From Playboy Penthouse to High-Rise Playboy: The Bachelor’s Evolution

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In “The Lair of the Bachelor,” George Wagner reads *Playboy*-commissioned designs for a series of “masculine” domestic interiors. *Playboy*, says Wagner, “was always dependent on the spatialization of the lifestyle imagined in its pages” (195); the architectural drawings it published function as a means of “imagining sites for the *Playboy* lifestyle” (198). These plans—renderings of fantastic spaces designed to meet the needs of the magazine’s equally fantastic bachelor—appeared in *Playboy* between 1956 and 1970. Wagner notes that each space signalled by the *Playboy* floor plans, architectural elevations, and commentaries exists only as an immaterial, speculative structure;¹ he notes as well the connection between the spatial fantasy elaborated by the magazine and the capitalist ideology both subtending and subtended by it. “The bachelor,” writes Wagner, “lives completely within the world of commodities and the market” (202); his bachelor pad is both “an icon of a liberated social position” as well as “of material acquisition” (204). The bachelor consumes gadgets, outfitting his home with up-to-date, specialized technology, and all to a single end: his seduction of women.

Wagner reads *Playboy*’s imagined interiors as elaborate woman-traps: spatial offspring resulting from the cross between technology and male sexual predation. According to commentaries accompanying artist’s renderings of these interiors, each functions as an engine designed to aid the bachelor in his pursuit, capture, and subduction of women. The magazine’s exegesis emphasizes the difficulty of the hunt, and the skill the wily bachelor must bring to bear upon it; its analysis of the spaces it imagines focuses on the helpful features each prospective trap proffers. As a result of this emphasis on the methods and mechanics of the capture of women, the commentaries Wagner analyses offer no clues regarding the method by which either the bachelor or a species of mediating technology might *eject* a woman from the bachelor’s domestic space.² For example, Wagner notes that the description of the *Playboy* Penthouse Apartment jumps directly from the final moments of seduction, as “[s]oft mood music flows through the room and the stars shine in the casements” while the bachelor “snuggles down” with his latest conquest, to

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the start of a new day, [when] the chime alarm sounds . . . : reaching lazily to the control panel, you [the bachelor] press the buttons for the kitchen circuits and immediately the raw bacon, eggs, bread and ground coffee you did the right things with the night before . . . start their metamorphosis into crisp bacon, eggs fried just right, and steaming fresh java. (201-02)

Wagner observes that “[t]he woman is never there in the morning, but the eggs and bacon are” (202). Yet given the multiple controls in place to ensure the woman does not leave—indeed, to compel her continued attendance on the bachelor—we must ask how it is possible that the tenant of the Penthouse Apartment finds himself serving a mechanical breakfast for one. Apart from the heavily implied obvious, what occurs between the moments of snuggling down and of consuming crisp bacon? When, and how, does the woman leave?

The missing description of her departure represents a substantial lacuna in the catch-and-release program Playboy sets out, since the bachelor’s status as such depends less on his ability to snare women than on his ability successfully to return them to the wild. Indeed, the maintenance of his very manhood demands her exit: Wagner indicates that “the domestic fantasies of Playboy are meant to compensate” for a number of fears surrounding dominant cultural constructions of domestic space (197)—constructions situating a man’s home as “appropriated” by women and children, taken over “as the domain of wife and family” (195). As evidence of these fears, Wagner cites Philip Wylie, who asserts (in his 1958 Playboy essay, “The Womanization of America”) that “America’s females [have] pushed and heckled their way into every private male domain;” Wylie laments what he labels “the encroaching ‘taffeta tide’—the feminization of the suburban domestic realm”—that “[t]he American home, in short, is becoming a boudoir-kitchen-nursery, dreamed up by women, for women, and as if males did not exist as males” (qtd. in Wagner 197-98).

He describes this trend as “spatial and architectural emasculation,” announcing gloomily that in its wake, “[m]en have become spatial expatriates” (qtd. in Wagner 198). As a corrective to this de-territorialization of an entire sex, Playboy proposes within its pages the carving out of all-male (and all-man!) domestic spaces in which the members of bachelor nation can nestle mechanically down. The bachelor “is fantasized as a free agent” whose home is not only “a space of imagined liberation,” but also one “in which technology serves as an extension of sexual desire” (199).

