 56). While frame theory is often applied to analyze non-fiction news media, the concept is still relevant for analyzing masculinity. Using this theory, I will examine what frames are being created by the characters and within the narrative of the shows and analyze what the framework is saying about subversive masculinity. This thesis uses the pattern of behavior expected and normalized within hegemonic masculinity as a framing device to determine how subversive Arnold, Aang and Lincoln are.

Male Gaze Theory

Although this thesis focuses on masculinity, there is still a need for a feminist lens to contrast with, which I will use to examine how the male characters are displayed within the series. This thesis compares the way Mulvey shows how women are seen in cinema and how the male characters are seen within their respective series. The concept of the male gaze used with male characters that display subversive masculinity will show the contrast between this gaze set on a hegemonically masculine character. This concept is a feminist theory as it is used to address, analyze, and study the role of women in cinema. Although there is no physical camera in animated media, the concept of the lens remains. The goal is to see how the characters are framed within the lens of the male

gaze. Are the males that break from masculinity viewed through the same lens as women? The main reason that this theoretical framework will be used in the analysis of the chosen animated series is to answer this question.

In using a Freudian, psychoanalytic framework, Mulvey created the concept of the “male gaze.” Mulvey stated that “the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form” (p. 267). Due to the pervasive nature of the patriarchy these ideals are permeated throughout various media. In a sense, media was framed in a manner that would adhere to the hegemonic ideology regarding gender. This, often, was to the benefit of men. This referred to both the male characters in media and the male audience. Men, according to the male gaze, can live out their fantasy through the lens projected by the film maker, who was also often men. The women in film were often framed as sexual objects. Mulvey stated that “the determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly” (p. 270). Mulvey also stated that the “erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object” (p. 269).

Literature Review

This thesis analyzes the subversive masculinity of three characters from three different animated television series and builds on a considerable body of work on gender that can be divided into multiple categories. Those categories are the depiction of gender on Nickelodeon, masculine representation in popular culture and gender in children’s media.

The Depiction of Gender on Nickelodeon

The research on gender previously done on this network is indicative of the likelihood of subversive gender representation in *Hey Arnold*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *The*

Loud House. There were articles that focused on Nickelodeon as a network and how gender was portrayed in their various series. Beth Hentges and Kim Case's study found that "from its inception, Nickelodeon was designed to appeal to both boys and girls with an explicitly gender-neutral tone" (p. 320). In their methodology, they explain that the series selected would be both animated and live-action and excluded shows that were designated for an early childhood audience. They also found that "Nickelodeon... typically fell between Cartoon Network and Disney Channel in gendered behaviors. This finding supports the show's producers' efforts to appeal to both males and females" (p. 328). Catherine Luther and Robert Legg also studied various cartoons from some of the same networks, Nickelodeon included. They focused their study on the differences in the gendered representation of aggression. They separate acts of physical and social aggression, stating that social aggression "includes exclusion of individuals, gossiping, and social manipulation" (p. 192). They found that "among aggressive acts in Nickelodeon's cartoons... 77.5 percent were physical, and 22.5 percent were social" (p. 198). Within these studies, the only series that was mentioned that this thesis will also analyze was *Hey Arnold*. Even so, it is indicative of the network's consistent trend to subvert the expectations of gender norms.

Analice Pillar focused on the portrayal of masculinity in three episodes of *SpongeBob SquarePants*: "Grandma's Kiss", "The Fry Cook Games" and "Pranks a Lot." Pillar's focus was constructed through a Brazilian lens, using a survey of what type of series appealed more to children in Brazil. Pillar noted the way in which colors and actions that were traditionally feminine were often levied at the main character and his best friend. Another popular show that aired on Nickelodeon was *Dora the Explorer*, a

series aimed at a younger demographic. Keys analyzed this series in tandem with Disney's *Doc McStuffins*. Keys stated that her study "draws upon intersectionality, a paradigm that considers gender, race, and class as well as other signifiers of marginalization and exclusion 'as simultaneous forces'" (p. 356). Keys argues that characters like Dora and Doc are indicative of a relative break from hegemonic gender, race, and class norms. In her analysis of the shows, Keys makes note of the fact that while both characters are minorities, they tend to have more position of power and authority. The characters also both seem to be in a higher class, with Doc clearly being in the upper middle-class bracket. Keys does note that there is still some adherence, however. The use of class and race alongside the representation of gender is significant for *Avatar: The Last Airbender* since this show is set in a culture that is completely different than *Hey Arnold* or *The Loud House*. As such, the difference in culture, especially within the different environments of the series is indicative of how they impact Aang's representation of masculinity.

Although there hasn't been an abundance of research on any of the shows that this thesis will analyze, there were three that focused specifically on *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. In Megan Jackson's senior thesis, there was a focus specifically on gender and this series. Jackson states that her study "examines the depiction of gender stereotypical behavioral traits of female and male characters in the series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005) and how that depiction reflects third-wave feminist theory" (p. 1). In explaining the relationship of gender and its representations, Jackson states that is "springs from one fundamental dichotomy--man/ woman--often deemed the *gender binary*, in which man is the norm and woman is the other. In this binary, man symbolizes all that is active,

masculine” (p. 5). Jackson argues that “the series debunks the gender dichotomy and upholds third-wave feminisms concept of gender fluidity by depicting *gender bending* characters of both sexes who do not present polarized depictions of gender in accordance to traditional gender stereotypes” (p. 7). Jackson found that that the series “provides a broad variety of female representations in support of third-wave feminist theory and debunks the gender binary” (p. 16). In another article, Fulya Icoz studies the series through the concept of resistance and how it is presented in the series. While this study does not focus on gender, it does show how masculine dominance plays a role in the way that resistance occurred. An example can be seen in Icoz’s explanation of the Fire Lord’s dominance in the series. Icoz differentiates Aang and the Firelord when he states that “Aang’s resistance is autonomous and spontaneous-based on his impulses, the Firelord’s discipline on the other hand is mechanical and authoritarian” (p. 117). The final article that specifically analyzes *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, is written by Mark Taylor. Like Icoz, Taylor does not focus on gender and instead focuses on the cultural impact that the West has on the representation of the East. Taylor states that “a recurring stereotype in the U.S.-American media, is the ‘Oriental Monk,’ a male Asian figure depicted variously as embodying transformative wisdom” (p. 737). Taylor notes that Aang is one of the few characters in Western fiction that is a Monk who is naïve (p. 742).

Masculine Representation in Popular Culture

Shumaila Ahmed and Juliana Wahab state that “70.4% of male characters were portrayed as strong and powerful in most of the animated cartoons” (p. 49). As noted earlier, a characteristic of hegemonic masculinity is power. Ahmed and Wahab showed in their study that, for the selected Cartoon Network shows, masculinity was framed as.

They further state that “male characters are socialized to be more strong, active and aggressive” (p. 52). Kaysee Baker and Arthur Raney also make note of this when they analyze gender-roles and their stereotypes in superhero series. They state that “authors found that males were portrayed as more verbally and physically aggressive, were more frequently rewarded, showed more ingenuity, asked and answered more questions, emphasized more tasks, laughed, insulted, and threatened others more frequently” (p. 27). Bresnahan et al. also made note of the masculine portrayal of characters, specifically in anime and cartoons. They state that “studies identified the stereotypical male character in animation as someone who is independent, active, noisy, muscular, tenacious, dominant, dynamic, competent, and concerned about control” (p. 208). Though this frame is considered a stereotype, it is still a prevalent framework when portraying masculinity. They further state that “both sexes tend to internalize such stereotypes about gender” (p. 209). In displaying the societal influence of masculine framework, Debbie Ging states that “mediated fictions are also a highly responsive and expedient source of information with regard to how society is thinking and talking about recent changes to the ‘gender-scape’” (p. 30). This indicates the dichotomy between society and masculinity in popular culture. They both influence and instill the ideologies. Ging further states that “widespread acceptance of the gendering of media as normal, as well as in their lack of awareness of the persistence of a dominant male gaze in popular culture” (p. 37).

In some work, masculinity is analyzed tandem with femininity. Femininity in this context refrains from female characters having autonomy over themselves or in their actions. In this case, masculinity would be framed as male characters that have autonomy. Jack Glascock notes that “while the progression of female characterizations on television

has been noted, the pendulum may have swung the other way for male depictions. Frequently criticized have been the made-for-television movies featuring males as abusive psychopaths” (p. 659). This rigid framing that Glascock makes note of can be due, in part, to the often-rigid characteristics that are assigned to hegemonic masculinity. The juxtaposition of feminine and masculine framework is also noted by Baker and Raney. They state that “when females are featured, they typically were portrayed in a stereotypical way... males tended to be portrayed as more aggressive and constructive... males were shown to being rewarded for their behavior more often than females” (p. 26). The need to understand femininity in tandem with masculinity also involves the dichotomy between masculinity and sexuality. Elizabeth Marshall and Ozlem Sensoy explore the dichotomy between gender and sexuality in their article analyzing *Shrek 2*. They state that “lessons about heterosexual masculinity *and* femininity are constantly being interjected in the film, for instance, pedagogies that seek to fiercely police performances of heterosexual masculinity” (p. 156). They make note of the rigidity of these frameworks in analyzing the subversive portrayal of Princess Fiona’s femininity. They state that “each show of power reiterates male/ female binaries that in a simple ‘role reversal’ still sustain a framework of normative gender relations” (p. 159).

Authors have also made note of the more negative aspect that comes with masculine framework, be it an adherence or subversion. In their article that studied gender in Disney villains, Meredith Li-Vollmer and Mark LaPointe quote Vito Russo’s “The Celluloid Closet” and state that “... nobody likes a sissy... there is something about a man who acts like a woman that people find fundamentally distasteful” (p. 89). This is an example of subversive masculinity in popular culture is framed in a less respected

manner and can also tie into the way in which masculinity is treated by the other characters in popular culture. In analyzing a scene from the Nickelodeon series *SpongeBob Square Pants*, Pillar states "... had the whistle been addressed to female characters it would not be unfamiliar, but it being aimed at male characters refers to a situation in which they would be arousing the attention of other men" (p. 74). The subversive framing of masculinity, in this scene, stems from the way that other male characters are addressing the titular character's masculinity. Subversive framework for masculinity isn't always displayed negatively. Emma Jane states that in *Adventure Time* "these visions of male characters enjoying the quotidian offered by the domestic sphere are not played for laughs but are simply presented as normal parts of the daily lives of heroes and villains" (p. 240). In this series, the subversive framework of masculinity in these characters is an extension of their personalities and isn't viewed as an affront in the narrative of this series.

Gender in Children's Media

Elizabeth Marshall states that "... a post cultural lens allows me to theorize girlhood as a socially constituted category and invites a reading of 'the girl' in children's literature as a less static figure than as a contested character" (p. 259). Marshall makes note of the fact that hegemonic portrayals of gender in children's literature stems from the parameters set by adults. Marshall states that "The arsenal of children's literature continues to be guided by adult preoccupations about appropriate material for young minds and docile bodies," (p. 262). This plays into the significance of culture regarding gender. Marshall further states that "the representation of the girl within this tale, then, exists as a historically and culturally bound textual construction that relies on certain

ways of speaking and thinking about the girl within a particular cultural moment and tradition” (p. 269). This is indicative of the significance of the expected cultural dominance of hegemonic masculinity studied in this thesis.

This cultural understanding of gender in children’s media is also made note of by Ahmed and Wahab in their analysis of various cartoons from Cartoon Network. They state that “the unbalanced and stereotypical representation of gender roles in animated cartoons, arguable play an important part in modeling gendered behavior in children,” (p. 46). They further state that “male and female characters are portrayed in the animated cartoon more often based on their physical appearance. Due to the reason of male-dominancy, men are considered more powerful and strong, not only physically but also mentally,” (p. 50). In this regard, the way that gender is handled impacts the way that masculinity is then framed. In their article analyzing gender in Disney villains, Li-Vollmer and LaPointe make note of what the portrayal of gender can do on a child’s perception of societal norms (p. 93). Jane states that “it would be beneficial for children’s film and television entertainment to contain more--and also *more diverse*--female characters” (p. 231; italicized in original). Having more entertainment that is less rigid in its portrayal of gender would make it possible for children to have a better grasp on non-hegemonic portrayals of masculinity. This is also noted by Nancy Taber and Vera Woloshyn when they state that “stories written for children have been recognized for their power to reproduce societal norms... proper femininities and masculinities are constructed, challenged, and reinforced in literature.” They further state that “... children do ‘rely heavily on traditional normative structures to make sense of the world, and they often accept gendered expectations as truth’” (pp. 227-228).

Some of the authors also made note of the difference in the number of male or female characters in the media that they were studying. In an article studying gender and superheroes, Baker and Raney state that “males outnumbered females nearly two to one. Of the 70 characters coded 65.7% were male superheroes” (p. 31). They further state that “females were most often portrayed with an average body size, whereas males were portrayed as muscular... females were portrayed as significantly more emotional than their male counterparts... male superheroes portrayed as tougher, and females as more superficial,” (p. 33). This study showed that male characters were not only more present in this medium but also held a more dominant or authoritative position and showed the gap between the representation of men and women. This representation, however, relegates behaviors and positions to a gender that is not necessarily all encompassing. Keys states that “today, in the United States, images in animated children’s cartoons do not accurately represent growing ethnic and gender diversity in this country... yet most of the leading children’s animated characters are white males” (p. 355). This relegated and stereotypical portrayal of the presence of gender in children’s media is indicative of the way that masculinity would be portrayed. Keys makes note of the lack of intersectionality when portraying the characters. Keys states that “the show does not address the social ‘otherness’ of her race or gender, which could potentially lead to important discussion between parents and their children” (Keys, pp. 363). This shows that series like *Doc McStuffins* and *Dora* don’t fully address the gender roles set on characters, even when they try to subvert them. This is also noted in Elizabeth Marshall and Ozlem Sensoy’s analysis of the film *Shrek 2*. They state that the film “replaces weak princesses with strong girls to challenge traditional lessons about femininity. This

strategy serves to give the appearance of feminism while ultimately reinforcing normative ideas about heterosexual girlhood,” (p. 153). This is another example of how the rigid portrayals of gender have made their subversions come across as lackluster. In analyzing one of Fiona’s fight scenes, they state that “these scenes ultimately uphold discourses of traditional heterosexual femininity since Fiona’s tough girl antics are not in her own independent self-interest, but in her desire to re-establish her position as Shrek’s beloved,” (p. 158).

