

Bachelor Parties, Bromances, and the Brokeback West:  
Male Friendship in Post-Closet American Culture

By

Jeff Casey

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2016

Date of final oral examination: 5/10/2016

This dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Michael Peterson, Associate Professor, Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies

Julie D'Acci, Professor, Gender and Women's Studies

Kristin Hunt, Assistant Professor, School of Film, Dance and Theatre, Arizona State  
University

Manon van de Water, Professor, Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies

Michael Vanden Heuvel, Professor, Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies

© Copyright by Jeff Casey 2016  
All Rights Reserved

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the guidance and support of the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies (ITS) program faculty and staff—including our ever-helpful Graduate Coordinator Brenda Weiss. I am indebted to my advisor Michael Peterson for his insight, support, and feedback, all of which helped to shape this dissertation. I deeply appreciate the generosity of my dissertation committee: Julie D’Acci, Kristin Hunt, Manon van de Water, and Michael Vanden Heuvel.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my graduate student colleagues in the ITS program. I am particularly grateful to Sandy Peterson, with whom I have so often shared the highs and lows of this journey, and to Niccole Carner and Laura Farrell-Wortman, who read nearly every page of my dissertation and offered their encouragement, advice, and insights.

I have received generous financial support in completing this dissertation from the UW-Madison Graduate School in the form of a Chancellor’s Fellowship, Research Travel Grant, and Vilas Conference Grant. I have also been supported by numerous scholarships from the Department of Theatre and Drama.

## A Dedication

My Arthur, whom I shall not see  
Till all my widow'd race be run;  
Dear as the mother to the son,  
More than my brothers are to me.  
-Tennyson, *In Memoriam*

I met Aeyn Edwards (née Peter Wheat) in the summer of 2000, after I joined the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Texas at Austin. It was my first “real job” after college, answering phones and processing paperwork, and Aeyn and I were the youngest full-time employees in the entire building. We would sneak down the stairwell, smoke cigarettes in the blistering heat of summer, and crack jokes about the cantankerous and absentee faculty members we worked under. I immediately liked Aeyn—his goofy sense of humor, convulsive laughter, and incorrigible need to break rules. Over the next year we hung out more and more. Our weekly appointment to watch the latest episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was faithfully observed. When Aeyn and his partner Tim got engaged, they asked me to preside over their wedding, and, though the union had no legal standing in the great state of Texas, being asked to do so is still one of the greatest honors of my life. When they moved to Arizona, I went to visit them nearly every summer, even after Tim died suddenly in a car accident.

Aeyn died in 2011 after a long battle with cancer. I have tried for some time to make sense of the loss. Before his death, when I imagined my life five, ten, twenty, or thirty years down the road, he had been there in my imagination, somewhere in the red rocks of the Sonoran Desert. In that future, I continued to visit him years after year. We would hike through the scalding desert, talk about our lives, and laugh at one another’s bad jokes over beers and tacos. With his passing I lost a fragment of my future, a reliable outpost of love that was supposed to last into old age.

In many ways this dissertation is about the love between men and what that love can mean in a post-closet world, and this project would not have been possible without Aeyn, who taught me so much about the love between men.

I owe this dissertation to Aeyn in another sense. He left me a sum of money, without which I doubt I would have been able to complete my degree. Aeyn and I both worked in administrative jobs for years, saving money so that we could go back to school. His cancer diagnosis prevented him from realizing those ambitions, and he died without finishing his undergraduate degree in philosophy. So, I am living out one of Aeyn's dream, one he didn't have the time to live for himself. In completing this dissertation, I hope to honor his memory.

## Contents

	Acknowledgments	<i>i</i>
	Dedication	<i>ii</i>
	Abstract	<i>v</i>
	Introduction	1
1	Romantic Friendship, Passionless Pals, Straight Panic, and Bromantic Friendship: An Overview of Male Friendship in American Culture	64
2	How Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em in the Closet Once They’ve Seen <i>Brokeback Mountain</i> : Homosociality and Fantasy in the American West	118
3	Think Like a Man: Bachelor Parties, Intoxication, and Ritual Homosociality	169
4	A Tenderness Which was Uncommon: Melancholy, Male Friendship, and Narratives of Maturity	220
5	Queer Cannibals and Deviant Detectives: Subversion and Homosocial Desire in NBC’s <i>Hannibal</i>	261
	Conclusion	288
	Bibliography	297

## Abstract

Gender and sexuality scholars have tended to see male homosociality as ancillary to homophobia and patriarchy. Under this view, male same-sex relations are largely mechanisms for maintaining heteronormativity. Representations of male relationships in American narrative culture have only lent credence to this view. The present study attempts to complicate this picture. First, building on recent scholarship on masculinity, I argue that the narrow understanding of “hegemonic masculinity” fails to account for the plurality of performances and discourses that are manifest in most media representation of men. To properly understand the norms of hetero-masculinity and homosociality, we must account for the shifting “scripts” taken up by men throughout their lives and across different contexts. Second, I argue that contemporary culture is undergoing a complex, if inchoate, reimagining of male friendship in response to LGBTQ politics. Although homophobia and misogyny remain deeply ingrained in representations of hetero-masculinity, an emerging anti-homophobic or “post-closet” culture has disrupted the homophobia-laden representations of male friendship of the previous century. Post-closet representations of male friendship, indeed, have begun to incorporate queer-inflected discourses and performances. They map onto male friendships tropes of straight and gay romance. Hence, the “bromance” genre increasingly imagines friendships as life-long commitments between male “partners” that exist as complement to marriage.