If the space is to continue as a site of liberation, however, its mediating technologies must facilitate not only the gratification of the bachelor’s sexual desire, but also his disconnection from others, especially women. It is no surprise, then, that after identifying desire as the only “palpable condition” of Playboy’s architectural enterprise and enumerating both the tangibles and intangibles after which the bachelor hankers, Wagner specifies the woman
“who seems to want to bolt” as the item topping the single man’s wish list (202). But since the fantasy of the Playboy apartment-as-seduction-prosthetic depends upon the continued (fantastic) existence of the free-agent bachelor, and since the free-agent bachelor only remains so if he can successfully avoid sustained connection with women, the entire Playboy house of cards is ultimately dependent not on the bachelor’s desire for the woman who will bolt, but on the bolting woman’s desire to flee. The collective schematic constructed piecemeal by Playboy over a decade and a half, then, signals that a particular construction of female rather than male desire founds the entire enterprise. And, unfortunately for the bachelor, at least one of the supplementary texts Wagner cites suggests that the bolting woman—whose behaviour must forcefully be shaped through coercion and electronics if our free-agent friend is finally to bed her—is at least as fantastic a construction as both the technologically-insulated bachelor and his Playboy pad.

As a counterpoint to Playboy’s disquisitions on the single man’s ideal domestic space, Wagner offers his readers Helen Gurley Brown’s Sex and the Single Girl (1962), in which the soon-to-be editor of Cosmopolitan magazine imagines the single woman’s ideal apartment. Gurley Brown partially confirms the power dynamic inherent in Playboy’s architectural commentary when she advises her readers that men “expect to corner you and gobble you up like Little Red Riding Hood” (qtd. in Wagner 203); seduction-as-predation, then, is Gurley Brown’s as well as Playboy’s theme. We might reasonably expect Gurley Brown’s text, then, to offer advice to bolting women—pointers on how best to evade the bachelor’s clutches, perhaps. These expectations, however, are thoroughly confounded: Gurley Brown encourages her female audience to facilitate rather than to avoid male predation. She counsels her reader to think of herself as a “star sapphire” whose “apartment is [her] setting,” since “[a] beautiful apartment is a sure man-magnet” (qtd. in Wagner 203). In Gurley Brown’s reading, predatory seduction is what every unmarried woman should encourage by setting herself up in her own apartment, since “if you are to be a glamorous, sophisticated woman that exciting things happen to, you need an apartment, and you need to live in it alone!” (qtd. in Wagner 202). Like the exegetes of Playboy’s fantasy architecture, Gurley Brown situates domestic space as a prosthetic to wield in the service of seduction. Her explicit advice to women, in the brief excerpt of Sex and the Single Girl Wagner quotes, is to facilitate that seduction on their own turf. Her implicit counsel, however, suggests that any answer to the question, “Your place or mine?” will do: her text teaches women to snag men by making men think they’ve done the snagging. Gurley Brown encourages the single girl to trap the bachelor by performing her own capture—she encourages women to occupy simultaneously both positions in the predator/prey binary.

So what happens when Playboy bachelor encounters Cosmo girl on his turf rather than hers? According to his literature, she will attempt to avoid seduction by bolting; according
to hers, however, bolting would be silly. While his apartment may not be the optimum setting for her “jewel,” it will nonetheless suit. In it, she is a glamorous, sophisticated woman in a glamorous, sophisticated place—a woman whose magnet has attracted a man, and to whom exciting things are about to happen! Surely, she doesn’t wish to bolt . . . ? What happens, then, when the bachelor’s only condition of desire for his fantasy space is not met—when the woman he thought was prey turns out to have predatory plans of her own? To offer one answer to this question, I turn to a recent incarnation of the fantastic bachelor and his equally fantastic home.