Donna Chu and Bryce McIntyre also make note of the significance of gender stereotypes and what it means for them to be considered hegemonic when they state that “people’s view of gender roles is largely the product of social forces, and one of the most salient of these is in television” (p. 206). They further state that “when the beliefs about sex roles are too rigid and resist change, they become sex role stereotypes” (p. 207). The concept of hegemony plays a role in what they say in these two quotes. When there is little room for a subversive portrayal of gender, this makes the likelihood of gender portrayals to be delegated to using simple stereotypes. In following the concept of gender stereotypes Mary Bresnahan, Yasuhiro Inoue and Naomi Kagawa analyze the perception of these stereotypes when Americans view Japanese anime. In explaining the concept of hegemony in tandem with gender portrayal, they state that “sex stereotypes are defined as the uncritical attribution to others of behavioral traits and characteristics typically associated with masculinity and femininity” (p. 207). In analyzing the cultural aspect of hegemony, Ging studied masculinity for Irish youth. Ging makes note of the rise of a subculture that was a form of backlash against subverting gender stereotypes. This culture is called “Lad Culture” (p. 41) and often tends to revel in complicity to

hegemonic masculinity while ridiculing those against them. This concept plays a role in this paper because the idea of an aversion to subversive gender portrayals plays a role in the way that cartoons will portray gender as well. The final article that will be used to explain the concept of hegemony is Ahmed and Wahab's analysis on gender in Cartoon Network. They make note of the fact that a lot of the cartoons that are displayed on this network are "male-character-oriented" (p. 48). This is significant because it shows that hegemony doesn't just affect the portrayal of male characters, but the amount of them in a given series as well.

In the article detailing the characteristics of the young characters, Doc McGuffin and Dora, Keys states that "...in some ways, both challenge and reflect traditional gender, class, and racial stereotypes. They embody characteristics that are typically attributed to white, male characters--they are leaders, heroic, inquisitive, clever and adventurous" (p. 365). In the article, Keys had shown how Doc portrayed characteristics that fit with being a girl in that she wore several pink accessories. However, this was in tandem with the traits noted earlier, and the fact that she goes by "Doc" instead of her name. This also highlighted in her interest in the STEM careers as a young black girl. This dichotomy shows how subversive hegemonic norms are also put on young characters in animation. This pertains to hegemonic masculinity because it shows what is considered normal for male characters. It's hegemonically expected for male characters to be STEM focused, heroic and straightforward, even at a young age. Chu and McIntyre further illustrate that point when they state that "male and female members of a society are expected to behave in certain ways at different ages" (p. 206). Taber and Woloshyn analyzed the gendered portrayal of themes in various cartoon novels. In their analysis,

they state that "... men and boys are normatively expected to be tough males with no trace of femininity (e. g in *Holes*)" (p. 28). This statement shows both one hegemonic characteristic for men as well as how that extends through several age groups.

Research Question

This analysis focuses on the juxtaposition of the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity and the presentation of subversive masculinity in Arnold from *Hey Arnold*, Aang from *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and Lincoln Loud from *The Loud House*. In this thesis, analysis of subversive masculinity stems from observing how the pattern of behavior the main character exhibits subvert the expected behaviors of hegemonic masculinity.

This thesis seeks to answer several questions: how is masculinity framed for the male leads of each animated series? What is shown in the series to indicate that the character's representation of masculinity is subversive? This question entails an analysis that delves into how the shows handle adherences to and subversions of hegemonic masculinity within the narrative of the series.

This thesis seeks to answer how the characters' environments impact their depiction of masculinity: what about it makes it subversive? Framing theory will be the means to answer this question. The way that characters talk, act and are referred to will be analyzed through the lens of hegemonic masculinity. How do the other characters of each series react to subversions of hegemonic gender norms? Understanding how the other characters react will help in further analyzing how normative, or abnormal, a subversion of hegemonic masculinity is. Are the males viewed in the same or similar way to the females? How is the framing of the narrative different through the lens of the male

characters? Do they “gaze” at women in the same way that is expected and depicted through Mulvey’s analysis of cinema?

Methodology

This thesis will analyze the subversive masculinity in three animated series from Nickelodeon: *Hey Arnold*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *The Loud House*. Analyzing subversive masculinity will be a major focus of this thesis and will be studied through the framework of masculinity within the narratives of each series. An analysis on this topic also entails studying adherences and subversions of hegemonic masculinity. Masculinity will be assertiveness, aggression, a position of authority, emotionally dismissive and physically strong. For an action or behavior to be considered as subversive, they would need to be the opposite of the behaviors and actions listed above. This thesis will also study these shows through the lens of the male gaze. As noted in the theoretical framework section, this thesis will study how the male characters are presented by the camera. It will indicate how similarly, or differently, these characters are treated by the camera in comparison to their female counterparts.

This thesis uses Hall’s “preliminary soak” to analyze each theory. Hall describes a “process of soaking oneself to define the categories and build a code (based on an intuitive sense of where the main clusters occur)” (p.15). This process will determine the pattern of norms for the characters’ behaviors and portrayals of subversive masculinity. This study uses the understanding of hegemonic masculinity developed through the research in the literature review. Hegemonic masculinity within these three series will be studied by analyzing the subversions and adherences to hegemonic masculinity. This entails analyzing what pattern of behavior from the characters is an adherence and how it

is framed within the narrative and in juxtaposition to the main male character of their respective show. The next method of study is in the environment. Studying the environment that the characters interact with will highlight the intersection between their upbringing and their representation and expectation of gender. The final method of study is to analyze Arnold, Aang and Lincoln through the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. The four specific characteristics studied are assertiveness and aggression, position of authority, emotional dismissiveness and physical strength. This will entail analyzing whether the characters' pattern of behavior was subversive to hegemonic masculinity within the mentioned categories and how said behavior was treated by the other characters and within the narrative.

Findings

As stated earlier in this thesis, the aim of this study is to analyze the subversive representation of masculinity in Arnold from *Hey Arnold*, Aang from *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and Lincoln Loud from *The Loud House*. This study uses the understanding of hegemonic masculinity developed through the research in the literature review.

What Makes a Man?

There are several standards for gender that fit into the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which includes male characters that fit these norms. Some such characters are Bob Pataki, Wolfgang, Frankie G, Torvald and Harold, all of which are characters that Arnold encounters. Throughout the series, each of these characters are framed as the more typical hegemonic male, especially in comparison to Arnold. The roles that the other characters play is often a foil to how subversive some of Arnold's actions are within the series. In order to develop a framework for Arnold to be studied against, his

other male peers and their representation of masculinity are necessary to study.

Regarding masculine framework, it takes more than a male character simply taking on what would normally be a woman's role to be considered subversive, however. Bob Pataki, Torvald, Harold and Wolfgang are characters that tend to consistently adhere to hegemonic masculinity. When in scenes with Arnold, their behaviors differ from how Arnold would act. This is seen explicitly for Bob in "Helga vs. Big Patty" (Season 3, Episode, 48). In this episode, two of Arnold's classmates; Helga and Big Patty get into an altercation. Through a series of miscommunication and running into the girl while she is at the tail-end of an insult, Big Patty believes that Helga is picking a fight with her. In a panic, given the other girl's far more imposing stature, Helga goes to her father for advice. Bob halfheartedly reads from a journal that says that the two should work on communicating how they feel instead of fighting and that listening to one another is also key. Ironically enough, he only gave Helga a moment of attention to focus instead on a fight on his television. While Bob is far removed from the beliefs of the journal, Arnold's advice falls in line with it. His advice is the same as the journal, suggesting that she talk to Big Patty. The difference in their responses is indicative of Arnold's subversive masculinity. In this instance, Arnold appears to be the opposite of Bob, a male that adheres to hegemonic masculinity. As noted earlier, there is also significance in Arnold's other male peers. While the ones mentioned previously adhere to hegemonic masculinity, there are others whose behaviors don't align with hegemonic masculinity. Arnold's other male peers adhere to hegemonic masculinity by showing how normative the behaviors are. This is seen in the way that his male peers will react in certain situations. Throughout the series, there were moments that Gerald, Arnold's best friend, would suggest a means

to solve a problem that adhered to the expectations of hegemonic masculinity. Gerald treats this manner of problem solving as the better solution. In “Girl Trouble” (Season 3, Episode 19), Gerald suggest that Arnold retaliates against Helga’s berating in a way that adheres to hegemonic masculinity. While Gerald is rather like Arnold in his physique and in his behaviors; the behaviors that he suggests tending to adhere to hegemonic masculinity. Connell noted that hegemonic masculinity is pervasive because even the men that couldn’t be categorized as such, still normalize hegemonic masculinity as the standard for men.

The representation of Aang’s masculinity can also be noted. The expectation for what is considered masculine within the world of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is varied given its pre-industrial setting. Given the difference in plot representation, the characters, and by extension their representation of gender norms, are more nuanced and less binary than in *Hey Arnold*. There is a plethora of male characters that fit the expectation of hegemonic masculinity. One stark example is seen in the main antagonist, Firelord Ozai; the leader of the Fire Nation. This man has characteristics that seem as if they were based directly from Connell’s definition of hegemonic masculinity. Ozai is quite clearly in a position of power given that he is the leader of a nation that actively seeks to control all the other nations. He is aggressive, immensely powerful and a stark contrast from the representation of Aang’s subversive masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity and an adherence to gender norms is even seen in Aang’s close friend, Sokka. Throughout the series, there are scenes where Sokka pokes fun at his younger sister, Katara, about her expected role as a woman. In “The Warriors of Kiyoshi” (Season 1, Episode 4), the siblings and Aang are traveling. Aang tries to get Katara’s attention, but she is sewing a

hole in Sokka's pants closed. Sokka says "Stop bugging her, air head. You need to give girls space while they're sewing," (Season 1, Episode 4). When Katara shows irritation at the statement, Sokka continues by saying "... girls are better at fixing pants than guys and guys are better at hunting and fighting and stuff like that" (Season 1, Episode 4). This is indicative of how Sokka views masculinity and femininity, which again, clashes with Aang's beliefs.

The Loud House has a more fluid representation of masculinity. *Hey Arnold* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender* still have male characters that strictly fit into the strict binary of hegemonic masculinity, as can be seen in Bob Pataki and Firelord Ozai. But in *The Loud House* there aren't men whose pattern of behavior consistently adheres to hegemonic masculinity. Gender dynamics are more fluid given the overwhelming presence of women. In Lincoln's home, he is one of only two male characters in a house of thirteen total. The fluidity of gender representation is that a lot of the examples of behaviors that adhere to hegemonic masculinity come from the women in the show. Two of the main examples are from Lincoln's sisters; Lynn and Lana Loud. Lynn is one of his older sisters, the athlete of the family. Lynn is consistently shown to be physically stronger than Lincoln and to be more assertive, as is seen in "The Loudest Yard" (Season 1, Episode 34) where Lynn is better at football. Lana is one of his younger sisters, a twin who is the tomboy of the two. A running joke in the series is how different Lana is from Lola, her twin. Lola is a pageant queen while Lana spends her time playing in the dirt. When Lana must take Lola's place in a pageant in "Toads and Tiaras" (Season 1, Episode 24), it's Lincoln that must teach her what to do. There is an intersection in the fact that

patterns of behavior that adhere to hegemonic masculinity are seen in women and that Lincoln's representation of masculinity is subversive.

The Man, and the Camera

As noted by Mulvey's male gaze theory, there is inherent gender specificity in the way the camera treats a character and suggests that gender plays a role in how a character is presented to the camera. Mulvey stated that "unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order" (p. 268). This is how gender plays a role in how a character is represented. She further stated that "the man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extra-diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle" (p. 271). While none of the series have an overt sexual nature that is alluded to in Mulvey's theory, there are still clear instances of a character being a spectacle and is typically shown through a character being an object of attraction. Each of these series display attraction in somewhat similar ways. All three have used scenes in which a character being hailed as attractive is the sole focus for the camera and is accompanied by either a light that focuses on said figure or will use an effect that tints the scene in pink. The camera represented both male and female characters in this way.

The gaze that is often put on Arnold is like the gaze levied at his female peers. In *Hey Arnold*, this effect was used on Lila and Ruth, two girls that Arnold was attracted to. In "Operation Ruthless" (Season 1, Episode 3), when Ruth is on camera, she is the focus of the shot with a single light casting over her. The shot is presented as going back and forth with a shot of Arnold, smiling longingly at her. Although she is the focus of

Arnold's attraction, throughout the episode, the camera doesn't linger on her. However, in this same episode, Arnold is the focus of affection for Helga. Throughout the series, there are instances where Arnold is the object of attraction. In this episode, this is shown by Helga making him the camera's focus. In this scene, Helga is the point of view.