Each chapter of the dissertation examines a specific set of texts that are united by mythologies (e.g., the American West as the crucible of American masculinity), fantasies (e.g., the bachelor party as a fantasy of male liberation), or genres (police procedurals about psychopathic killers). While my focus is on contemporary culture, I use a historical lens to contextualize the contemporary moment and assess how much, or how little, change can be discerned within each set of texts. The resulting analysis is mixed. The social boundaries between gay and straight masculinities have begun to erode, but misogyny and homophobia remain durable in many

homosocial rituals, fantasies, and mythologies. Nevertheless, my assessment is guardedly optimistic. Across various media, post-closet culture allows for the reimagining of affection between straight men beyond the limitations of heteronormativity.

## Introduction

Standup comedian Louie CK's FX network series *Louie* (2010-present) has proven to be one of the most adventurous and sophisticated sitcoms on television. CK plays a version of himself, a divorced comedian raising two young girls in New York. The series has been particularly insightful, if not unproblematic, in its examination of masculinity. The episode entitled "Miami" provides an interesting look at male friendship. Louie travels to Miami for work and meets a handsome, affable Cuban-American lifeguard, Ramon. Ramon drags Louie along with him on a tour of "the real Miami" and later to a small house party. Enlivened by the experience, Louie decides to stay in Miami a few days longer.

The next day Louie asks Ramon if he would like to hangout. The two men frolic in the ocean, and that night Louie catches Ramon in the hotel lobby and invites him for a drink. As they drink together, Ramon awkwardly asks why Louie prolonged his stay, and Louie fumblingly tries to explain himself. Ramon is anxious that Louie is romantically interested in him, and Louie cannot quite articulate a response. I quote at length the dialogue in order to capture how language fails both men, as they attempt to "clear up" Louie's motives:

Ramon: Hey, uh, Louie, can I, uh, can I ask you something?

Louie: Yeah.

Ramon: It might be a little weird... kind of a question, but it's... it's just that I've been— Why did you stay here... longer?

Louie: Oh, why did I, um ...?

Ramon: Yeah.

Louie: Well, I, ya know... I just, um, I—okay, you know [*incoherent consonant sounds*] To be honest, I just wanted to spend more time, you know... hanging out, and ...

Ramon: Yeah, see, that's what I thought. [*uncomfortable laughter*]

Louie: Yeah, but, yeah, but... look, I know, I know, I know what you're asking...

Ramon: I...

Louie: But, but... no, no...

Ramon: Hey, it's cool...

Louie: Yeah, but... no, no...

Ramon: It's just that I, you know, I...

Louie: Yeah, but, I'm not—I'll, I'm not... Okay, like I don't... I don't judge anyone...

Ramon: Yeah! Me neither.

Louie: But, but, but I'm not—And, okay, first of all, I have, I have zero anything, okay?

Ramon: Okay.

Louie: I guess, what—the thing is, I feel like...

Ramon: See, see. I'm gonna stop you there. [*both laughing*] Look, man, my uncle Chavo, when he said all men are brothers. Cool. It's cool, man. And honestly, you're a great guy, cool, fun to hang out with. It's just... be yourself.

Louie: What do you mean? What do you mean? Be myself?

Ramon: Dude, alright, I got this cousin, cousin Manny, right. He's...

Louie: Yeah, but no, that's... I'm not... You, you, I, I just—It's not... It's like I don't know if I've ever, I don't know if I ever... I'm not trying anything—and I don't even, I mean, I'm not...

Ramon: I mean, dude—

Louie: Okay. I know. Hey, man, you know. Yeah, okay.

Ramon: Alright. I don't take anything back. You know what I mean?

Louie: Me neither. Yeah.

Ramon: It was fun. It was cool. You know what I mean? And you're a good dude, and I wish you the best.

Louie: Hey, man, me too, man. [*They shake hands.*] Thanks a lot. Cool, man. Okay. Take it easy.

The two men shaking hands, and Louie remains, sipping his drink alone. At first glance, we may read this scene as an instance of homophobia preventing two men from enjoying one another's company. They are so intensely gripped by homophobia that they cannot even utter the word "gay," even to say, "I'm not gay." In this way, the scene is an instance of the comedic mistaken-for-gay trope, which is common to television and film.

However, this scene is not simply characterized by homophobia. If this was the case, Louie could simply say, "Hey, I'm not a fag." In doing so, Louie would assert his heterosexuality and position himself above abject queerness through a homophobic slur. Yet, both men carefully avoid being explicitly homophobic. They repeatedly qualify themselves with declarations of gay tolerance.

Louie says, “I don’t judge anyone...” and Ramon quickly agrees. Ramon alludes to his cousin Manny, who is presumably gay, and he exhorts Louie to “just be yourself.” Obviously these gestures toward queer acceptance are belied by the anxious homophobia that motivates the entire conversation. Indeed, the entire logic of the scene turns on how the fear of homosexual desire or being mistaken for gay interplays with the desire to not appear homophobic. We could then classify the scene as an example of the not-that-there’s-anything-wrong-with-that trope, which was perhaps first seen in the *Seinfeld* episode “The Outing” (1993). A reporter mistakes Jerry Seinfeld and his best friend George Costanza for a romantic couple. Their repeated attempts to correct the error are hampered by, among other things, their compulsive disavowal of overt homophobia, expressed in the phrase “not that there’s anything wrong with that.” Jerry and George’s most adamant assertions of heterosexuality are derailed by their gay-tolerant qualifications.