Barney Stinson, one of the main characters of the television sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* (*HIMYM*, 2005-present), inhabits the twenty-first-century version of the *Playboy* apartment. His Manhattan aerie is the technological extension of himself—an engine composed of disparate parts allowing him literally to signal his purpose with everything he owns; as we are unceasingly reminded, his purpose is first to seduce and then to discard as many women as possible. Unlike the *Playboy* bachelor, however, Barney needs no prosthetic assistance to keep women from fleeing his home to avoid seduction, since the only women invited into it in the first place are those who have already been seduced. More important to Barney than seduction itself is the maintenance of the condition that permits his seductions to continue: his primary concern is in preserving his bachelorhood. When, in *HIMYM*’s season two episode, “World’s Greatest Couple,” Barney grudgingly agrees to let his friend Lily stay with him for a few days, he informs her that in his apartment, she is “in the heart of bachelor country. And, as a woman, you are an illegal immigrant here. Now, you could try to apply for a sex visa, but that only lasts twelve hours—fourteen, if you qualify for multiple entry. Ha!”

In contrast to *Playboy*’s architectural focus “on a set of controls that instrumentally assisted the seduction” by preventing the bolting of women (Wagner 211), Barney’s apartment is designed around a set of controls that ensure women’s forcible departure. His home is a prosthetic designed to evict female guests, and thereby instrumentally to end seduction.

As Barney gives Lily a tour of his apartment, he explains to her its ethos, stating, “I don’t want to *be* in a relationship. That’s why I make it crystal clear to every woman who walks through that door that this is not a place to leave a toothbrush, this is not a place to leave a contact-lens case, this is a place to leave.” In fact, though, Barney doesn’t have to make these things crystal clear: “Whenever a girl wakes up here, I never have to tell her to go build her nest somewhere else,” he says, since “my apartment does it for me.” The prosthetics embedded in Barney’s domestic space functionally cohere into a streamlined woman-ejection device. As the tour proceeds, Barney points out the component parts of this collective machine: there is the king-sized bed only half-covered with a full-sized blanket, and featuring a single pillow (“Everything about this bed,” he explains, “says,
‘Our work here is done.”); a bathroom, sans hairdryer, in which hangs a single towel (“You know where I keep that stuff? Your place.”); a toilet seat, spring-loaded so as perpetually to be up (“The coup de grâce! Patent pending.”); and an extensive, “professionally lit” pornography collection housed on the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves lining the hallway (“Girls see this, they can’t get out of here fast enough.”). But all of these technologies come to naught when Barney, modern playboy, brings home Dawn, HIMYM’s contemporary version of Gurley Brown’s single girl.

The discomfort-by-design Barney’s apartment offers to female guests fails to faze Dawn. No blanket for her on the bed? No problem—the room’s chill cannot disturb her slumber, since she spends the entire night awake, staring at Barney as he sleeps. No towel for her, either? Again, no problem: Dawn doesn’t “buy into the myth that we need to shower every day.” In Barney’s world, “a fridge full of groceries or fresh coffee in the morning” signals a relationship; accordingly, his pantry is empty. But Dawn (you guessed it) doesn’t mind: “I’m boycotting coffee. You may as well drink the tears of a Columbian peasant farmer. God, I love this place! I’m better than porn!”

In Dawn, Barney encounters a woman who refuses to bolt, and who thereby exploits the weakness built into the bachelor’s domestic fantasy. Her rejection of flight is paired with her refusal of the capitalist ideology underwriting the construction of Playboy’s fantastic bachelor: Dawn doesn’t need things. She is proof against the effects of the technology and gadgets in Barney’s antirelationship arsenal. As a result, not only do his machinations with blankets, pillows, towels, and hairdryers have no effect, his employment of technological gadgets (in the form of a rigged toilet seat, or remotely-controlled light and sound systems) is similarly ineffective. No consumer items exist that will insulate Barney from Dawn—that will mediate his relationship to her in such a way as to promote his own convenience and the security of his free-agent status. The borders of bachelor country have been thoroughly breached.

At the precise moment that Barney’s bachelorhood is most threatened by Dawn’s unrelenting presence, Lily enters the apartment. Mistaking her for Barney’s wife, Dawn is finally persuaded to evacuate the premises: she bursts into tearful recriminations and storms out. Her exit triggers Barney’s great discovery: “Wow,” he exclaims to Lily,

That was close. That hippie chick wouldn’t leave . . . She was freakishly immune to everything in my apartment, except you . . . Huh, you’re better than porn! . . . How’d you like to extend your stay here? All you’d have to do is pretend to be my wife, and scare off the occasional one-night stand.