Through her, the audience can focus solely on Arnold, making him the spectacle that is voyeuristically gazed upon. Although Arnold is a main character and a lead, there times were the camera depicts him as an object of affection for Helga. The camera depicts Ruth as an object of affection again in "The Little Pink Book" (Season 1, Episode 6). In this episode, Arnold and Gerald find a pink diary on the bus. It details a crush toward Arnold but is anonymous. The boys want to find out who wrote the diary, so that they can find out who has a crush on Arnold. Arnold remembers that Ruth had been on the bus. The scene then cuts to Arnold's imagination, in which Ruth is the focus. She is placed in the center of the frame. Her surroundings are black and white, but she is both completely colored in and has a glow set around her. As was the case with "Operation Ruthless" (Season 1, Episode 3), Arnold is depicted through a similar lens as Ruth. In the very beginning of the episode, Helga is daydreaming about her conflicting feeling for Arnold. The camera focuses on Arnold, panning very closely toward his face and focusing on his eye as Helga writes poetry about their color. In "Ms. Perfect" (Season 2, Episode 6) Lila's introduction is a close shot of her accompanied with the sound of fluttering flutes and the interested whispers of Arnold and his classmates. It isn't until the next season that Arnold realizes that he feels some sort of attraction toward her. In "Arnold and Lila" (Season 3, Episode 13) Arnold realizes that he like Lila after they go on a date. In thinking about his time with her, there is a white gradient that softens the edges of the

scenes with Lila. However, Arnold is also on camera. Lila isn't the desirable focus in the same way that Ruth was. The representation of Ruth and Lila through the camera is indicative of the presence of the male gaze. However, this gaze is also directed at Arnold. This frames Arnold as equal to Lila and Ruth, regarding the male gaze. He is no longer the audiences' voyeuristic like or stand-in. He is to be gazed at in the same way as his female peers. This framework is indicative of how Arnold isn't represented as a hegemonically masculine character through the lens of the camera. Through being an object of affection and thus represented as such in the camera, Arnold is placed as equal to the women around him; two of which he had also viewed in the same way.

Aang is also represented in a similar light to his female peers. With Aang, there was also an overt contrast in the representation of Aang and a hegemonically masculine character; Zuko. Regarding the women, this was mainly used with Katara and Ty Lee. In "The Fortuneteller" (Season 1, Episode 14), Aang gives Katara a hand-woven necklace to replace the one she lost. When he turns back to face her, the camera zooms in and out of Aang's face as he stares at her with wide eyes and a blush. When back on Katara, the camera is tinted pink with various sparkles around her. The camera pans from her feet and stopping at her upper half where she is posing to extenuate the new necklace that she is wearing. Like Ruth and Lila in *Hey Arnold*, Katara is depicted as an object of affection for Aang. However, the exact same lens is used on Aang in this episode. This occurs once Aang, Katara and Sokka make it to the town's fortuneteller. Her assistant, Meng, comes to the front to greet the group. Like Katara, the camera pans from Aang's feet stopping to focus briefly on Aang's upper body with the same soundtrack playing in the background.

However, this scene is tinted a light shade of red instead of the pink that had shaded the scene with Katara. Also, unlike Katara, Aang isn't posing. Aang is standing with his shoulders slightly hunched and his eyes to the side. Although Aang appears to be an object of affection for Meng, his representation is different and less objectifying than it was for Katara. Ty Lee is another character that is depicted as an object of affection. In "The Beach" (Season 3, Episode 5), Ty Lee is shown to get attention from the men on the beach. An unnamed male turned to look at her. Ty Lee is the focus of the camera as she lounges on her towel. The scene looks to be in slow motion as she flips her hair over her bangs out of her face. In similar fashion to the scenes in "The Fortuneteller", there is a filter that softens the edges of the frame, glimmers of some sort of sparkles and an accompanying fluttering soundtrack. These scenes are indicative of the male gaze's presence in this series.

It is a bit different for *The Loud House*. With the episodes that have aired, there has yet to be a scene in which a gaze of attraction is prominent. The closest ones to that are the scenes in which Clyde (Lincoln's best friend) and Lori (Lincoln's older sister) have an interaction. A running gag throughout the series is that Clyde has a one-sided crush on Lori. Whenever he sees her or even thinks about her, he has a nosebleed, stammers, shuts down as if her were a robot, or does a combination of the three. However, in these scenes, there is never an emphasis on Lori as an object of affection. She typically only walks into the frame for long enough to Clyde to notice her and react. Given that the perspective of the show appears to solely be through Lincoln, there aren't instances where Lincoln is depicted through a lens of affection.

The way that the camera treats the female characters is an important juxtaposition in how the camera frames Arnold, Aang and Lincoln along with the other male characters. Mulvey states that "... the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like" (p. 271). In *Hey Arnold* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, there are scenes in which a male is depicted in this light. Arnold is very often depicted as an object of affection. Granted, this also occurs when it is in Helga's perspective. With *Avatar*, there was a scene which male character was depicted in a somewhat objectifying manner. This was seen in "The Beach" with Zuko. In this scene, Azula challenges another group of beach-goers to a volleyball match. Zuko stands up and throws off the robe that he had been wearing. The camera is angled slightly below Zuko with a slight focus on his abs while birds fly in the background. The music in this scene is a rendition of the soundtrack that usually plays when Zuko appears. Instead of the fluttering instrumentals that played with Katara, Ty Lee and Aang, the music has a deep almost foreboding bass. Zuko is a character that, often, adheres to hegemonic masculinity. Though he is an object of affection, and in a way, in an even more objectifying scene than Katara, Ty Lee or Aang, the scene is framed differently. There is no softening filter or glimmers of light; there is simply an action preformed, a camera angle that extenuates that action and a scene immediately following that shows a group of women fawning over Zuko. The gaze that is put on Aang is more in-line with the gaze put onto the women of the show when the point of the scene is affection. Zuko, a character that often demonstrates a pattern of adhering to hegemonic masculinity, doesn't get the same gaze as his female peers and Aang. A character that adheres to hegemonic

masculinity is less likely, if at all, to be represented in the same way as the women around them through the lens of the camera.

Hegemonic Masculinity Characteristics

In analyzing Arnold, Aang and Lincoln through their subversions and adherences to hegemonic masculinity the characteristics that are common in that theory will be used. This is indicative of its importance in its usage to analyze the gendered representation of Arnold, Aang and Lincoln. The concept of hegemonic masculinity will be narrowed down to specific patterns of behaviors that were noted in the study of hegemonic masculinity. This will be used to analyze the subversion and adherences that Arnold, Aang and Lincoln's pattern of behavior exhibited and what that meant for the narrative. The four main characteristics that will be used is assertiveness and aggression, position of authority, emotional dismissiveness and physical strength. Each of these traits were frequently noted in the studies used to develop the understanding of hegemonic masculinity.

Assertiveness and Aggression

Arnold

Throughout the series, Arnold tends to follow a more passive role when interacting with his peers, particularly Helga. Between these two characters, Helga is the one that is more likely to act as an aggressor and assert her dominance over her peers. Helga's closeness to hegemonic masculinity is indicative of the series' pattern of fluidity in gender representation. When interacting with Helga, he often chooses to either ignore her aggression or bend to it. In "Helga's Love Potion" (Season 2, Episode 2), Arnold

waits behind Helga for a turn at the water fountain. She moves out of the way, only to splash him in the face with the water once he leans down. Gerald, his best friend, remarks on how she always picks on him, to which Arnold agrees but says that he would rather ignore the problem. When questioned on the success of his method of handling the situation, Arnold states, “At least I still have my dignity, Gerald” (Season 2, Episode 2). He says this with a smile. Up to this point in the series, there have been a few examples of a hegemonically masculine character; Bob Pataki, Harold and Torvald. They are shown to act aggressively. In this episode, Arnold subverts the expectations set by characters like his more hegemonically masculine characters by choosing to ignore Helga’s aggression towards him. Gerald’s questioning of Arnold’s restrained reaction is indicative of this not being the norm. In this episode, Arnold’s actions are framed as a joke within the narrative. Once Arnold makes the response about his dignity, a sound effect is used that is often relegated for when a joke is being made. While, in this instance, it’s treated as a joke, Arnold’s restraint is indicative of this behavior being common for him.

There are several instances in which it would be understandable for him to retaliate against Helga’s antics, but he chooses not to. In “Girl Trouble” (Season 3, Episode 19), the class is instructed to make a diorama depicting Lewis and Clark’s expedition, in which Arnold, Gerald, Phoebe and Helga must work together. Arnold is berated by Helga and even had feathers glued to him. Gerald remarks on the bullying and suggests that he get back at her. Arnold states, “What would that prove? I think it’s just better to ignore her” (Season 3, Episode 19). This scene comes after a back and forth

between the two. Although Arnold initially tries to assert himself, he concedes. Again, in this scene, Gerald suggests to Arnold what would be the expected reaction. Unlike in the previous episode mentioned, when Arnold refrains from retaliation there isn't a sound effect. In this episode, Arnold's initial avoidance of aggression isn't depicted as a joke and is still in line with a pattern of behavior that is the norm for Arnold. This is one of the few episodes that Arnold retaliates, however. This will be further analyzed when studying his adherences to assertiveness and aggression.

Arnold's method of problem solving tends to avoid confrontation altogether, or to appeal to the emotions of those involved. In "In Helga vs. Big Patty" (Season 3, Episode 4), Arnold tries to implement non-confrontational problem-solving to avoid a fight between the Helga and Big Patty. He tries convincing Big Patty that Helga is a good person and to try and befriend her as opposed to fighting her. This is framed as the correct option since Patty does indeed follow his suggestion. To protect her reputation, she tells Helga to act as if she had gotten beat up while punching a gym mat to make it sound like a fight had occurred. Arnold's suggestion is indicative of an avoidance of aggression all together. Arnold focuses on Patty's feelings, suggesting to Helga that Patty was not angry at being made fun of, but hurt by being misunderstood. He suggests that Helga take her feelings into account and to even try and become friends with her. Arnold's suggestion is framed as a genuine option and not as a joke. While Arnold talks to Helga in this scene, the only sound effects are the sounds of children playing and the vague sounds of an urban freeway. Once music cuts in, it's used a transition to the next scene but with a focus on Helga's face. Throughout the series, different soundtracks are

used to quickly convey thoughts and actions. Just as there's a soundtrack or sound effect that is used to indicate a joke, there are soundtracks that indicate specific internal feelings of the focus character. The soundtrack used in this scene is one where Arnold, or that episode's focus character, is in thought. That framework coupled with the lack of jest in Arnold's suggestion makes the mentioned suggestion something that is considered as positive within the narrative. In "Curly Snaps" (Season 3, Episode 6), the named student reaches his breaking point and locks himself in the principal's office. Mr. Simmons suggests to principal Wartz that they should reason with him and be sensitive to his problems. Arnold concurs and once the issue is resolved, Arnold states, "We solved the problem in a peaceful way" (Season 3, Episode 6). Mr. Simmons and Arnold's method of problem solving is framed positively since their suggestions lead to Curly conceding to leave the office and go back to class. In "24 Hours to Live" (Season 1, Episode 17), Arnold accidentally knocks Harold out in a baseball game. Harold, in turn, threatens to beat him up, giving him the titular warning. Instead of fighting, Arnold chooses to dance "like a crazy person" (Season 1, Episode 17). In response, Harold becomes his friend and ignores the crowd that gathered for a fight. While an avoidance of aggression is common for Arnold, it's not necessarily an abnormality for other male characters. As noted just previously, Harold is a character that is more likely to succumb to aggression. However, it's through Arnold's influence that Harold views the behavior that subverts hegemonic masculinity as the better option.

Those around Arnold also notice his tendency to lack assertiveness and aggression. In "Girl Trouble" (Season 3, Episode 19), Helga notes how her actions

pushed Arnold to retaliate against her, which will be further explained in the section about his adherence to more aggressive behaviors, and how far removed that was from his typical behavior. In “Beaned” (Season 5, Episode 11), Arnold accidentally hits Helga in the head during a baseball game, causing a moment of amnesia for her. Arnold takes care of her throughout the episode. Unbeknownst to him, Helga regained her memory the next day. At the start of the episode, Helga already makes note of Arnold’s kindness and says, “Oh Arnold; so benevolent, so totally considerate and selfless to others” (Season 5, Episode 11). Gerald also takes note of his kinder nature. In “Best Friends” (Season 2, Episode 11), two classmates, Rhonda and Nadine, have a falling out. Arnold sets out to help the pair, to which Gerald says, “Arnold the problem solver, Arnold the ambassador, Papa Theresa” (Season 2, Episode 11). With his peers acknowledging Arnold’s tendency to avoid aggression, it creates a narrative framework that indicates that the subversion is a norm in Arnold’s pattern of behavior.

Even though Arnold tended to be passive and avoid aggression, there are still instances in which Arnold adhere to this behavior in hegemonic masculinity. One instance can be seen in the episode “Girl Trouble” (Season 3, Episode 19). Throughout this episode, Helga relentlessly bullies Arnold. The next day, Arnold and Helga have a tug of war, though involuntary on Arnold’s part, over a can of paint. Some of the paint gets on Arnold, and he immediately retaliates, throwing paint onto Helga in return. The entire class gasps, all the students facing Arnold in shock. Their teacher, Mr. Simmons, states, “this is so not like you” (Season 3, Episode 19), in response to the action. He is given detention. Once he gets to his house, he tells his grandfather about it, in which he

says, "... oh, my word, you've snapped Arnold! You've turned into a vicious, paint pouring thug. I don't know what to think of you anymore," (Season 3, Episode 19). Although the overreaction is played for laughs, accompanied with an eye roll from Arnold, it is still in line with how this kind of action is viewed for Arnold. His grandfather follows up and asks him why he didn't follow his instincts, to which Arnold responds that he did. His grandfather then says that he should've followed his "good instincts" (Season 3, Episode 19). Arnold's retaliation isn't seen as a good thing. His peers recognize this action is out of the norm for him and see it as a negative. When Helga remarks on the day's events while at her home, she says, "What havoc have I brought; forcing you to behave so badly? Where is my kind, thoughtful, generous Arnold, the boy who turned the other cheek?" (Season 3, Episode 19). In this instance, the adherence to a hegemonically masculine behavior is treated negatively within the narrative of the show. This is also indicative of the more fluid representation of gender. Arnold's aggression was in retaliation to Helga's aggression. However, the aggression from her is viewed as normal by their peers. For the audience viewing this exchange, the frame is that this characteristic is both normal and somewhat neutral for Helga, while being abnormal and a negative for Arnold. In "Mugged" (Season 1, Episode 11), Arnold is robbed and physically assaulted by a man. He learns self-defense from his grandmother; however, he shows a change in attitude in which he is more aggressive to his peers and even strangers. This is framed negatively in that his peers no longer want to be around him. During this episode, Arnold is both able to fight and physically imposing. This framework is highlighted by the narrative as well as physically with his representation through the camera. His typical smile or blank expression is replaced with

a scowl while walking down the halls of his school. He startles a classmate by punching at him and stands over the classmate with his shadow casting over the other boy. Each time that Arnold punches, the screen briefly goes black with a flash of white lightning over the top of it. The sequence happens as quickly as a blink of the eye. This same overlay is used when Arnold is confronted by a group of people after he makes a man cry. When he runs away from the group, he rounds the corner into an alley. He gets scared when he sees the shadow of his mugger, only to realize that it was his own shadow. This framed Arnold as equally aggressive as his mugger, and it is neither in line with who he is nor what is considered positive for him within the narrative.