Yet, unlike *Seinfeld*, Louie and Ramon cannot even utter the word “gay.” They, indeed, have trouble forming complete sentences. I quote the scene above in order to highlight the stammering and elisions, which leave lacuna throughout the text. Unlike Jerry and George, who are unequivocal in disclaiming homosexuality, Louie stops short. He seems almost on the verge of expressing uncertainty, rather than definitive disidentification, when he says, “It’s like I don’t know if I’ve ever, I don’t know if I ever...” Everything in the series indicates that Louie is decidedly straight, but in the “Miami” episode itself there is room for doubt. Throughout the preceding scene, Louie and Ramon play in the ocean and ride a bicycle together through a Cuban neighborhood. Louie is charmed by Ramon’s carefree manner, and the adventure lifts Louie from his usual gloomy temper. The sequence, much of it in montage, resembles a falling-in-love sequences from a romantic comedy and Ramon’s revivifying effect on Louie could be compared to the cliché of the vivacious love-interest who pulls the stuffy male protagonist out of his morose stupor. Thus, it may be the case that Louie simply cannot say that he is not attracted to Ramon because, at some level, this handsome athletic

young man has swept Louie off his feet. The ambiguity made possible by what goes unsaid in the men's dialogue leaves open such possibilities. This scene and its ambiguities are quintessential to the shifting norms and attitudes toward male friendship in the present age of queer visibility.

Twenty-first century popular culture, and to a lesser extent high culture, is awash in self-conscious representation of male friendship. This dissertation aims to examine how male friendships have been represented in the past and, more importantly, how they are represented today, as a consequence of shifting norms of gender and sexuality over the past forty years. My principal thesis will be that, although homophobia and misogyny remain deeply entrenched, an emerging anti-homophobic, or post-closet, culture is already reshaping in significant ways how we imagine male friendship and how friendship is represented in film, television, literature, and theatre. These cultural shifts, in turn, present ever new opportunities for reimagining "straight masculinity" beyond the limitations of heteronormativity. Each chapter of this dissertation will examine a specific set of texts that are united by mythologies (e.g., the American West or the myth of male victimhood), fantasies (e.g., the bachelor party as a fantasy of male liberation), genres (detective fiction and police procedurals about psychopathic killers), and similar meta-textual "scripts." Each chapter will take a long historical perspective, examining the historical and medial legacies that lead up to the contemporary era, but will focus on contemporary (broadly construed) narrative representations of male friendship. In each chapter, the central question is how have durable myths, fantasies, and generic conventions persisted and remained unchanged over time *as well as* how they have been transformed along with the broader culture.

This introduction begins with a discussion of sociological and popular writings on masculinity, male friendship, and homosociality in order to flesh out a cultural context and to build a theoretical apparatus, through which groups of texts will be considered in the subsequent chapters. The next chapter will outline a rough historical framework for the dissertation.

## Key Terms and the Conceptual Scope of this Project

Before proceeding, I should define some key terms and concept, and, in so doing, I will define the scope of this dissertation. To begin with, I will often use the terms “homosociality” and “male friendship” as more or less interchangeable, but the different denotations of the terms are important for defining the scope of the present study. Male friendship is essentially a species of homosociality. Homosociality, in my usage, refers to all instances of male same-sex socialization. The focus of this dissertation is male friendship, especially “intimate” friendships, as opposed to the more general category of homosociality. To maintain this narrow focus, most of my “case studies” will *not* be instances of male relationships based on their employment (coworkers or comrades in arms) or familial relationships (fathers and sons or brothers). In the first chapter, I will briefly look at buddy cop films (e.g., *Lethal Weapon*), theatrical workplace dramas (e.g., David Mamet’s *Glengarry Glen Ross*), or family dramas (i.e., Sam Sheppard’s *True West*) because these examples have been central to scholarly writings on homosociality. Nevertheless, the focus will be on relationships defined as friendships *per se*.

Part of why I distinguish between these two related categories, homosociality and friendships, is because of the different political valences they have. Whereas my attitude toward friendship is ambivalent but generally optimistic, I regard any sort of institutionalized homosociality as inherently problematic. Any institution, practice, or site which is officially or *de facto* sex-segregated—fraternities, men’s clubs, corporations with all-male or dominantly male executives, etc.—are suspect in my estimation. Thus, while I am at times guardedly optimistic about how straight men transcend homophobia and sexism in their friendships, I am certain that homosociality more broadly is a negative phenomenon.