“Pop/Corn”
In the wake of Dawn’s departure, Barney enlists Lily as a species of technology, recruiting her into the prosthetic architecture of the apartment itself. Dawn’s immunity to Barney’s existing stratagems has revealed the exceptional fragility of the construction “bachelor.” Lily’s masquerade as Barney’s wife, then, will provide an additional protective layer for this delicate being, not by signalling its existence overtly (as do the porn collection and the always-up toilet seat), but by thoroughly camouflaging it. Women like Dawn cannot target a bachelor if no bachelor appears to exist. Lily becomes a woman-deterrent device, part of the mediating machine keeping Barney’s domestic space safe from antibachelor incursions.

Her equivalence to just another of the bachelor’s machines is clear when we recall the portrait Wagner (via *Playboy*) paints of the bachelor as the solitary consumer of a mechanical breakfast for one: Lily’s first actions as Barney’s houseguest are to stock his refrigerator and to surprise her host with a breakfast of *crisp bacon, eggs fried just right, and steaming fresh java*. Her induction into the machine, then, takes place through its kitchen circuits, which increasingly become the focus of the protect-Barney’s-bachelorhood project. Lily’s first planned intervention as Barney’s “wife” takes place over another breakfast: after she scares off the woman who spent the night, she slides into the seat the woman has abandoned and shares with Barney the pastries, fresh fruit, orange juice, and coffee laid out on the table. Barney’s gradual relaxation into “married” life is signalled by his growing appreciation of the most important meal of the day: “I have to say, it’s kind of nice having food around here for a change,” he tells Lily.

But in his appreciation of a fully stocked pantry, and in sharing breakfast with the “machine” whose function is simply to prepare it, Barney begins to undo his own bachelorhood. Other changes rapidly accrue, documented in a brief montage of domestic bliss (one that includes a “properly” feminine orgy of consumption as Lily spends Barney’s money): throw pillows, area rugs, flowers, and fresh produce appear in the Stinson pad. Under the direction of his “wife,” Barney’s bookshelves are emptied of pornography and filled with books, and his bed is fully dressed with king-sized linens and multiple pillows. As this montage concludes, we watch Barney and Lily curl up on the now-cozy bed to watch Letterman. The next morning, they are shocked—although we are less so—when they wake up together. The greater shock for Barney, however, comes when he realizes that although they’ve slept together, they haven’t had sex.

“I don’t sleep in the same bed as a woman and not make a move!” he rails at Lily.

How could . . . ? You! You spooned me against my will! . . . We redecorated my place. We stayed in on a Friday night to watch Letterman, and then slept together and didn’t have
sex. Oh my god, we’re in a relationship . . . You were supposed to be the vaccine, but you gave me the disease. You gotta go.

In the “divorce” settlement, Lily keeps the custom-made Italian sheets. The series narrator tells us, as the episode concludes, “And that’s the story of how Aunt Lily furnished her apartment.” Her ejection from the bachelor pad includes the bachelor’s rejection of the changes she effected: the basic conditions of the bachelor’s home are, with her departure, reset.

But domesticity in the form of heterosexual partnership, signalled by the feminine consumption of home furnishing goods, is not all that must be rejected by the bachelor if he is to continue to uphold his position as Playboy’s ideal reader. He must not simply remain unattached; he must also remain obviously masculine and straight. “A bachelor,” writes Wagner,

is a single man, but some delicacy has always been required in the discussion of why the bachelor is single . . . [W]e know that in the shadows of the cocktail party, the speculation is that the bachelor is a loser, or even worse—he’s a queer. And as a result, the décor of the bachelor must be carefully calibrated not to send off the wrong signals. (196)