Aang

Given that *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is an action-adventure series, aggression and assertiveness is a bit different from *Hey Arnold* and *The Loud House*. As the main character of this series, there is an expectation for Aang to fight. However, unlike a vast majority of the other characters, Aang's fighting style involves a focus on evasion and last resort defense. This is acknowledged by Aang in "Sozin's Comet, Part 2: The Old Masters" (Season 3, Episode 19). This episode is one of the final ones leading up to his fight with Firelord Ozai. Aang is on the back of a lion-turtle, a creature whose body is initially mistaken for a small remote island and uses his time to contemplate how stop Ozai without killing the man. It should be noted even his friends expect him to kill Ozai. During this time, he calls on his past lives to try and see if they can give him advice. He can contact Avatar Yangchen, a fellow Airbender in the hopes of getting advice from her that matches with his pacifistic morals. When she comments on his gentle nature, he

responds by saying, "... I've always tried to solve my problems by being quick or clever. And I've only used violence for necessary defense" (Season 3, Episode 19). This is indicative of a subversion of hegemonic masculinity. There's nuance to the representation of this subversion within the framework of the narrative. Trying to find a way to stop the Firelord is framed positively for Aang on a personal level. The other Avatars recognize that a less aggressive means is preferable for Aang. However, all the Avatars that Aang speaks to tell him that the more aggressive option is what would be most beneficial for the fate of the world. Aang's more evasive fighting style is noted by other characters throughout the series. Both Zuko and Admiral Zhao, two fire benders, would also use his evasive fighting style to mock him during their fights. Even though the two mock his less aggressive fighting style, Aang still manages to beat both in almost every one-on-one fight.

While Aang is willing to fight, he tends to try and solve his problems through talking and more peaceful means. In "Winter Solstice, Part 1: The Spirit World" (Season 1, Episode 7), Aang and his friends stop in a village that is under attack from a spirit named Heibi. Aang offers his aid to try and stop the onslaught of the village. There is a clear difference in the way that Aang and Sokka handle the situation. Aang had tried talking to the spirit but was attacked in return. Sokka comes out to help him and specifies his intent to fight. Aang responds by saying, "I don't want to fight" (Season 1, Episode 7). This is a direct contrast between Aang and a character whose behavior is more typical to hegemonic masculinity. Although Sokka knows next to nothing about spirits, he comes to Aang's aide, ready to fight. As Heibi approaches, the music is a bit slow and

foreboding and continues as Aang tries to reason with the destructive spirit. Aang gets to a rooftop and shouts a command for the spirit to stop and listen to him. The music stops completely, only starting up with a fast-paced flutter of woodwind instruments as Heibi hits Aang away from the roof. This soundtrack is often used in the series when Aang encounters some form of trouble, be it from another character or something happening negatively in the environment. Aang's assertion is framed as a cause for a negative reaction. It isn't until the next episode that Aang solves the problem with Heibi. He does so by understanding that Heibi is hurt by the loss of his forest and assuring him that it will grow back by presenting the spirit with an acorn. The difference between Sokka's reaction is that his choice to fight ends with him being captured. When Aang chose to understand Heibi and appeal to the spirit's emotions, he was able to save the village, Sokka and the other villagers that had been captured before Aang got there. In "The Great Divide" (Season 1, Episode 11), Aang gets two feuding tribes to come together by using a clever means to help remedy the past transgressions between the tribes. In "The Avatar State" (Season 2, Episode 1), the group meets with General Fong to try and figure out how to fight the Fire Nation. Fong suggests that they used the Avatar state since that was when Aang was at his utmost strength. Aang initially doesn't want to be a part of Fong's plan and must be convinced into this position of extreme aggression on his part since it is so different from his typical behaviors. Aang is depicted as at the height of aggression when in the Avatar state and that he is weary of it. When Fong's plan to trigger the Avatar state puts Sokka and Katara in danger, Aang appeals to emotion to try and get General Fong to stop. The narrative treats General Fong as in the wrong. The music that is played when General Fong tries to force Aang into the Avatar State is like Heibi when

the spirit was first introduced as a threat. This frames General Fong as a threat as well. Once the Aang is triggered into the Avatar State, everyone, including the General is shown to be afraid of him. Aang's peace oriented problem-solving is even extended to the main antagonists of the series. In "Sozin's Comet, Part 3: Into the Inferno" (Season 3, Episode 20) and "Sozin's Comet, Part 4: Avatar Aang" (Season 3, Episode 21), Aang tried to convince the Firelord to surrender so that they wouldn't have to fight. Although Aang was unsuccessful in this endeavor, Aang is still able to subdue Ozai without killing him, and even without causing a lot of pain when they do end up fighting. This is indicative of how the narrative treats Aang's subversion of this characteristic. At the end of the series, it's Aang's actions that leads to Ozai's defeat while also sparing his life.

Other characters often took note of Aang's gentle nature. In "Sozin's Comet, Part 2: The Old Masters" (Season 3, Episode 19) Avatar Yangchen states, "I know you have a gentle spirit," (Season 3, Episode 19). Avatar Yangchen's comments come off as sad. The camera pulls back from a close shot of Aang's distraught face and is accompanied by somber music. The framework in this scene is a recognition that the idea of Aang having to stray from this subversive characteristic is troubling for him and Yangchen. She recognizes that killing Ozai goes against Aang's best needs. A character that frequently makes note of Aang's lack of aggression is Toph Beifong, a blind earth bender that is around the same age as Aang. She tends to act in a way that is more abrasive than Aang. Toph joined the group so that she could help Aang master earth bending. When Aang and his friends first meet Toph in "The Blind Bandit" (Season 2, Episode 6), they see her in an underground arena that is like a wrestling ring in which the opponents use earth

bending. As opposed to fighting with their fists, the flashy moves used in this scene involve using their ability to manipulate the earth to launch rocks at one another. Aang gets into the ring to challenge her but says “I don’t want to fight,” (Season 2, Episode 6). At this point, Toph gives him the nickname, “Twinkle Toes,” which she does throughout the series. Between these two characters, Toph is represented as having behaviors that adhere to hegemonic masculinity. She is brash, where Aang is a bit meeker. This, like Helga in *Hey Arnold* is indicative of the fluidity in how this series represents gender. He’s still framed as formidable against Toph. Aang is the first and only person who was able to win against her. Even so, it is his evasive fighting style that gave him an advantage over Toph. Zuko also makes note of Aang’s passive behavior. In “The Day of Black Sun, Part 2: The Eclipse” (Season 3, Episode 11), Zuko confronts his father, the Firelord and says that he will join the Avatar’s side in the war. He says, “. . . we need to move to an era of peace and kindness,” (Season 3, Episode 11) equating these attributes to Aang and his peers. Zuko is depicting his father’s and even his own aggression as something negative. Zuko’s departure from the aggressive framework of his family is framed as a necessary progression. Throughout the series, Zuko is depicted as a relatively strong fire bender. However, in “The Fire Bending Masters” (Season 3, Episode 13), he realizes that his anger and aggression is what fueled his bending. In letting go of his aggression, he can become a true fire bending master. The narrative, in this scene, treats a lack of aggression as something positive. Zuko can become a better fire bender, through actions that align more with Aang and subvert hegemonic masculinity.

While Aang was more likely to avoid aggression and assertive behaviors, there are exceptions. A lot of these instances occur when Aang is in the Avatar state. As noted, Aang is at his strongest during this time. In “The Avatar State” (Season 2, Episode 1), Katara makes note of how uncomfortable she is when Aang is in the Avatar state. She states, “I saw you get so upset that you weren’t even you anymore” (Season 2, Episode 1). There were still times where Aang was aggressive without going into the Avatar state. These instances happened after Appa, his giant, flying bison, was taken. In “The Desert” (Season 2, Episode 11), Aang frequently lashes out at his friends when Appa is initially captured. After wandering deeper into the desert, they find the hive of buzzard wasps. One takes Momo, Aang’s lemur that joined the group from his old home and flies away. In response, Aang follows behind the buzzard and kills it to rescue Momo. In this series, Aang has had to fight against different animals multiple times, from the spirit Heibi to a platypus bear. He has never in any other instance caused harm to those animals, let alone kill one. This action is out of the norm for Aang. It is framed as such in the episode. The music is dark and foreboding when the camera goes from the buzzard’s falling body and back to Aang. The lighting casts a dark shadow around Aang’s eyes, clouding them. Even Momo is impacted by this difference since he cowers beside him instead of resting on his shoulder like he normally would. In the same episode, Aang and his friends encounter the sand benders that had taken Appa. Aang reacts to them violently, breaking one of their sand sails. He gets so upset, that he triggers the Avatar state. When Aang adheres to aggression, it is often framed as negative. His aggression is views is something that he needs to overcome in order to be in control. A lack of aggression isn’t framed as a lack in masculinity. Only Toph jokingly feminizes Aang’s lack of aggression.

Lincoln Loud

A lot of Lincoln's problems tend to revolve around his ten sisters. When he has altercations with his siblings, he often tries to avoid abrasive behaviors and instead focuses on understanding them. In "Left in the Dark" (Season 1, Episode 1), Lincoln uses his understanding of his sisters to get what he wants. All eleven siblings must share one television in the living room, and none of them wants to watch the same thing. Lincoln uses his knowledge of his sisters to convince them to do another activity instead watching TV, only failing when he forgot to account for his younger sister, Lucy. Like Aang, Lincoln uses cleverness, rather than aggression, to get his way. *The Loud House* relies on comedy more than *Hey Arnold* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. As such, many of his instances of cleverness over assertion are used for comedic purposes. Within the narrative, it's normal for Lincoln to be clever or even cunning. However, this also highlights Lincoln's ability to understand and care about his sister's feelings. This is seen in "Driving Miss Hazy" (Season 1, Episode 6). In this episode, Lincoln and his other siblings were frustrated with having to do favors for their oldest sibling, Lori, so that she would drive them places. Lincoln initially convinces the second-oldest sibling, Leni, to try and learn how to drive to by-pass Lori's demands. However, it's in seeing how much Leni wants to succeed that he puts his more selfish needs aside to help her. Both examples highlight another consistent behavior in Lincoln, and that is putting his sisters' needs over his own. This is framed as a positive thing in the narrative of the show given that he is often rewarded by the end of the episode. In "Heavy Meddle" (Season 1, Episode 2), Lincoln mentions that he has a bully. When asked by his friend, Clyde, on

how he should handle it, Lincoln says, "I'm going to deliver a well worded speech" (Season 1, Episode 2). When Clyde mentioned possibly having a physical altercation, Lincoln looks down on the idea, calling it "barbaric." While this response is framed a joke, by the end of the episode, avoiding an aggressive response quells the tension he has with his bully (who, incidentally, was a girl). This subversive behavior is often either what helps Lincoln gain what he wants or portrayed as the positive action.

Lincoln's willingness to assert himself fluctuates throughout the series. Some of that stems from the dynamics of the family. Because there are so many members of the family, thirteen to be exact, they all often vote to make decisions. This is seen in "In Tents Debate" (Season 1, Episode 4), in which Lincoln's vote is the tiebreaker for what the family will do for vacation. Lincoln follows a more manipulative behavior instead of an assertive one to get bribes from both sides. However, when he is caught, Lincoln decides to do their usual vacation and ensure that his sisters have an enjoyable time. He says, "It may not be much of a vacation for me, but it's worth it if all ten of my sisters are happy" (Season 1, Episode 4). In this episode, he uses his cleverness to get what he wants. By the end of the episode, he is shown to be the one in the wrong; not because he chose to be clever, but because he had betrayed his siblings. In "One of the Boys" (Season 1, Episode 41), Lisa, the second-youngest and resident genius, creates a watch that will let Lincoln experience an alternate reality in which he has ten brothers instead of sisters. After the first day, Lincoln finds that it is impossible to assert him with a more abrasive set of siblings. He also dislikes how aggressive they act towards him, openly complaining whenever a brother physically teases him. When in a house that mainly

adheres to hegemonic masculinity, Lincoln is unable to adjust. In comparison to male characters that adhere to hegemonic masculinity, Lincoln is noticeably different.

In opposition to assertiveness and aggression, Lincoln abides by a more nurturing attitude. There are several moments in the series in which Lincoln, in some way or another, takes care of his siblings. In the season prior to their parents really being shown in the series, Lincoln was often the one that would prepare his siblings for the day. In “Shell Shock” (Season 2, Episode 19), Lincoln makes note of his own nurturing nature. Lincoln is assigned to watch over an egg and act as its parent with his classmate, Ronnie Anne. He sees her as too violent and not enough of a caretaker to be left alone with their egg. Lincoln treats aggression as a negative behavior that is not the norm for him.