Another question is how homosociality relates to homosexuality, or how “same-sex desire” (broadly construed) relates to homosexual desire. I do not have an entirely satisfying answer to these questions, because these ambiguities are part of what interests me about many of the texts I will consider herein. I remain agnostic as to where exactly homosociality ends and homosexuality begins. Homosexuality and homosociality are distinct, but the boundaries between the two are sites of negotiation, as opposed to absolute borders. Jane Ward’s recent book *Not Gay: Sex Between Straight White Men* provides one explanation for how difficult it is to map out the terrain between homosocial and homosexual as categories. Ward convincingly argues that “homosexual contact is a ubiquitous feature of the culture of straight white men.”<sup>1</sup> In making this argument, she, of course, must contend with the prima facie objection that a man who has sex with another man is by definition gay or bisexual. Ward counters that, whether we know it or not, our culture regularly exceptionalizes homosexual behavior between men and makes allowances for various circumstances that permit straight white men, in particular, to disavow homosexual acts as incidental to their core sexuality. Some of Ward’s examples are familiar—a variety of sexual acts used in fraternity and military hazing rituals, for example—but nearly any American man has experienced, seen, or heard of sexual acts between putatively straight men. Television writer and producer Bryan Fuller discusses how, in an attempt to “correct” his budding homosexual inclinations, his parents forced him to spend time with his more hetero-masculine brothers. Much to Fuller’s surprise, his brothers and their friends engaged in “circle jerks,” or mutual masturbation. Yet, Fuller, now openly gay, notes that all of the participants were otherwise straight.<sup>2</sup> Such sexual activity is usually explained away as “juvenile experimentation” that has no bearing on one’s “real” sexual orientation. We demonstrably count some homosexual acts as evidence of being “gay” but not others, and the very meaning of sexual identity is not defined by objective behavior. Ward argues that the ideological construction of

sexuality is designed to exceptionalize homosexual activities between white straight men. Ward writes,

I conceptualize heterosexual subjectively as constituted not by a lack of homosexual sex or desire, but by an enduring investment in heteronormativity, or in the forces that construct heterosexuality as natural, normal, and right and that disavow associations with abnormal, or queer, sexual expressions. This investment in heteronormativity is itself a *bodily desire*; in fact, I believe it is *the* embodied heterosexual desire, more powerful than, say, a woman's yearning for male torsos or penises or a man's longing for vaginas or breasts. It is the desire to be sexually unmarked and normatively gendered.<sup>3</sup>

Paradoxically, the embodied desire for heteronormativity depends upon homosocial relations that in turn often manifest homoerotic and even homosexual desires and behaviors, such as circle jerks and homosexual hazing acts.

This is not to say that homosociality is indistinguishable from homosexuality, but the two categories are neither mutually exclusive nor is one the subset of the other. Homosociality, or more precisely homosocial desire, cannot be defined through a dialectical negation. It cannot be defined as "any male social interaction that does not involve homosexual sex," for example. Such a definition would beg the question of what constitutes "sex" as opposed to platonic physical intimacy. When is a caress just a caress, and when is it a sexual act? What distinguishes an admiring glance ("That guy is ripped," a college-age jock says admiringly) from an erotic glance ("Look at his ass!" the jock's buddy replies)? Ward argues that the boundary between homosexual and merely homosocial is defined by the strategic needs of white heterosexual men. I would add to this, however, that these dividing lines have long been contested. Today the human body is sexualized in a manner that is historically contingent. Nineteenth century male friends (who held hands, kissed, cuddled, and slept in the same beds) perceived their physical intimacy differently than we would. Such contact was not "sexual" or "erotic" in their conception. Again, the definition of sexual versus platonic is organized by the normative conceptions of gender, intimacy, sociality, and sex within a given culture.

Homosociality and homosexuality have their most ambiguous relationship in instances where the sexual objectification or exploitation of women is central—for example, a group of men watching a “stag film” or internet pornography together, two men mutually masturbating one another at a pornographic theatre, a group of men frequenting a strip club or a brothel, or two men sharing intimate details of their sexual past. Such homosocial activities are at once homoerotic, in that some part of the erotic pleasure comes from the same-sex partners, and misogynistically heterosexual. In such instances, homosociality and any attendant homoeroticism are easily re-consolidated into normative hetero-masculinity and, far from challenging the existing heteronormative culture, serves to shore it up. As Ward argues, in such instances, an individual’s identification with and investment in “the project of heteronormativity” is more important than whether his actions could be classified as homosexual or not. These examples also demonstrate how the ideological formulation of straight masculinity always already carries internal contradictions, which can be leveraged to challenge the mythical solidity and absoluteness of that identity position. By focusing on hyper-masculinity examples (fraternities and military service men), Ward discovers instances in which hetero-masculinity appear intransigently normative. Yet, as I will argue, American popular culture is increasingly interested in these formerly invisible aspects of male homosociality. It is not merely scholars and academics who recognize the incongruities of sexual and gender identity. Queer and feminist academic discourses, themselves often a response to activist discourses from historically marginalized peoples outside the Academy, have made their way into popular discourses, and, as a consequence, expose masculinity and male friendships to queer- and feminist-informed scrutiny.