Wagner’s assertion is echoed by Bill Osgerby, who traces the development of a masculine tradition of conspicuous consumption through the late nineteenth century and into the mid-twentieth. Osgerby notes that despite the fact that “the nineteenth century saw an extensive ‘bachelor subculture’ evolve based on the network of eating houses, barber shops, tobacconists, tailors, city bars and theatres that prospered on the patronage of affluent young bucks” (101), and despite the success of Esquire magazine (launched in 1933 to cater to “masculine identities based upon the pleasures of consumption” [101]), at the time of Playboy’s 1953 inaugural issue,

feminine connotations surrounding consumerism were still pronounced. Self-conscious consumption, therefore, remained an uncertain field for masculine identities keen to maintain their credentials of heterosexual manhood. Hence Playboy’s nude pictorials were crucial. The pin-ups served to mark out the magazine as an unmistakably masculine and heterosexual text, allowing readers—secure in the knowledge that their ‘manly’ identities would not be compromised—to cruise freely through the magazine’s bounty of fashion and furnishing.5 (100)

As such, it is no accident either that the home-decorating purchases in “World’s Greatest Couple” are assigned to Lily rather than to Barney, or that Barney as one incarnation of the Playboy bachelor is so ruthlessly, misogynistically heterosexual: Barbara Ehrenreich’s observation that “the breasts and bottoms” of Playboy’s signature nudes “were necessary not just to sell the magazine, but to protect it” applies equally aptly

“Pop/Corn”
to Barney and his signature parade of disposable women (qtd. in Osgerby 104). Lily-as-home-decorator works to neutralize any suggestion of effeminacy on Barney’s part, but according to the *Playboy* formula, all potential suggestions of bachelorly queerness must also be excised. This is easier said than done on *HIMYM*, however, since both queerness⁶ and the threat of loser-dom are built into Barney from the series’ outset.

In the show’s pilot episode, Ted reveals his deepest fear: that he’ll end up like Barney, who is something of a running joke during the early years of the show (Lily calls him “the dumbest single person alive”)—that he’ll be “that weird, middle-aged bachelor” Marshall and Lily’s kids will “call Uncle Ted” (“Pilot”). As he vacates the apartment he shares with Lily and Marshall so that Marshall can propose marriage to his long-time girlfriend, Ted feels his “loser” single guy status keenly. And in the context of *HIMYM*, it’s a short step from single/loser to single/queer. In the pilot episode, the show presents its committed bachelor as a man who cruises other men in public washrooms (Barney introduces himself to Ted over the urinals in a bar’s mens’ room). Later in the pilot, Barney kisses Marshall full on the lips to demonstrate to Ted the action he (Ted) should have taken with Robin (a shocked collective gasp erupts from the show’s recorded audience). From the moment we meet Barney, then, the spectre of the queer bachelor lurks beneath the over-the-top heterosexuality the character performs. But in “World’s Greatest Couple,” that spectre is rather forcefully (and ham-fistedly) directed away from Barney and onto Marshall—as though the bachelor’s potential queerness is so potent that it cannot simply be kept under wraps but must instead be physically relocated.⁷ As the Barney-Lily “matrimony” storyline develops, a parallel story featuring Marshall’s side of the Lily-Marshall breakup plays out.

Marshall, beginning to climb out of a deep depression, wishes to resume the activities he had previously enjoyed as part of a heterosexual couple, only to discover how difficult those activities are for a single man to undertake. Marshall wants to go to Sunday brunch; he wants to make use of his Alanis Morissette concert tickets; he wants to attend a Broadway performance of *Mamma Mia!*—none of which he feels comfortable doing alone. But Marshall’s friend Brad has also recently been dumped, and the two men decide to do brunch and attend the theatre together. As Brad rhetorically asks, “Why can’t two single bros go out and rock brunch, Sunday-morning style?” Naturally, Marshall becomes a target of ridicule for Robin and Ted, who are dating at this point in the series’ storyline. In “World’s Greatest Couple,” we see Robin and Ted most often in the domestic space of Ted’s apartment, usually snuggling on the sofa. They mock Marshall’s connection with Brad, while Marshall simultaneously denies any romantic relationship—and in fact, there isn’t one.⁸ Robin and Ted, however, represent in this episode a judgmental, prescriptive heteronor-
mativity that Marshall desperately fails to live up to, as evidenced by his increasingly “radical” queer rhetoric:

Okay, you know what? You two are just threatened because I’m a single guy moving in on your couples’ turf. Well guess what? It’s my territory now. I’m peeing all over brunch-es, fancy dinners, and musicals. That’s right. Brad and I are taking back Broadway.