Position of Authority

Arnold

There are several times where Arnold is the leader of the group, however, that leadership is less of a position of authority and more as means to make him an effective problem solver. When he takes charge of a situation its mainly to help another character. This is prominent with Tucker in “Benchwarmer” (Season 1, Episode 5). Arnold, his friends and Tucker play on a basketball team where Tucker’s father is the coach, Coach Wittenberg. He instructs the kids to always pass the ball to Tucker, something that Arnold only disobeys when Tucker is physically unable to catch the ball which leads to coach Wittenberg benching Arnold for the foreseeable future. Although Arnold initially wants to quit, he is willing to stay, not for the chance to outplay Tucker, but for the good

of the team. When he sees that Tucker is struggling under the pressure, he offers to help him overcome it. Helping Tucker is to his detriment. Arnold can consistently make free throws, but Tucker admits that he gets flustered and is unable to land any points. If Arnold had let him continue with his lackluster performance, then he likely would've made it back onto the team, at the very least. This is shown to be true when Arnold is brought back onto the court when Tucker fakes an injury. He is positioned as the one that will carry the team. Even with this glimpse of leadership, Arnold makes the choice to enact a play that both utilizes the other players and positions them as equals to him. However, he is the decision maker, in this regard.

There are several instances in the series where Arnold is the decision maker of his peer group. Often, Arnold takes a leadership role to avoid conflict, and/ or confrontation. This is seen in "Mudbowl" (Season 2, Episode 10). In this episode, Arnold and his friends are challenged by a group of fifth graders. Initially, the group continued to lose to the older kids. However, Arnold told the group that they should follow his plays which favored outsmarting the older kids as opposed to being stronger than the older kids. In this situation, Arnold not only took the lead, but he also had a position of leadership. There is a noticeable difference in Arnold's representation of leadership and Wolfgang's. With the older kids, Wolfgang is domineering, leaving no room for his teammates to give any suggestions for their football strategies. Arnold, on the other hand, made plays that worked to the strengths of his classmates. In the end, though Arnold and his friends are smaller than everyone on Wolfgang's team, they are still able to win thanks to Arnold's

leadership. Although Arnold is a leader, compared to the authority of a character that is hegemonically masculine, he is subversive.

Arnold was also the planner of the group and often put in the position to make a final decision. This was seen in episodes that had the groups' sports games. When playing baseball or football with his friends, he is often the one that makes the plays. In "The Vacant Lot" (Season 1, Episode 3), Arnold is the one to decide where the kids should go to play baseball. In the beginning of the episode, Arnold and his friends are shown struggling to get through a single game of baseball because they held their games are held in the middle of the street. On happenstance, Arnold passes by a vacant lot and convinces his friends to work with him, clean it up and turn it into "Geraldfield."

Although he is the one that gets his friends to get the field ready, when the senior citizens show up, he suggests sharing the field with them. Although he played the role of the leader in the initiation of Geraldfield, he bends to the request of those that are older than him.

The only reason that the kids got their field back was because Arnold's grandpa tells his companions that it was wrong to take it in the first place. His grandpa is pushed to this decision after Arnold and his friends put trash on the field and says that, "if you want it, you can get it how we found it" (Season 1, Episode 3). Another instance in which Arnold took a more authoritative role is in the episode "Save the Tree" (Season 2, Episode 1). Arnold convinces his friends to work with him to keep Bob Pataki from tearing down the oldest tree in the neighborhood. This aspect of Arnold fit more in line

with the expectation for hegemonic masculinity. The way that Arnold's represented authority is framed within the series is as a virtuous act.

Aang

The concept of leadership within Aang's peer group is something that is immediately delegated to Sokka. In "Jet" (Season 1, Episode 10), Sokka asserts himself as the leader of their group. This occurs when the group tries to decide between using Appa to fly to their next destination or to walk through the forest. Sokka suggests that they walk, indicating that his instincts told them to walk to avoid being spotted by Fire Nation soldiers. Katara asserts that Aang should be the leader since he was the Avatar. Sokka responds by saying "He's just a goofy kid" (Season 1, Episode 10), to which Aang agrees. This is framed as a joke given that the sound that is played when Aang agrees is one that is often used for jokes. However, it's the fact that he's agreeing to being goofy and not his lack of leadership. He is shown to willfully follow Jet and Sokka's lead. While Aang sees himself as an aggregator of peace, he neither sees himself as a leader, nor acts as a leader. In this same episode, he follows the lead of another male, Jet. The two characters that Aang follows, Jet and Sokka, have a few similarities. Both are teen males that are physically bigger than Aang and both have behaviors that adhere to hegemonic masculinity. Throughout the series, Sokka is the one that is seen as the leader and the one that makes the plans for the group. In "The Library," it is Sokka who makes the plan to attack the Fire Nation during the day of the eclipse. Throughout the series, Aang is very rarely put into a leadership role and almost never shown to be in a position of power even though he is the Avatar.

Lincoln Loud

Between himself and his best friend, Clyde, Lincoln often acts as the leader and decision-maker. Throughout the series, there's a running gag in which Lincoln and Clyde interact with each other using walkie-talkies. Often, their interaction involves Clyde asking instruction from Lincoln, or Lincoln reiterating a plan. This is highlighted in "Overnight Success" (Season 1, Episode 23). In this episode, Lincoln is granted the ability to have a sleepover for the first time. When Lincoln addresses the audience, a gag that happens in every episode of the series, Lincoln shows a list that he created for the pair to do during said sleepover. In this instance, his role as the leader isn't derailed because of himself, but because of his sisters. The lesson he learns isn't to detract from his role as the leader between himself and Clyde. It is instead to teach him to be more considerate.

Lincoln is also shown to be the one that can corral his sisters. This is highlighted in "No Guts, No Glori" (Season 1, Episode 7). Lincoln and his sisters are upset at Lori's extremely strict method of babysitting them while their parents are away. It is Lincoln who takes the lead and plans to overthrow Lori so that they can spend the night doing what they want. This instance uncovers two things. The first is that Lincoln is framed as in the wrong. This directly ties with the second thing, which is Lincoln's tendency to take the role of nurturer as opposed to a leader. Once he sees how his plan has the capacity to put his other siblings in danger, he follows the leadership of Lori. The juxtaposition of Lincoln's nurturing tendencies and his occasional roles of leadership is also seen in "Project Loud House" (Season 1, Episode 4). In this episode, Lincoln takes the role that

their parents would have in getting his siblings ready for school in the morning on time. The role of the parent is to nurture and lead, as is what Lincoln does. This also ties into Lincoln's cleverness and his understating of his siblings. He uses what he's learned about his siblings to get them all to the family van.

Emotional Dismissiveness

Arnold

Arnold is shown to be very empathetic and sensitive throughout the series which is directly seen in the Christmas episode, "Arnold's Christmas" (Season 1, Episode 18). From the very start of the episode, it shown that Arnold puts more of an emphasis on the emotional aspect of gift giving than his peers. Helga exclaims that the whole point of the holiday is to get things that are the most expensive and the best to brag about. When Gerald talks about the gifts he got for his family, Arnold chides him, saying that "... Christmas is special. It's about showing the people that you're close to that you really care about them" (Season 1, Episode 18). The importance of an emotionally significant gift is a running theme in the episode. Arnold believes that he should take special care that whoever he gets a gift for should feel special and know that there was a lot of thought put in the present. Once he goes home, the rest of the tenants at the boarding house begin their traditional secret Santa. Arnold found out that he is to give a gift to Mr. Hyunh, noting that he always looks sad during this time of year. Arnold goes to see Mr. Hyunh to try and find out what would be the most likely present to cheer him up. He finds out that Mr. Hyunh, a Vietnamese immigrant, had to leave his daughter with a soldier so that she could safely escape their village twenty years prior and he hadn't seen

her since. Arnold then makes it his goal to reunite Mr. Hyunh with his daughter. Although Arnold tries his best to make this happen by spending his Christmas Eve getting presents for an employee at Federal Office of Information to convince him to find her, he still is unable to succeed. This is significant for two main reasons. The first one is that Arnold is very open in how hurt he is for Mr. Hyunh. He is disappointed that he can't give a person he cares about the one thing that he truly wanted. The other significant thing is how Arnold's emphasis on empathy and sensitivity changes Helga. As stated earlier, Helga believes that the most important thing about Christmas is to get the biggest, flashiest gift. This type of gift is epitomized in the popularity of a pair of snow boots from a local, prestige designer, which is incidentally the gift that the employee wanted Arnold to get for him. Helga's mom had gotten her the last pair in the city. It's Arnold's impact that makes her put his needs over her wants. She gives the boots to the employee and helps him find Mr. Hyunh's daughter. Arnold's subversive behavior is framed as a positive thing. The running theme of this episode adheres to Arnold. The characters whose behaviors didn't initially align with Arnold's, Helga and Gerald, in the episode also following Arnold's subversive behavior.

Another instance that highlights Arnold's sensitivities is "Pigeon Man" (Season 1, Episode 14). In this episode, Arnold is the only one of his peer group to talk to the man at the top of a roof who took care of pigeons. He can make a connection with the man due to the kindness that he showed his carrier pigeon. When Arnold and the pigeon man leave the roof, Harold and his peers start to destroy the intricate habitat that he had made for the pigeons. This leads to the birds flying away. Arnold's emotional reaction to the

destruction is framed as normal. He doesn't cry, but he gets very close to the action when looking back to the pigeon man to try and comfort him. These episodes showed a pattern of Arnold being emotionally available to those that need it. The narrative frames this as something positive.

When solving problems, Arnold appeals to emotion. In "Coach Wittenberg" (Season 2, Episode 16), Arnold and a few of his friends deal with having the abrasive coach Wittenberg as their bowling coach. Wittenberg berates the team, so much so that several of the members intend to quit. Arnold tells him to try and change his approach and to "try psychology" (Season 2, Episode 16), which involves him focusing on the individual needs of each player which is framed positively in the episode since the team begins to win consistently once the more sensitive approach was implemented. Wittenberg adheres to hegemonic masculinity, especially in comparison to Arnold. The narrative treats Coach Wittenberg's switch to Arnold's suggestion as the right thing to do. There is a moment where Wittenberg falters from Arnold's method upon seeing his wife. This almost immediately has an adverse impact on the team. This position is reaffirmed when Arnold lets Wittenberg know that he is a good coach and says "being a good coach isn't about winning or losing. It's about supporting your players as individuals," (Season 2, Episode 16). When trying to resolve conflicts between other characters, Arnold often resorts to sensitivity. In "Helga vs. Big Patty" (Season 3, Episode 4), Arnold suggests to both girls that taking the time to know each other and becoming friends would lead to the fight no longer being necessary, a sentiment that both girls conceded to. This is also seen in "Curly Snaps" (Season 3, Episode 6), in which Curly barricades himself in the

principal's office. Both Arnold and Mr. Simmons suggest a sensitive approach whereas Principal Wartz would prefer to go straight to punishment. Mr. Simmons states that "he needs sensitivity. We need to reason with him," (Season 3, Episode 6). This is framed as the correct option since it is a conversation with Arnold and Mr. Simmons that gets Curly to leave the office.

There are a few instances in which Arnold is emotionally dismissive or despondent. In "Mugged" (Season 1, Episode 11), Arnold becomes despondent when he gets home after being robbed. When initially interacting with the other tenants, he is despondent and gives short responses. This is framed as an oddity for Arnold. When Arnold first responds to his grandpa, the older man urges him to talk about what is bothering him. Within the narrative, there has been a pattern for the expectation of emotional vulnerability for Arnold. In the series finale, "The Journal" (Season 5, Episodes 19 and 20), Arnold is having a hard time with how little he knows about his parents. His closed off behavior is noticed by Gerald, Helga and his grandparents. This, again, is framed as out of the norm for Arnold. Gerald sees it as odd seeing as how Arnold doesn't want to be with the group when they go to the neighborhood's amusement park, "Dino Land". Helga also hangs back, initially, and makes note of how different his attitude at the time to his usual optimistic self. His grandparents notice his behavior and decide to get to the root of his feeling and tell him more about his parents.

Aang

Aang was very unabashed in expressing himself emotionally throughout the series. The emotions that he felt were, often, very visible. One of the clearest examples is

in how often and openly that he cried in the series. In “The Southern Air Temple” (Season 1, Episode 3), Aang goes back to his home. It is here that Aang is faced with the reality that he is indeed the last air bender. He openly cries with Katara and Sokka when he finds the bones of his closest companion, Monk Gyatzo. Aang’s reaction and open emotions aren’t hindered. He is comforted through the moment by Katara. A trend that happens throughout the series is that Aang can trigger the Avatar state when he is emotionally overwhelmed. This is one of those instances. This is indicative of a link between Aang’s emotional vulnerability and the immeasurable strength that is found in the Avatar State. The series gives emotional vulnerability narrative significance because Aang’s strongest asset is triggered by overt emotional expression. The emotions that specifically trigger it are rage and grief. In “The Guru” (Season 2, Episode 19), Guru Pathik hints that understanding his emotions and their vulnerabilities is the key to controlling his power. In this episode, Aang travels to the Eastern Air Temple to meet with Guru Pathik so that he could gain control of the Avatar state. Pathik instructs him to maintain balance through balancing the various levels of his chakras. This instruction focused on Aang being able to get an understanding of and balance with his inner self. Pathik instructs Aang to reconcile the grief that he feels at the loss of his entire culture and civilization to which Aang cries. Aang doesn’t just display these emotions and leave them as they are. He works through them, often by talking about how he is feeling. In the first scene mentioned, Aang is brought back from the Avatar state by interacting with Katara. When speaking to Guru Pathik, though Aang is crying, he has a smile on his face. This scene was the first time that Aang was able to let go of the resentment that he had at the loss of his culture through his conversation with Pathik in opening this specific chakra

level. In this series, chakra is described as the energy that is in the body. Guru Pathik explains that there are seven chakra levels that can become blocked based off certain emotions, such as fear, guilt and shame. Pathik gets Aang to open these blocked levels by understanding these emotions and working through them as opposed to closing them off. An example of this can be seen in opening of the air chakra which was blocked by the grief he felt over the loss of his fellow Air Nomads. Guru Pathik instructs him, not to throw away or close off these feelings, but to work through them by thinking of the new love that Aang was able to develop for his friends.