Ultimately, my concern in this dissertation is less with sex *per se*. I have tended to exclude from this study instances in which there are explicit sexual relationships between men, but I have tried to include instances where the boundary between sociality and eroticism are blurred—with the

understanding that eroticism has an ambiguous denotation. The text selection then is a bit theory laden to the extent that I have selected for the purpose of exploring this ambiguous territory. These instances of textual ambiguity do present hermeneutical problems. In some cases, explicit censorship prevents overt expressions of queer sexuality, as in most American cinema between 1934 and the 1960s and in American television well into the 1990s. In other cases, individual characters may be incapable of articulating such desire. For example, as I will discuss in chapter four, Brick in Tennessee Williams's play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* seems simply incapable of facing his own sexuality, unable to even entertain the possibility of sexual attraction between him and his best friend Skipper. We cannot draw the conclusion that he is in denial about his homosexual desire. The text simply provides insufficient evidence for this conclusion, but the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Other texts examined here strategically leave open the question of sexuality. For example, as discussed in chapter five, NBC's *Hannibal* plays with the ambiguous sexual relationship between its two leading men. Yet, these omissions, gaps, and ambiguities are not empty of information. On the contrary, they are all the richer for leaving such questions open.

### **Masculinity as Homophobia**

Masculinity studies as a field emerged in large part as a reaction to feminist studies and, to a lesser extent, gay and lesbian studies. Masculinity scholarship at its best is constantly in dialogue with feminist and queer studies. Historical and sociological accounts of masculinity have demonstrated how in the twentieth century straight masculinities were constituted in relation and often in dialectical opposition to "femininity" and queer masculinities. Race, class, geography, citizenship, age, religion, ability, and other intersectional identities further modulated masculinity. These interrelationships between masculinity, queerness, and femininity were never purely dialectical. Masculinity was never a monolithic category, and masculinity could not simply be reduced to the

“opposite” of gay masculinity or femininity. Nevertheless, discourses of gender and sexuality—be they popular or “scientific”—tended to imagine these identities in binary terms, however implicitly or unconsciously. As a consequence, the dominant ideas about masculinity cannot be properly understood without accounting for how they were co-constructed from the late nineteenth century through late twentieth century.

The emergence of a homosexuality identity within medical and popular discourse of the late nineteenth century overlapped with a series of social upheavals in American culture. At the turn of the twentieth century, these upheavals radically called into question many of the most basic categories of identity. Following the demise of Reconstruction, whites, particularly in the South, fought a bloody war against African American’s attempts to claim basic civil rights. Anglo-Americans in Northern cities renegotiated the meaning of “whiteness,” as succeeding waves of non-Anglo immigrants entered the United States and began to claim political power. The Second Industrial Revolution reshuffled the most basic working conditions for many Americans, driving an unprecedented concentration of wealth and propelling the development of the modern labor movement. The feminist movement challenged male domination of the public sphere, and a series of related social reform movements, such as temperance, social purity, and social hygiene, challenged institutions like the saloon and the brothel. Numerous other historical and cultural phenomena could be named, but the upshot of this cluster of social changes is that Americans of all races, classes, ethnicities, and genders had to reevaluate their identity positions. Amidst this social upheaval, white middle-class men were reimagining what counted as an ideal model for manhood. As Gail Bederman has observed, the heretofore dominant ideal of Victorian manliness lost some of its prestige as a masculinity more associated with working-class men was ascendant. Middle and upper-class *manhood* has been defined by self-control, rationality, refinement, and sympathy. It was dialectically opposed to boyhood. The newer concept of *masculinity* was dialectically opposed to

femininity and was defined by a modicum of aggression and sexual appetitiveness.<sup>4</sup> The emergent notion of masculinity precariously positioned relative to the dominant notion of manhood, as well as the dominant ideals of womanhood.

Converging with these developments, though lagging by three decades or so, was the emergence of a gay subculture in American cities in the early twentieth century. George Chauncey in *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* has demonstrated that an active gay male subculture thrived in New York City from the 1880s to the 1930s. The subculture existed, he argues, in a relatively public manner and with relatively few repressive measures launched against it until the pre-War period. Over this period, Chauncey argues, the boundaries between “normal” men and queer men became increasingly better defined. Prior to the 1930s, a more flexible notion of sexual identity operated, allowing for multiple subtle gradations of participation in gay subcultures.<sup>5</sup> David Johnson in *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* similarly argues that Washington, DC was a relatively hospitable environment for gays and lesbians prior to Senator Joe McCarthy’s communist witch hunts.<sup>6</sup> The Great Depression, the New Deal, and World War II caused radical shifts in the geographic distribution of the population, disruptions of normative familial and community bonds, and concentrations of men, because of military service, public works projects, factories, and transitory labor camps. All of these factors allowed for an unprecedented growth of gay subcultures, especially in urban centers.<sup>7</sup> As John D’Emilio argues, “World War II also marked a critical turning point in the social expression of homosexuality. It created a substantially new ‘erotic situation’ that led to a sudden coalescence of an urban gay subculture in the 1940s.”<sup>8</sup> The relative openness of gay culture in urban centers provided a target for the paranoiac anxiety of the Cold War.

Over the course of the early twentieth century the “fairy” or homosexual came to represent the dialectical opposite of the normative heterosexual man. Virile heterosexual desire had become

the *sine qua non* of masculinity, which differentiated men from women, queers, and effete men.<sup>9</sup> As George Chauncey writes,

But heterosexuality became even more important to middle-class men because it provided them with a new, more positive way to demonstrate their manhood. Sexual style has long been a crucial aspect of gender style; both sexual aggressiveness and sexual self-control—as well as the ability to propagate and support children—had served as markers of manliness among different groups of men. But by the late nineteenth century, sexual personality—or “sexuality”—had emerged as a distinct domain of personhood and an independent basis for the assertion of manliness. Middle-class men increasingly can see their sexuality—their heterosexuality, or exclusive desire for women—as one of the hallmarks of a real man. It was as if they had decided that no matter how much their gender comportment might be challenged as unmanly, they were normal men because they were heterosexual.<sup>10</sup>

By the mid-twentieth century, the performance of masculinity—in clothing, embodiment, speech, and other behavior—was almost conflated with heterosexuality. “Effeminacy” was in many ways synonymous with homosexuality, just masculinity was synonymous with heterosexuality. The failure to perform masculinity was grounds for suspicion of being homosexual.