Marshall’s rallying cry, “I don’t care what either of you say. I am going to the Popover Pantry with Brad. We’re here, we hungry, get used to us, Brunch!” fails, however, to move his judges: like Lily and her designer sheets, Brad’s ultimately got to go. But if Marshall fails the heteronormative test in this episode, it is worth noting that Barney also fails it—and not only in “World’s Greatest Couple,” but in every episode leading up to it. Repeatedly overshooting the mark, he caricatures masculine heterosexuality by performing it to excess, too virile to be successfully partnered in a reproductively heterosexual pair.

Although Barney Stinson is not precisely the bachelor Playboy imagines, he appears precisely to be the one the Playboy fantasy creates—the free agent who both disavows intimate relationship with men while using every means at his disposal to resist sustained connection with women. The series’ creators employ queerness as a shifting signifier that both pervades and glances off the Barney character; they also employ a properly masculine strategy of consumption to build Barney’s “den of seduction” (Playboy qtd. in Osgerby 105). The prosthetic technologies built into his home—those woman-deterring gadgets and toys—mark Barney as a late-capitalist masculine consuming subject par excellence. As such, his home—Playboy’s mid-twentieth-century bachelor pad, enacted onscreen in 2006—signals masculine heterosexuality, solving the “problem” not of female resistance to seduction, but of female resistance to seduction’s end. The bachelor, enacted, is concerned in his domestic space with sending queerness packing, and, rather than cajoling those women who would otherwise bolt, with forcefully removing those women who won’t. The bachelor pad in practice, then, is a prosthetic less of erection than of r/ejection.

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1 The one bachelor pad appearing both in Playboy and in reality is Hugh Hefner’s mansion. Wagner points out that although schematics for the mansion are not published in the magazine, we may catch a glimpse of it through the living-room window in the drawing of the bachelor’s townhouse that appears in Playboy’s May 1962 issue (208).

2 Again, the exception is Hugh Hefner’s fully realized Playboy mansion, which features a trap door in the living room floor, “through which,” writes Hef, “you can drop twelve feet into a kidney-shape indoor pool. ‘That,’ I’ll tell my visitors, ‘is where we throw the old discarded girls” (qtd. in Wagner 212). At first glance, then, the mansion seems to come equipped with a device (however objectionable) for evicting
women. However, the mansion’s trap door doesn’t actually remove a woman from the premises, it merely relocates her; in addition, the presence of the under-living-room pool echoes the indoor pool featured in plans for the bachelor’s weekend hideaway (Playboy, April 1959), which functions as a kind of aquarium “further[ing] the themes of containment: the woman becomes a zoological specimen, confined and observed within the pool” (Wagner 205). No instructions are provided for how the specimen might be released from its watery captivity.

3 Tangible desires: possession/consumption of the electronic gadgets and stylish accessories marking the bachelor as “in the city, but insulated from it by altitude . . . controlling his world remotely,” so that “security, convenience, and desire are electronically intertwined” (202). Intangible desire(s): erasure of fears of the potential for psychic castration signalled by the “encroaching ‘taffeta tide.’”

4 The premise of HIMYM is deceptively simple: a man in his fifties tells his children the story of how he met their mother. That man is Ted Mosby; his story, which continues to unfold, has now stretched through eight and a half seasons of television. Although Ted ostensibly tells his story in 2030, the “how I met your mother” portions of each episode—which comprise more than 90 percent of the show’s screen time—are set in the month and year in which each episode originally airs.