Aang is shown throughout the series to think with his heart. He often makes decisions based on what aligns with what he emotionally feels is right which is overtly stated by a fortuneteller. With Guru Pathik, Aang is willing to forego control over the Avatar state for his emotional connection to Katara.

There are times in which Aang would either be angry or emotionally overwhelmed. This scene triggered two responses. One response is to trigger the Avatar state. When Aang found the remains of Monk Gyatso, after having the emotional reaction of crying, he's overcome with rage and pushed into the Avatar state. When Aang confronts the sand benders, he hears that they put a muzzle on Appa. Aang gets so angry that he goes into the Avatar state. In both instances, his anger is quelled through a hug from Katara. In the incident with the sand benders, once Aang is brought back from the Avatar state, Aang cries in frustration.

There is a specific incident in which Aang is emotionally dismissive. "The Serpent's Pass" (Season 2, Episode 12) is the episode that follows Aang's run-in with the

sand benders. He is emotionally closed off, refusing to be angry or even sad about Appa's abduction given how volatile he thought his reaction was. This change in his attitude is framed as out of the norm for him. Throughout the series, Aang has been very physical in his displays of affection. This happens several times with Katara specifically. However, in this episode, Aang is resistant to hugging Katara. He openly admits that he would rather keep all emotions closed off to avoid becoming irrational. In this episode, Aang and his friends are accompanying a pregnant couple through the deadly pass into Ba Sing Se as refugees. The woman gives birth and names the baby Hope. When Aang sees the baby, he begins to cry and says, "I thought I was trying to be strong, but I was really just running away from my feelings" (Season 2, Episode 12). An avoidance to emotions and emotional vulnerability is framed as a weakness. In this scene, Aang isn't himself until he makes himself emotionally vulnerable and but close off how he felt.

Lincoln Loud

Amongst the Loud family, there appears to be an expectation for emotional openness. Due to there being so many people in one house, they use a system that has an expectation, and even a necessity for the family to be open. The siblings speak about what they are feeling and why. There is also a consistent sense of sentimentality. In "Picture Perfect" (Season 1, Episode 8), Lincoln puts a lot of his focus on making sure that his gift to his mother is perfect. However, when he is being overbearing and making his siblings act differently than what is normal for them, it is framed negatively. It's in understanding his sisters and appreciating their personalities that Lincoln gets the perfect picture. This is also seen in "The Whole Picture" (Season 2, Episode 8), in which Lincoln

is devastated by the loss of his old baby pictures. His sadness at the loss of these pictures is framed as a consistent part of his personality. His sisters also seem sad about the fact that the pictures were deleted and agree to help him recreate them. The sentimentality is seen in this action and in how Lincoln recognizes the importance of the new memories that he made during the recreation of the old ones. The narrative doesn't treat Lincoln's emotional response as a joke. In fact, once Lincoln believes that everything is lost, the music used is a somber soundtrack. It's in his willingness to be emotionally vulnerable that his problem is solved. His sisters see how upset he is and work to remedy the situation. What's more, he sees even more emotional significance in the new pictures because his sisters worked hard to make him feel better.

Physical Strength

Arnold

Physical strength in this series is based on the real world. No one in the series has super strength or any sort of super human power that could put them above anyone else. Arnold is relatively neutral regarding strength. Arnold's display of physical strength is relegated to his ability to play sports. A consistent activity that Arnold and his friends are involved with is sports. Throughout the series, it is shown that Arnold both enjoys and is good at sports. Episodes like "The Vacant Lot" (Season 1, Episode 3), "The List" (Season 1, Episode 2) and "Benchwarmer" (Season 1, Episode 5) show his interest in a variety of sports. "The Benchwarmer" showcased that not only was he good at basketball, but that he was also good enough to be able to teach one of his peers. His representation of overt physicality is limited to his ability to be a good team player. He avoids hurting

those around him. In “Dangerous Lumber” (Season 3, Episode 2), Arnold accidentally hurts his peers during a baseball game, and continues to do so throughout the game. He is shown to be very upset about that and even says, “I quit. I’m sick of hurting people. I don’t care how much I love baseball,” (Season 3, Episode 2). His strength is quite evident in this episode. He views said strength as a negative because of how it adversely impacted his peers. He places the safety of his friends over the sport that he loves.

Although Arnold is good at sports, he isn’t shown to have brute strength. As a result, Arnold tends to focus on being clever and out witting those around him as opposed to being physical to get what he wanted. In “Mudbowl” (Season 2, Episode 10), Arnold makes a plan that focuses on outsmarting the fifth graders in a game of football. Throughout the series, Arnold tended to avoid confrontation, especially confrontation that could possibly resort in a physical altercation. In “Cool Jerk” (Season 1, Episode 5), Arnold becomes friends with an older student, Frankie G, after said student defends him from Harold when Arnold refuses to fight back. This, along with his choice to put his peers over sports, is indicative of what little importance Arnold places on physical strength. It is neither a consistently defining characteristic for him, nor something that he values.

Aang

The time in which Aang is at his strongest is when he is in the Avatar state. As the Avatar, Aang has a connection with all the past Avatars. In this state, Aang is able use all four elements simultaneously. When Aang triggers the Avatar state, his eyes and tattoos begin to glow, casting a shadow on his face that makes him look more threatening. There

are several moments in the series that highlights Aang's destructive powers while in the Avatar state. In "The Avatar Returns" (Season 1, Episode 2), Aang triggers the Avatar state when he is pushed off Zuko's ship. Although prior to this moment, Aang had never used water bending, Aang was able to create a wave that was several meters high from the surface of the water to bring him back to the top of the ship. He uses this wave to, in turn, push Zuko and his henchman off the ship and bring down large pieces of an ice cliff to cause significant damage to the steel ship. In "The Southern Air Temple" (Season 1, Episode 3), when Aang triggers the Avatar state after finding Monk Gyatso's remains, Sokka warns that Aang could possibly blow them all off the side of the mountain. Aang and those around him can tell how strong the Avatar state is. In "The Avatar State" (Season 2, Episode 1), General Fong believes that Aang in this state is strong enough to take down the Fire Nation army. While Aang is shown to have an immense amount of destructive power, during this time, he isn't actively controlling it. Once he comes out of the Avatar state, he seems faint and is unable to stand on his own. His physical strength is shown to be something that he must control. As noted, it's Aang's emotions that trigger his strength. This is how the narrative puts Aang's emotions over his physical strength.

The strength of the Avatar state is mainly highlighted in the final fight between Aang and Firelord Ozai. While Aang displays an immeasurable amount of physical strength in this fight, it's his emotional and spiritual strength that the narrative frames as the correct option. In this fight, Aang has all aspects of the element surrounding him in a sphere. This is framed as scary or threatening within the show. The shadows cast on Aang's face in this scene while in the Avatar state puts more definition in his already

intense facial expression. This framing is also highlighted in the sound design. The sound of Aang manipulating the elements is akin to weaponry. Even the music is far more intense in this fight once Aang triggers the Avatar state. When he is about to deliver the final blow to the Firelord, his voice sounds like a mix of his own and several other menacing voices. Even Ozai, who had spent the first half of the fight taunting him, looks scared of Aang. Even so, Aang doesn't win against Ozai through brute force or causing harm to him. Aang instead, uses a technique that he learned from the lion turtle from "Sozin's Comet, Part 2: The Old Masters" (Season 3, Episode 19). He learns how to bend energy, something that is tied to his understanding of chakra that he learned from Guru Pathik. The lion turtle says that "To bend another's energy, your own spirit must be unbendable" (Season 3, Episode 21). The narrative frames Aang's ability to use his emotions to overpower Ozai as his true strength.

Even without the Avatar state, Aang is considered strong. This is mainly noted in "The Fortuneteller" (Season 1, Episode 14). In this episode, a fortune teller tells Katara that she will marry a powerful bender. Aang overhears this and get happy since he has a crush on her. This is indicative of how Aang sees himself. Aang views himself as powerful. Sokka echoes this when Aang can stop lava from a volcano from getting close to the village that they are in. Sokka states that "... sometimes, I forget what a powerful bender he is" (Season 1, Episode 14), to which Katara agrees.

Even so, Aang has a fear and even aversion to the Avatar state. In the episode with General Fong, Aang initially has a nightmare when he sees himself in the Avatar state. When talking to Katara about the Avatar state he says, "I was scared, I was scary"

(Season 2, Episode 1). Katara echoes the sentiment making note of how uncomfortable she felt when Aang was triggered into the Avatar state. Aang also doesn't view power as something that is of the highest value. In Ozai's initial taunting, he says "Even with all the power in the world, you're still weak" (DiMartino, Konietzko & Dos Santos, 2008). Aang chooses his love for Katara over control of the Avatar state in "The Guru" (Season 3, Episode 19).

Lincoln Loud

The concept of physical strength within this series is like *Hey Arnold*. There aren't characters with a superb level of strength or super human powers since the series is based in the world. By these parameters, Lincoln is completely lacking in physical strength. Unlike Arnold, Lincoln is not only bad at sports, he has an outright distaste for them. He says as much in "The Loudest Yard" (Season 1, Episode 34) when he argues with his mom about getting into physical activities. In the beginning of the episode, Mrs. Loud chastises her son's avoidance of exercising, suggesting that he join the football team to get him more active. In response, Lincoln complains, saying, "Come on mom, you know sports aren't my thing" (Season 1, Episode 34). Physical strength in *The Loud House* is seen mainly in Lynn, one of Lincoln's older sisters. She is the rowdy character within the series and is great at almost all sports but more specifically at football and soccer. Initially, she tries to help Lincoln get better at football by teaching him basic exercises to build strength. Lincoln is completely unable to keep up and instead convinces her to play for him.

A running joke throughout the series is Lincoln's ineptitude at physical activities and complete lack of strength. Of all the characters analyzed, Lincoln is the only one that is represented as having no physical strength whatsoever. He is bad at sports and avoids any sort of physical activity. He's shown to be physically weaker than a lot of his sisters, not just the one that are framed as tomboys. In "Roughin' It" (Season 1, Episode 32), Lincoln tries to break away from his proximity to his sisters. He tries to act as what he perceives as manly, but by the end of the episode, he sees this as counterproductive. Lincoln states that "... I don't have to worry about what is manly or girly..." (Season 1, Episode 32).

"Health Kicked" (Season 2, Episode 79) is one of the few times that Lincoln tries to engage with any sort of physical exercise. His main reason is to ensure the health of his parents. He gets the idea from Clyde when he sees that his dads are exercising so that they can join a competition and to be able to be there for Clyde as he gets older. Lincoln, concerned at the state of his parent's health, suggests that they get more active. In the montage that scene their parents getting into exercise, the children are the ones that teach them what to do. However, it's noted that Lincoln is one of the siblings that doesn't engage in any of the exercises. Once the episode turns to him and his sibling having to exercise, he is no longer fond of his parents being so health conscious. When their parents get all the children to exercise, Lincoln struggles considerably. When they are all lifting weights, Lincoln is the only one, aside from the baby who doesn't partake, that is unable to lift the weights. Instead of continuing to humor their parents, Lincoln uses his cleverness to convince his parents that they are healthy and that the children don't have to

keep up the exercises with them. By the end of the episode, the family settles with a morning walk as their exercise.

Lincoln's lack of physical capabilities is noted but isn't framed as something negative for him. In "The Loudest Yard" (Season 1, Episode 34), Lincoln is told to be more physically active by his mother. He gets a negative frame at the end of the episode because he lied to his parents. Neither parent comments on the fact that he isn't a good football player or even note that his sister is better than him. They are upset because he wasn't honest. Even the coach of the team is more concerned with Lynn getting on the team than noting the fact that Lincoln isn't a good player. In "Roughin' It" (Season 1, Episode 32), it's his proximity to his sisters and their behaviors that helps Lincoln, not the physical strength that he attributes to a "tough guy" (Season 1, Episode 32).

Environments and Masculinity

The environments that the characters inhabit play a role in their representation of masculinity and the subversiveness of said representation. These places that the characters inhabited and interacted with will be analyzed to determine what role these environments play in shaping gender norms and expectations. Before delving into the in-depth analysis of these environments, the similarities that were found will be noted. The first similarity is that both *Hey Arnold* and *The Loud House* are set in a present-day America. Present-day, in this case, is indicative of when the shows aired. The setting for *Hey Arnold* is during the 1990s in a fictional city that drew inspiration from Brooklyn, Washington and Oregon. The setting for *The Loud House* is set in the 2010s in a fictional city in Michigan. The next similarity is that the main male characters of *Hey Arnold* and

Avatar: The Last Airbender don't live with their biological parents. In both cases, there is little to no mention of their them ever being present. This is especially the case for Aang, seeing as how there is no mention of his parents at all in the series. Aang doesn't have a biological, male role model, whereas Arnold has his grandfather. The final similarity in the environments is that both *Hey Arnold* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender* have a multitude of environments that can be used to analyze the representation of the male leads' masculinity. Different areas highlight just how subversive their masculinity is. The environment that the characters grow up in and frequently interact with are more than likely to play a role in how their beliefs, values and behaviors develop.

Hey Arnold

One of the most consistent environments in this series is the boarding house where Arnold lives. He lives with his grandparents and four other tenants who act as recurring characters in the series. The tenants act as Arnold's close familial bonds as well as where he gets his male role models. The boarding house is an environment that evokes emotional vulnerability. In "Mugged" (Season 1, Episode 11), Arnold is mugged by a stranger. He comes home and is emotionally despondent. He is noticeably less talkative, an action that is framed as an oddity for him. The other tenants notice and convince him to talk to his grandparent about what was bothering him. In "Arnold's Christmas" (Season 1, Episode 18), the tenants come together to do a secret Santa. They notice that Mr. Hyunh, a Vietnamese immigrant, is sad due to not being able to have seen his daughter in twenty years after giving her to a soldier so that she could escape the war. Although he is sad, he still can express his emotional vulnerability with the other tenants,

specifically Arnold since he is Mr. Hyunh's secret Santa. When the two are reunited at the end of the episode, the camera shows their reactions, which includes a few of the male tenants crying tears of joy. Both examples are indicative of the fact that this environment also acts an emotional support system which is consistent throughout the series. In "School Play" (Season 3, Episode 20), the tenants rally behind Arnold to help him learn his part for the school play and is framed in direct contrast with Helga's home. The Pataki house has a focus on competition and has less familial warmth than Arnold's boarding house. Throughout the series, Bob Pataki shows a lack of emotional understanding of both Helga and his wife. The only character within the Pataki house that brings out overt warmth from Bob is Olga Pataki, the oldest daughter. Even with that, Olga's is directly compared with Helga to incentivize competition to make her a better daughter in Bob's eyes. The difference in Arnold and Helga's home shows how their environment impacts their proximity adhering to the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. As noted, Arnold's home environment subverts the hegemonically masculine characteristic of being emotionally dismissive. Arnold, in turn, has a pattern of behavior that also subverts this characteristic.