Even as an emerging gay rights movement took shape in the late 1960s, a medicalized discourse had been established to monitor the development of boys’ sexuality. A 1969 *Time* magazine article, “The Homosexual: Newly Visible, Newly Understood,” emphasizes the importance of monitoring juvenile sexual and gender development: “A boy who likes dolls or engages in occasional homosexual experiments is not necessarily ‘queer’: such activities are often a normal part of growing up. On the other hand, a child who becomes preoccupied with such interests or is constantly ill at ease with the opposite sex obviously needs some form of psychiatric counseling.”<sup>11</sup> Peter and Barbara Wydens’s *Growing Up Straight: What Every Thoughtful Parent Should Know About Homosexuality* (1968) aimed to educate parents about how early childhood development causes homosexuality and, consequently, about the preventive measures parents may take to head off homosexuality in their own children. The Wydens write that parents shouldn’t obsess over close male friendships—being overly concerned about a child’s sexuality can paradoxically produce deviancy—but should carefully consider those friendships and ask some key diagnostic questions:

How can you tell whether a chum relationship is excessively close? The experts suggest some test questions. Are these boys constantly and exclusively involved with each other? Are they always going off alone together to lonely places? Are they visibly unhappy—even ‘mooning’—when they are away from each other for a day or two? If such children are not interested in baseball and other normal physical activities of childhood, the chances are that they should not be questioned about it, but that the parents should seek professional advice.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, parents were encouraged to police their boys’ gender development from a very early age in a variety of ways, including their same-sex friendships.

Gender scholar Michael Kimmel articulated the relationship between masculinity and homophobia in his article “Masculinity as Homophobia.” The title of the article is somewhat deceptive. Kimmel actually presents the myriad of intersecting forces that shape masculinity in relationship to various other identities, but he prioritizes homophobia as a foundational element of modern manhood constituted in opposition to femininity and homosexuality. The latter two are conflated in homophobia, with the homosexual being little more than a feminized man. Kimmel writes, “In this sense, homophobia, the fear of being perceived as gay, as not a real man, keeps men exaggerating all the traditional rules of masculinity, including sexual predation with women. Homophobia and sexism go hand in hand.”<sup>13</sup> Kimmel argues that the lived experience of many men is characterized by fear and anxiety at the prospect of being “discovered” as falling outside the strictly policed boundaries of masculinity and being perceived as queer or feminine.

### **Hegemonic Masculinity**

Alongside Kimmel’s notion of masculinity as homophobia, we can consider one of the most influential notions in masculinity studies, “hegemonic masculinity.” The notion of hegemonic masculinity was originally advanced by Carrigan, Connell, and Lee<sup>14</sup> and subsequently expanded and revised by Connell<sup>15</sup> and Connell and Messerschmidt.<sup>16</sup> At its core, the theory of hegemonic masculinity understands gender identity as constituted by historically contingent relations of power

between and within sexes. Rejecting both biological essentialism and the “sex role” model of gender, Carrigan et al. developed a model in which social practices are organized around an ever-changing hierarchy of gender differences. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as a set of practices that “guarantees... the domination of men and the subordination of women,”<sup>17</sup> the subordination of non-normative masculinities (particularly queer identities), and the marginalization of intersectional masculinities (e.g., those of the working-class and people of color). Connell and Messerschmidt write, “Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. 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. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.”<sup>18</sup> Important to this theoretical framework of masculinity is the presumption that masculinity is plural and organized through power relations.<sup>19</sup>

Hegemonic masculinity provided a more sophisticated lens through which to articulate masculinity than previous theories, but it also brought with it a new set of presumptions. Some scholars have provided incremental critiques of the theory, which have resulted in modifications to how social scientists use the theory, but other scholars have advanced broader critiques of the theory’s basic assumptions. “Hegemony” itself must be understood in a more dynamic way. As Berlant and Warner observe, “when we say that the contemporary United States is saturated by the project of constructing national heterosexuality, we do not mean that national heterosexuality is anything like a simple monoculture. Hegemonies are nothing if not elastic alliances, involving dispersed and contradictory strategies for self-maintenance and reproduction.”<sup>20</sup> Hegemonic often functions, not to enforce uniformity, but to efface the difference among the members of a privileged group. “Hegemonic masculinity” is no exception. Gabriela Spector-Mersel is among the scholars