In the show’s pilot episode, Ted begins dating Robin, a Canadian ex-pat attempting to break into broadcast journalism, and we are introduced to Barney, a misogynist bachelor who has, by the time we meet him, seduced and discarded more than a hundred women (the season four episode, “Right Place, Right Time” sees Barney celebrating his 200th conquest). Barney is situated as a Lothario from the first moment he appears onscreen: in the first lines he speaks, he rhetorically asks Ted, “You know how much I like half-Asian girls?” (“Pilot”). In the season two episode with which this essay is concerned, the character Lily has broken up with Marshall and is destitute after having given up her teaching job to pursue her dream of attending art school. She finds herself temporarily homeless and briefly moves in with Barney. The two play, after a fashion, with domesticity and matrimony.

5 In the late nineteenth century, masculine pleasure in self-conscious consumption also needed to be accompanied by displays of “manliness.” The anonymous writer of “The Lair of the Bachelor,” an essay published in the July 1887 edition of The Decorator and Furnisher, describes the five-room New York apartment maintained by “Mr. Herman Oelrichs, the agent of the North German Lloyd Steamship Company” as filled with “costly and delicate bric-à-brac” supplanting the more usual décor associated with the stereotypical bachelor (“boxing gloves and foils,” “racing prints on the walls,” “a poker table, with its usual paraphernalia, a miscellaneous assortment of pipes,” “and everywhere countless pairs of slippers, wrought by fair hands to give ease to the tired and lonely occupant”). The writer asserts that “the bachelor apartment of today is a totally different affair” than the sad, sere masculine
spaces formerly occupied by unmarried men. He or she notes that in Oelrichs’s and others’ apartments, “we have pictures, lounges, faience, carvings, books, etchings, the piano or the violin, but generally with some one predominant feature to mark the owner’s taste”—one New York bachelor has decorated his lair with “a collection of India shawls that would arouse envy in the most placid and contented of woman-kind.” Perhaps as a result of the potential crossing of gender lines signalled by the recognition that both men and women might desire the objets the writer describes, he or she takes care to assure readers of the virile masculinity of the one bachelor she or he identifies by name, describing Oelrichs as “[a]n athlete himself,” who “doubtless when the spirit moves him to ‘punch some one’s head,’ betakes himself to the Athletic Club” (121). Oelrichs is a manly man, then, and all the etchings in the world won’t soothe his savage masculine need to knock a dude out.

6 Barney is played by Neil Patrick Harris, an openly gay actor—New York magazine dubs him “Hollywood’s First (Openly) Gay Breakthrough Star,” lauding his ability to play “a womanizer” (Nussbaum 1). Certainly, at the metatelevisual level, one of the pleasures of watching Harris-as-Barney derives from awareness of the disjunction between Barney’s personality and Harris’s public persona. Harris was not publicly out when HIMYM was created and launched, but his sexuality was not a secret to friends and family (Nussbaum 5). Since he was invited to audition for the role of Barney by a friend, casting director Megan Branman (Dransfeldt), and since he’d attended cast events with his partner, presumably his sexuality was also not a secret to the show’s cast and crew. When “World’s Greatest Couple” aired in October 2006, Harris was a month away from publicly outing himself via interviews in People and Out magazines, and on Howard Stern’s Sirius Radio show, in a preemptive series of moves to prevent a “scandalous” tabloid-style outing by Perez Hilton (Nussbaum 5).

7 Six episodes later, the relocation of queerness will be more permanently registered in the series’ overarching text: in the tenth episode of season two, “Single Stamina,” we meet James, Barney’s gay and black half-brother. In the character of James, race intersects with sexuality to forcefully assert difference and to shield Barney—presumably for the remainder of the show’s run—from any whiff of queerness. But just in case James’s racialized embodiment isn’t enough to do this trick, the show’s writers bring dialogue to bear on the matter as well. When she learns that James is gay, Robin is surprised: “Never in a million years would I picture you with a gay brother,” she tells Barney, as though the sheer force of his heterosexuality should be powerful enough to tamp down all potential homosexuality in his ambit.

8 The pair do almost spend the weekend at a B&B in Vermont to attend a wedding (“Two single guys on the prowl . . . it’ll be like Wedding Crashers!” Ted jeers), and the show’s writers play up the homosocial/sexual potential of such a trip: after Brad convinces Marshall to attend the affair, he triumphantly tells him that when he called to book a room, “There was one [. . .] left, and we got it! Walt Whitman suite, bro!”
Works Cited