There are a multitude of environments that Arnold frequents, each varying from the others. P.S 118 is an environment that differs from the ones just mentioned. Unlike the boarding home, there are no expectations of creating familial bonds, specifically during season one. While there are no familial bonds, there are still expectations for gender that can be framed against Arnold's behaviors. There is no blood connection between Arnold and the other male tenants, but they still are a frame for gender norms for

Arnold. There are several episodes that make note of the expectation for masculinity. In “Tutoring Torvald” (Season 1, Episode 14), Torvald is seen as one of the examples of masculinity within P. S. 118. Torvald is a thirteen-year-old student in the same grade as Arnold. The other children are afraid of him given his large stature and assume that he is violent. However, Arnold is one of the few children amongst his peers that diverges from Torvald’s assumed violence and tries to get to know him. Arnold is one of the few students that is willing to empathize with and connect to Torvald. This aspect of Arnold’s ability to empathize with and emotionally connect to Torvald will be further discussed in a later section. The importance of Torvald is to indicate the way that this environment treats masculinity, especially with characters that display overt, hegemonic masculinity. This is also seen in how the Arnold and his peers react to Wolfgang, an older student at the school. Wolfgang, like Torvald, is much bigger in height and build than Arnold. He is also very aggressive. The audience is introduced to Wolfgang in “Longest Monday” (Season 2, Episode 4), which highlights the school tradition of fifth graders putting fourth graders in the trashcan. Wolfgang is shown to be the leader of his friend group that torments Arnold and his peers, even going so far as to continue the tradition off school grounds and not sparing the female fourth graders. Throughout the series, he is presented as the bully that picks on Arnold and his friends. The way that those within this environment treat subversive masculinity is also something that could be pinpointed in viewing the entirety of this series. In “New Teacher” (Season 2, Episode 1), Mr. Simmons is introduced as a new character. When first showing how he intended to teach the students, Mr. Simmons focuses on the students’ emotions. Helga refers to him as a hippie. The students initially bully Mr. Simmons into quitting after a few days. After they

are faced with the aggressive and harsh Lieutenant Goose, they see Mr. Simmons' "caring and giving nature" (Season 2, Episode 1) as the better teaching style. Throughout the series, there is juxtaposition in the way that Mr. Simmons and Principal Wartz handle disciplining the children. This comes to a head in the episode "Principal Simmons" (Season 5, Episode 4) where they come to the consensus that they need to be both stern and emotionally supportive of the children. While Mr. Simmons isn't disregarded outright, in comparison to Principal Wartz, he is shown to be far less effective on his own. By the end, Principal Wartz implements aspects of both his style of discipline and Mr. Simmons. The framework developed with this environment is that there is a necessity for both adherences and subversions to hegemonic masculinity to make a well-rounded environment where Arnold and his peers can thrive.

Avatar: The Last Airbender

This series has four main environments, the Air Nation, the Water Nation, the Earth Kingdom and the Fire Nation. Each of these places has a different set of cultures and societies within them. As such, each one has different gender norms, thus, having variations in what is considered hegemonic masculinity. These differences are significant to showing Aang's representation of masculinity and how said masculinity is seen amongst his peers and enemies alike.

Aang's subversive pattern of behavior was able to develop and thrive because the culture of the Air Nation also subverts the expectations of hegemonic masculinity. The Air Nation is where Aang is from. A lot of the information noted about this culture stems from Aang's memories and historical notes from other characters. This is because of the

Air Nomad genocide committed by Firelord Sozin. The Air Nation is a nomadic culture. The nation is separated into the Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern Air Temples, the latter of which was Aang's home. Due to the genocide, there isn't much known on the differences between these temples. Of the elements, air is the least aggressive. In "Bitter Work," (Season 2, Episode 9) both Toph and Iroh make note of this. Toph, a blind and aggressive Earth bender, states that Aang needs to think less like an evasive Air bender and more like a more physically obstinate Earth bender (Season 2, Episode 9). Iroh describes to his nephew, Zuko, the differences in the four elements and their respective nations. When describing the Air Nation, he notes their focus on peace. As such, Aang was raised in an environment that normalized an aversion to aggression. This is something that is highlighted in his fighting style, as mentioned before. He was raised in a way that subverts hegemonic masculinity.

A commonality that this environment has with Arnold's boarding house is that there is an emphasis on the bonds created by choice and the strength of said bonds. One such example is seen in the relationship between Aang and Monk Gyatzo. In "The Storm" (Season 1, Episode 12), Aang recounts his time with said Monk before he ran away. Gyatzo is shown to have a deep emotional bond with Aang. In response to the other Monks suggesting that Aang focus on strengthening his training to be the Avatar, Gyatzo states that he understands what Aang truly needs. In this case, that is for Aang to continue being a joyful child (Season 1, Episode 12). Aang reciprocates this emotional bond, especially in his reaction to his passing. Another Air Nation specific bond that is noted throughout the series is his bond with Appa, a flying bison. In "Appa's Lost Days"

(Season 2, Episode 16), the audience is made privy to Appa's memories, something that doesn't happen since Aang is usually there to frame the perspective for them. In this episode, Appa uses his memories of Aang to get through his time away from the group. It showed that Appa and Aang chose each other at a very young age. The memory devolves into the present day with Aang rolling over in his sleep and saying, "we'll always be together" (Season 2, Episode 16). Gender roles aren't mentioned in this environment. The only woman seen in the Air Nation is Avatar Yangchen. In Aang's memories there are no women present. It can be assumed that the men in the Air Nation took on the expected roles of both men and women. This can be seen in Aang's relationship to Monk Gyatso. Gyatso is depicted as Aang's nurturer, especially in "The Storm" (Season 1, Episode 12). In the flashback in this episode, the Monk puts Aang's emotional well-being over the expectation thrust upon him as the Avatar. This subversion in masculinity isn't seen in relation to the women of the Air Nation, but instead in comparison to the men of the other nations. Unlike the other nations, there is an expectation to rely on expressing their emotions. In comparison to his peers, Aang tends to be more emotionally open, especially in comparison to the men. The narrative doesn't treat this as a weakness, however. It's in his emotional strength and spirituality that Aang can control his greatest strength.

The Water Nation tends to have cultural values that adhere to hegemonic masculinity. The way that Aang often directly challenges these beliefs that is indicative of how he subverts hegemonic masculinity. The Water Nation is the smallest of the remaining nations. There are three main areas within the Water Nation; the Southern Water Tribe and the Northern Water Tribe and the Foggy Swamp Tribe, the foremost of

which being where Katara and Sokka are from. When describing the elements, Iroh referred to the water nation as having, "... a deep sense of community and love" (Season 2, Episode 9). Unlike the Air Nation, there is conversation on gender norms and expectations in the different Water Tribe. In the Southern Water Tribe, the men are expected to go and fight, while the women and children are expected to stay. Sokka is one of the few older males, even though he is only a young teenager. In the first episodes, "The Boy in the Iceberg" (Season 1, Episode 1) and "The Avatar Returns" (Season 1, Episode 2), Sokka teaches the young boys to be warriors. In these episodes, the audience is also introduced the Fire Nation when Zuko breaches the shore of the Southern Water Tribe. Sokka's teaching is shown to be a norm for the boys when one throws Sokka a weapon to attack Zuko and says, "Never surrender" (Season 1, Episode 2). The fact that men go to fight in the Southern Tribe is also seen in "Bato of the Water Tribe" (Season 1, Episode 15). In this episode, Sokka has flashbacks about the day his father left to fight in the war. Sokka believes that he should go with him stating that he sees himself as a man (Season 1, Episode 15). While Aang doesn't overtly object to these beliefs, there is a clear difference in how Sokka and Aang treat female warriors throughout the series. As seen in "The Warriors of Kiyoshi" (Season 1, Episode 4), Sokka doesn't feel that female warriors would have the capability to best two men, whereas Aang never questions their abilities.

In the Northern Water Tribe, gender norms are also directly stated. Paku, the water bending master that was expected to teach Aang, states that he won't teach Katara because she is a woman. The water bending women in the Northern Water Tribe are

taught to heal and not fight. While this aspect of their culture from Katara and Aang, this is initially met negatively from the chief of the tribe. This tribe also practices arranged marriages, which is represented by men giving a betrothal necklace to their wife. In this culture, the man is both the decision maker and the one with the ability to fight. Aang directly objects to this, showing a clash in their upbringing. The series frames Aang and Katara's objection to this as correct. given that by the end of the conflict Master Paku does indeed train the two of them.

The Earth Kingdom is extremely vast in comparison to the Air and Water Nation. Gender norms and expectations vary from place to place. There are four main environments that Aang encounters within the Earth Kingdom, either for a long period of time or multiple times. Those places are Omashu, Kiyoshi Island, the Si Wong Desert and Ba Sing Se. Omashu is an Earth Kingdom city ruled by an eccentric monarch who is also a longtime friend of Aang. This environment doesn't have set or as strict expectations on gender in this city. While city is ruled under a male monarch, he is shown to be different than the other leaders from the any of the other nations. There are no expectations for gender. As a leader, Bumi is emotionally open and affectionate. He embraces Aang after the latter realizes who he is. Kiyoshi Island is different from Omashu, in that gender norms are directly challenged. The island is named after a female Avatar, Kiyoshi. The warriors of that land are women under the name of Kiyoshi warriors. In "The Warriors of Kiyoshi" (Season 1, Episode 4), gender norms are directly challenged when Sokka says "there was no way we were defeated by a bunch of girls" (Season 1, Episode 4). However, by the end of the episode, Sokka is made to embrace the

women and their culture when fighting alongside them against Zuko. The Si Wong Desert is far less defined. In this lawless land, gender norms appear non-existent. Ba Sing Se has far more defined gender norms, both implicit and explicit. Ba Sing Se is ruled under a monarchy with a class system hierarchy which is seen in the vast difference between lower and upper rings of the settlement. Ba Sing Se is a place that many refugees displaced by or running from the Fire Nation escape to. The lower ring is where the poor and refugees are relegated to. The financial and social status that the citizens have raises the further up in the rings that they go. A character that joins Aang's group is Toph, a member of the prestigious Bei Fong family. Her strength and prowess as an earth bender is framed as an oddity for her family in that she is blind and a young girl. Gender norms are implicitly adhered to by the Dai Lee and the various women all named Ju Dee. The Dai Lee is the group that is designated to protect the king and instill order in Ba Sing Se. All the members of the Dai Lee are men and they have even more power than the king himself. Ju Dee, on the other hand, was a woman that had no autonomy and used as a guide. The first Ju Dee that the Aang and his friends encounter is replaced when she is unable to keep Aang from asking questions about the king and talking about the war. Something noted by multiple characters is that the Earth Kingdom is the only nation that has been equipped to truly fight against the Fire Nation without the Avatar's presence. As an element, Earth bending requires sturdy stances and physical strength. A fundamental part of Aang's upbringing is air bending. That shows a significance in Aang's inherent struggle with earth bending, an element that tends to adhere to the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. Katara notes that earth is his "natural opposite" (Season 2, Episode 9). Within the narrative of the show, the differences in the elements are also a

framework for the differences in the proximity to hegemonic masculinity. Aang's difficulty with earth bending, an element and culture that adheres to the characteristics expected of hegemonic masculinity is indicative with his more subversive representation clashing with it.

The final prominent environment is the Fire Nation, the antagonists of the series. The Fire Nation is under a patriarchal totalitarian rule. Like the Earth Kingdom, there are various areas that are a part of the nation, but they are all under the rule of the Firelord. They are the most aggressive of the four nations given that this is the nation that instigated the hundred-year war and was the nation whose leader committed the genocide of the Air Nomads. Firelord Ozai is the pinnacle of hegemonic masculinity. He is in the highest position of authority as Firelord. He is very aggressive. In "The Storm" (Season 1, Episode 12), Iroh recounts how his brother, Ozai, permanently scarred Zuko's face for simply speaking out of turn in his war room. As such, this nation also tends to not subvert hegemonic masculinity. When Zuko confronts his father and become the Avatar's ally in "The Day of the Black Sun, Part 2: The Eclipse" (Season 3, Episode 11), he mentions that the Fire Nation needed to transition to an "era of peace and kindness" (Season 3, Episode 11), indicating that these two attributes were not a norm for the Fire Nation. While the gender norms for the Fire Nation adhere to aspects of hegemonic masculinity, there is a prominent outlier. This is seen in Azula, princess of the Fire Nation, and her friends. Her strength as a fighter isn't questioned even though she is a woman. However, her lack of femininity is noted when compared to her companion, Ty Lee. With the physical design of the characters, Ty Lee looks closer to Katara. In personality and behavior,

Azula is often shown to be far removed from the expected behaviors of a woman. This is especially seen in “The Beach” (Season 3, Episode 5), when Ty Lee must teach Azula how to romantically interact with men. As an element, fire bending is seen as the most aggressive and most dangerous. Throughout the series, there are instances in which fire benders make note of how dangerous the element is to control. In “Imprisoned” (Season 1, Episode 6), a Fire Nation soldier begins to bend fire to threaten the occupant of an earth family home. The soldier says, “... we wouldn’t want an accident, would we? Fire; it’s sometimes so hard to control” (Season 1, Episode 6). This is also the only element that Aang was afraid of. In “The Deserter” (Season 1, Episode 16) and “The Fire Bending Masters” (Season 3, Episode 13), Aang shows an apprehension to even learning how to bend the element. Throughout the series, fire as an element has been hailed as an element of strength. It is the one element that Aang is afraid to use, up until he gets Zuko as a fire bending master. It is highlighted in “The Fire Bending Masters” (Season 3, Episode 13) that both Aang and Zuko see fire as an element of anger. In that episode, neither of them was able to use fire bending. Aang was still afraid of the element and Zuko admits that he didn’t have the same emotional baggage that ignited his fire bending. They meet the last two dragons to try and learn what can help them. The dragons breathe a twister of fire around them, the fire shimmering with blue, orange, green, red, purple and yellow. Zuko says that he understood and was able to replace his feelings of anger with what he learned from the dragons to fire bend again. Aang similarly, doesn’t fear the element and sees it as beautiful. He too is able and willing to fire bend. It isn’t until Aang removes himself from the norms of the Fire Nation that he is able to use the element. Aang’s removal from Fire Nation norms is another framework for his subversion of hegemonic masculinity.