who sought to enrich the picture of “multiple masculinities” by observing how we may discern multiple masculinities “*across persons and within persons.*”<sup>21</sup> Carrigan et al. had already argued for plural masculinities as existing throughout a social milieu. Thus, white heterosexual middle-class men may enact and understand their masculinity in quite different ways than gay men, but scholars more and more recognized that a single individual will express multiple masculinities across their lifetime or even from moment to moment. Spector-Mersel asserts that different masculinities are still “scripted” and that “culture, in a given time and place, offers its men hegemonic masculinity scripts.”<sup>22</sup> The “scripting” of dominant models of masculinity can thus be understood to have a temporal component and to change over the course of history, life span, and daily routines. We can imagine, Spector-Mersel writes, a single man cycling through a series of masculinities in a single day: “In the morning, when he converses with his child, our man performs a ‘fatherly’ masculine role. In an office meeting, he displays ‘managerial’ masculinity. At a basketball game, he displays physical masculinity. Finally, when he goes out to dinner with his wife, he shows a masculine face which, we hope, is solely dedicated to her.”<sup>23</sup> Later in this introduction I will return to the notion of narrative scripts in my discussion of “mythologies” of masculinity in a cultural studies context and to put forward the “straight circuit,” a theoretical framework that provides a specific kind of script enacted in different cultural contexts.<sup>24</sup>

Other theorists have offered similar modifications. Tony Cole, for example, has argued for “fields of masculinity.” He writes that hegemonic masculinity has limitations, “particularly in relation to the disparity between the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity as the culturally dominant ideal and men’s lived experiences of a variety of dominant masculinities.” Coles’s model imagines “multiple dominant masculinities that operate within subfields.”<sup>25</sup> He continues, “For example, in the field of business and finance where economic capital is highly valued, dominant masculinity is exemplified in the aggressive market exploits of men. In the field of militia, toughness and brute

physical strength represent dominant versions of masculinity, and the body is valued as physical capital. Furthermore, these dominant masculinities are crosscut by external fields such as ethnicity and age to form a complex matrix of masculinities.”<sup>26</sup> Both Cole and Spector-Mersel provide critiques of the relatively flattened models of masculinity presented in the hegemonic masculinity framework. They demand that the theory be modified to account for how individuals and classes of men’s masculinities are varied across spatial-social and temporal contexts. Numerous other theorists have similarly contested the theory’s totalizing account of masculinity, which sorts the inherently heterogeneous expressions of masculinity into a handful of categories: dominant, subordinate, and marginalized. As Hammaren and Johansson write, hegemonic masculinities “overuse results in the conflation of fluid masculinities with an overarching structure.”<sup>27</sup>

While admittedly useful within some sociological analysis, hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical frame will prove to be of limited utility for this dissertation. Connell and Messerschmidt grant that masculinities at the local level may not resemble hegemonic masculinity at the regional or global level. They write, “Thus, hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men. Yet these models do, in various ways, express widespread ideals, fantasies, and desires.”<sup>28</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt indicate that hegemonic masculinity may subsist in “ideals, fantasies, and desires,” existing as a sort of imaginary mediation between subjects and their lived experiences, similar to Althusserian ideology. In this formulation, hegemonic masculinity shapes everyday practices but does not correspond with real social relations. In other words, Connell and Messerschmidt appear to treat the media as one site that propagates hegemonic masculinity.<sup>29</sup> Connell in her *Masculinities* also indicates that, given the diversity of masculinities in everyday lived experience, hegemonic masculinity has its clearest expression in the media. She writes that “the most visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity.... may be exemplars, such as film actors, or even fantasy figures, such as film characters.”<sup>30</sup> This line of thought implies that, while lived local

manifestations of masculinity are heterogeneous, the media on balance remains a preserve of stable gender representations that undergird hegemony.

Against this view, I would contend that even media representations of masculinity are often contradictory and even paradoxical. As one example, we can consider the Fox comedy series *New Girl* (2011-present), which follows the misadventures of Jessica Day (Zooey Deschanel) after she moves in with three male roommates. Each of the male roommates is indicative of wildly different norms of masculinity. Schmidt (Max Greenfield) is a narcissistic, status obsessed “douchebag.” He at once appeals to a normative model of the virile and financially successful skirt-chaser; yet, he repeatedly fails to live up to even his own standards of masculinity. Moreover, he departs from “hegemonic” masculinity by being fastidiously domestic (cooking and cleaning), codependent on his best friend Nick, and emotionally vulnerable. Nick Miller (Jake Johnson) similarly seems to be a prized normative man. He is a gruff working-class bartender, who is handsome, if unkempt. His “ruggedness” presents the opposite model of masculinity to Schmidt’s “metrosexuality.” Yet, Nick too fails at any discernable male normative standards: he is always broke, emotionally stunted, and pathologically irresponsible.<sup>31</sup> Despite their foibles, or perhaps because of them, Nick and Schmidt are the primary love interests for the two female leads in the series. To be sure, blockbuster films are still centered disproportionately on white heterosexual men who fit within a relatively narrow range of masculine ideality. They tend to be the handsome, athletic, and suave leaning man, e.g., Tom Cruise in *Mission: Impossible* or Daniel Craig as James Bond. Of course, these characters do not define masculine normativity but an unattainable ideal (or erotic object). On the other hand, television is lousy with men who are objects of ridicule or who fumble in their attempts to fulfill their own idiosyncratic version of masculinity. Some of the most successful TV series of the past decade have been based around leading men whose identities are fraudulent: Don Draper/Dick Whitman in *Mad Men*; Walter White/Heisenberg in *Breaking Bad*; Michael C. Hall’s role the serial killer who passes as a

forensic scientist in *Dexter*; or Mike Ross, who poses as a Harvard Law graduate in the USA series *Suits*. The masquerade of masculinity is as common of a theme in popular culture as the mythic ideal of the wholly contained and powerful male figure.