The Loud House

There are only two consistent environments that Lincoln, the main character and only male sibling in the Loud family, actively interacts with. The main one is his home. Gender norms and expectations are extremely loose in this environment. In “Roughin’ It” (Season 1, Episode 32), Lincoln and his dad subvert hegemonic masculinity. The episode starts with the Loud siblings crowded around their TV to watch a show that pits men against one another for the affection of one woman. Lincoln joins in with his sisters to see which man a better option for the woman would be, picking apart their attributes. Lori addresses Lincoln and says, “It’s so much fun watching this show with you. You’re like, literally, one of the girls,” (Season 1, Episode 32). Lincoln questions if all the time around his sisters is making him more feminine but assures himself that he’ll “turn out fine” (Season 1, Episode 32). However, after their father come in from the kitchen in a pink apron and with pink muffins while also showing interest in the show, Lincoln spends the rest of the episode trying to adhere to hegemonic masculinity. However, when applying the adherences to hegemonic masculinity, he finds that acting in his old behaviors is more in line with who he is and what works for him. In this environment, his sisters also can be used to make commentary on gender norms and expectations.

Lincoln’s sisters Lynn, Lola and Lisa are represented to lack or subvert typical femininity while Luna and Lucy are used to blur the lines. In “The Loudest Yard” (Season 1, Episode 34), Lynn offers to take Lincoln’s spot on their school’s football team since he both hates the sport and is bad at it. Physical strength is an attribute for hegemonic masculinity. Lincoln is shown to have a complete lack of physical strength in

not only “The Loudest Yard” (Season 1, Episode 34), but also throughout the entirety of the series. Lynn is depicted as one of the few characters to be physically strong. This is one way that she also is one of the few characters that adheres to hegemonic masculinity consistently. In this environment, Lincoln’s lack of physical capabilities in comparison to Lynn isn’t framed as something that he needs to change. Even in this episode, the focus is the way that the coach and the other teammates accept Lynn as a fellow football player. The other environment is his neighbor’s homes. One home is his best friend, Clyde’s, home. This environment challenges the heteronormative concept of hegemonic masculinity in that Clyde’s dad is gay with a male partner that he is married to.

Discussion

There are a myriad of realizations and conclusions that are made through the analysis of *Hey Arnold*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *The Loud House*, separated in this section by key observations, future research, limitations in the research and the conclusion.

Key Observations

One of the first observations made over the course of the study is that *Hey Arnold* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender* both had several male characters that strictly adhered to a representation of hegemonic masculinity, whereas *The Loud House* had no male characters (that were named) that strictly adhered to hegemonic masculinity. In *Hey Arnold*, the characters that adhered to hegemonic masculinity were Bob Pataki, Torvald, Wolfgang and Principal Wartz. Throughout the series, each of these characters was

represented in a way that was completely different from Arnold. The contrast was often one-to-one in their difference. In many scenes, Arnold actions and behaviors were in complete contrast to the male characters that would adhere to hegemonic masculinity. This was especially so for the assertiveness and aggression section. Bob Pataki and Wolfgang were consistently characterized as different from Arnold in all aspects of hegemonic masculinity. For *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, the characters that adhered to hegemonic masculinity were Firelord Ozai, Zuko, Jet and Sokka. With Aang, sometimes it was a little more nuanced given the style and premise of the show. Where Aang's behaviors and reactions were a stark contrast from the more hegemonically masculine characters, Aang was still physically capable in comparison to them. In some scenes, he was able to beat them in a fight. This is indicative of the next observation made in this study.

All these shows had the capacity to be very fluid in their representations of gender. There were male characters from all three shows that completely subverted hegemonic masculinity. In *Hey Arnold*, this was seen in Arnold's teacher, Mr. Simmons. This character completely subverted the expectations of hegemonic masculinity, so much so that he never had behaviors that adhere to it. In *The Loud House*, none of the male characters would fully adhere to hegemonic masculinity, even in comparison to Lincoln. The fluidity in the representation of gender from all three shows is seen in the proximity of female characters to hegemonic masculinity. In *Hey Arnold*, this is seen in Helga Pataki. Like her father, her behaviors tend to be in line with the behaviors expected in hegemonic masculinity. Between Helga and Arnold, the former is more likely to act

aggressive and to have displays of physical strength. However, she also has behaviors that are like Arnold's in his subversion of hegemonic masculinity. There are several scenes where Helga is very expressive in her emotions. Like in *Hey Arnold*, the fluidity of gender representation in *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is seen in the female characters. Azula and Toph are characters whose behaviors divert from what is normal for Aang into a pattern that is more in line with the expectations in hegemonic masculinity. As for *The Loud House*, the representations of gender are completely fluid. This stems from the fact that the number of women in the show far out-weighs the number of men. In Lincoln's home, of the thirteen family members, only he and his father are male. Even with the dominating presence of women in the household, there are still characters that adhere to hegemonic masculinity. However, both of those characters are women. This fluidity in all the shows is indicative of the narratives normalizing Arnold, Aang and Lincoln's subversive representation of masculinity.

Future Research

While gathering research, there were several things that I noticed that could be used to further delve into this study. One of the main ones would be to study all the released animated media from Nickelodeon. As noted by Hentges and Case, Nickelodeon is a studio that sought to appeal to both genders. A study of this studio's animated body of work would be beneficial in determining if that is what played a role in the main male leads having a subversive representation of masculinity. This is especially something of note given the lack of strict gender binaries in *The Loud House*. Extending the study so that it includes all the Nickelodeon shows can also determine how much the era a show is

released impacts its representation of gender. Similarly, adding Nickelodeon's live action children's shows would make for a broader study in subversive masculinity.

Another aspect to be delved further into is the importance of culture. This is mainly seen in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, since the series is set and heavily inspired by Asian culture. As an American researcher, it would be interesting to use this series to study the juxtaposition in gender norms for our vastly different cultures. This was done within the narrative, using the difference in the four nations. However, further research can be done on the real-world cultures that each nation was inspired from.

Limitations in the Research

With this study, there were very few limitations. However, many of them stemmed from *The Loud House*. One of the first limitations is that it is a very new show. It was only released in May of 2016 and research for this study started in mid- 2017. Based on time limitations to finish this study, only two seasons were able to be used, which amounted to a little under eighty eleven-minute segments. As such, there was less information to study from Lincoln. The newness of the series also come into play when trying to find other studies that analyzed this series. This is something that also plagued *Hey Arnold*. Upon gathering different studies to aid in an in-depth analysis of these shows, I couldn't find any academic studies on these shows.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyze the representation of subversive masculinity. There were several questions raised within this study. The first was how masculinity was

framed for Arnold, Aang and Lincoln. The masculinity of all the leads subverted the norms of hegemonic masculinity. This was seen in the fact that their pattern of behavior subverted the expected pattern normalized by Connell's theory. Arnold, Aang and Lincoln directly subverted the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity consistently.

Throughout the series, Arnold would actively subvert the expectations for each characteristic that was used as a framing device in this thesis. Arnold tended to have a complete aversion to aggression and assertiveness. Regarding aggression, specifically, Arnold was represented as a bit of a passive character. This was highlighted in his reactions to altercations with characters like Helga or Harold. For example, during the times that Helga's misguided affection led her to pick on him, he was more likely to take it in stride. When working on a class project with Helga, Gerald and Phoebe, Arnold conceded to most of Helga's demands in "Girl Trouble" (Season 3, Episode 19). His aversion to arguing with her was represented as a norm for him. In fact, it was his retaliation in this same episode that was framed as not only an abnormality, but also as a negative representation of his character. Arnold is also considered subversive in comparison to other characters. When compared to the characters that are more aligned with hegemonic masculinity, Arnold's pattern of behavior is far removed from what is normal to them. Within the framework of his series, Arnold's subversive representation of masculinity was often seen as either a norm for him or a positive within the narrative. The actions that Arnold took were framed as the correct course of action in the series, in episodes that highlighted Arnold's subversive representation of masculinity. Arnold's suggestions were the ones that ended with the characters getting what they wanted.

Aang's framework was a little different, given that the framework for gender in the series was more nuanced. While within the frame of the series, Aang's representation of masculinity was likely subversive. *Avatar: The Last Airbender* had more violence that was prevalent within the narrative. As such, while Aang was relatively non-violent within the narrative of the series, he could be considered more violent than Arnold or Lincoln. Within the series, Aang's framework of masculinity was often challenged. This came to a head in the finale of the series, where Aang was frequently pressured to set aside his beliefs and solve their problem in a way that adhered to hegemonic masculinity. However, by the end of the series, Aang's option was framed as the correct one. Like Arnold, there were times that Aang's pattern of behavior broke from his norms to adhere to hegemonic masculinity. This was mainly seen in "The Desert" (Season 2, Episode 11). In this episode, Aang exhibited a notable departure from his usual behaviors. Aang's peers, mainly Katara, noted how different Aang acted. Within the narrative, this difference was framed negatively, even going so far as to use the music and shading to show how frightening Aang had become. However, not every adherence to hegemonic masculinity was framed negatively. Given the nature of the show, it was necessary for Aang to display his immense strength. Though Aang was able to defeat the Firelord without killing him, Aang still needed to get there through his own prowess.

Lincoln's representation of masculinity was subversive and was a bit more nuanced, given the fact that most of his gender representation comes from his sisters. Lincoln's subversions were framed against his sisters who would adhere to hegemonic masculinity. However, unlike Arnold and Aang, he would overtly make note of his

departure from hegemonic masculinity. He was aware of his own subversions within the narrative.

The environments the characters were raised in and interacted with was indicative of what behaviors were normalized. This was most prominently seen with *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. There is a clear difference in the cultures of the four nations. This leads to a difference in the representation and expectations of gender and gender norms. The Air Nation, where Aang is from, is fluid in its gender representation. Thus, it is a significant influence on why Aang's representation of masculinity is subversive. The Air Nomads raised Aang in a culture of pacifism. Although he is still taught how to fight, seeing that air bending is a martial art form, his method of fighting focuses on evasion causing little to no damage to those around him. Because of the environment that Aang was raised in within the narrative of the show, Aang is far less aggressive. The subversive nature of Aang's upbringing is also notable in that the expectation of masculinity in the other nations adhere more to hegemonic masculinity. Both the southern and northern Water Tribe have cultural norms that normalize men adhering to hegemonic masculinity. The men of the Water Tribe are expected to fight in the war and they also hold power over women because it is the man who chooses his wife. While the cultures of the Earth Kingdom and Fire Nation are far too expansive to solidify the gender representation, both of their elements are indicative of a style of fighting that adheres to hegemonic masculinity, especially in relation to how Aang handles said elements.

While being less extensive than *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, *Hey Arnold* and *The Loud House* have environments that were influential in the subversive representation of

masculinity for their respective characters. For Arnold, the difference in his home environment from characters that adhere more to hegemonic masculinity is indicative of why his representation of masculinity is subversive. The boarding home that Arnold grew up in had an expectation for emotional honesty while also normalizing this characteristic. This is seen in Arnold's interactions with the other tenants. They all take notice of each other's emotions and try to alleviate their problems like Arnold did for Mr. Hyunh in "Arnold's Christmas" (Season 1, Episode 18). For Lincoln's home, his subversive representation of masculinity is influenced by the less binary gender norm in his home. In times where Lincoln overtly takes note of his removal from masculine norms as illustrated in "Roughin It" (Season 1, Episode 32), he notes that it is due to the overwhelming female presence in his house. However, the show frames this fluidity positively given that it's the things that he learns from his sisters that helps him and not his view of what it means to be a man; which are characteristics that incidentally adhere to hegemonic masculinity.

In *Hey Arnold* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, Arnold and Aang get a similar romantic gaze that their female peers get. For Arnold, the framing device for this gaze are the times that Helga fawned over him. This was consistent throughout the series. When the camera was through Helga's gaze, Arnold was an object of affection. He was no longer the male audience's stand in and was instead someone to be gazed at. Using Mulvey's male gaze theory, this made Arnold the same as his female peers that had been gazed at in a similar way. This was a similar case for Aang. He was represented in a way that was like Katara. However, male characters that adhere to hegemonic masculinity

were framed in a different way. In “The Beach” (Season 3, Episode 5) Zuko was being fawned over by unnamed women, however, the way that he was viewed by the camera was less as an object of affection to be gazed at instead. He was represented with an air of dominance through the lens. Through Mulvey’s theory, he was still framed as a male audience stand in.

Arnold, Aang and Lincoln subverted the characteristics and expectation of hegemonic masculinity through their pattern of behavior. This was consistently normalized throughout each series. Even though the characters had times where they also adhered to hegemonic masculinity, the subversions were normalized and far more consistent throughout their respective narratives.

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