I do not mean to suggest that the theory of hegemonic masculinity is without merit. The theory provides an essential framework for understanding how power operates across various intersections of identity. The basic understanding that gender is structured by power is fundamental to any discussion of masculinity. While Connell et al. are not unique in articulating this insight, they were at the forefront of explaining it systematically with regard to masculinity. Thus, my critique of the theory is not a rejection of it outright but a call for the theory to be enriched beyond its currently limited form. As it stands, by essentially setting hegemonic masculinity against subordinate modes of masculinity, it schematizes masculinities into a binary. This binary schema hampers the analysis of the gender in narrative texts because it precludes the discovery of leakages between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities. Thus, the framework of hegemonic masculinity when applied to media will tend to produce a confirmation bias. It can only discover hegemonic masculinities or non-hegemonic masculinities and nothing in between. In this way, texts can only serve to verify the theory; the theory cannot enable complex readings of texts. It also leads to a fundamentally pessimistic analysis of texts, which can only confirm the penetration of hegemony into narrative culture. The framework also, by creating such a sharp divide between the hegemonic and subordinated masculinities, obscures the possibilities of subversion latent in narrative texts.<sup>32</sup>

The approach to analyzing gender, sexuality, and masculinity in this dissertation will borrow from the social scientific writing on masculinity but is grounded much more in the approaches to gender and sexuality that have developed in the humanities. Growing primarily out of feminist studies and subsequently LGBTQ studies, the scholarship around gender within the humanities has since the 1970s built upon Marxist theory, psychoanalysis, and French post-structuralism. While

various scholars throughout the humanities have rejected some or all of these influences, these have become the dominant influences within gender studies. Post-structuralism has been particularly important in offering an alternative epistemic frame for reading cultural works and understanding gender. I will discuss media-specific gender scholarship below, but, in broad terms, this dissertation will take for granted several aspects of gender theory. For the most part these will be deeply indebted to the theorization of gender developed by Judith Butler.<sup>33</sup> To begin with, I assume gender is constituted by its performance. Gender is not ontologically grounded in either biology or an innate or essential “self.” Because gender is not ontologically grounded it must be reiterated as performance again and again in order to maintain the appearance of being real, authentic, and natural. On the one hand, the compulsory reiteration of gender demonstrates the dominance of heteronormativity, which is underwritten by the penalties applied to those who fail to conform. At the same time, compulsive reiteration is necessitated by the inadequacy of any single performance to fully actualize gender. That is, every performance comes up short and must be reiterated. In this dissertation, I will treat masculinity as always failing to entirely disclose itself, because the “self” it purports to disclose is never fully present (or present-able). In this sense, gender is both *excessive*, in that its signification exceeds any “real” ontological base, and *inadequate*, in that each iteration fails to substantiate gender. Thus, gender and sexuality are always subject to failure, equivocation and slippage. Perhaps the most important premise of this dissertation will be that gender and sexuality rarely operate in a univocal way but rather are subject to multiple readings. As we will see, the decision to read Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* as “gay” would reflect more about our hermeneutics of sexuality than about his “real” sexuality. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* demonstrates that sexuality is always already subject to compulsive interpretation and policing fueled by a need to establish the definitive ground for sexuality. This dissertation enacts an *ethics of reading* that resists this compulsion and, instead, valorizes the uncertain over the certain. Having said this, I will heed the incisive criticism

made by Bryce Traister that masculinity studies, in appropriating Judith Butler's performative theory of gender, surreptitiously efface the political power held by men. The relative stability of heterosexual masculinity in terms of its privileges must be contrasted with the precarious and even dangerous identity position of 'others.'<sup>34</sup>

### **Contemporary Historical Contexts: Inclusive Masculinities and Post-Closet Culture**

Having critiqued the theory of hegemonic masculinity, I want to return to the notion of masculinity as homophobia and offer a similar critique of it. In doing so, I also want to demonstrate that contemporary culture demands that we move past the narrow confines of "hegemonic masculinity" and that we revise the premise that masculinity is inextricably bound up with homophobia. While homophobic violence and discrimination and causal homophobia are persistent in the United States, a sea change has taken place over the past four decades. A steadily increasing number of Americans accept gays and lesbians and support gay marriage. The trend is even more positive among young Americans who are significantly more likely to be accepting of gay and lesbians and supportive of gay marriage.<sup>35</sup> Still, LGTBQ visibility and rights have also galvanized many on the far right, just as the immediate post-Stonewall era and the AIDS crisis mobilized anti-gay political movements and discourses. Yet, shifting public opinion has changed the political realities for gay and lesbian people. Some municipalities and state governments, along with the federal government in more incremental ways and the Supreme Court in more dramatic ways, have made significant policy changes in the matter of a few years that benefit gays and lesbians, particularly those in conventional monogamous relationships. In addition to the legal changes that affect the daily lives of LGTBQ peoples, we have seen dramatic changes in how such people are depicted in popular culture.

This dissertation will discuss at length the shifting cultural representations of gender and sexuality in contemporary film, television, theatre, and literature, but for the time being I want to observe the growing body of sociological research that challenges the heretofore orthodox position that masculinity in the United States is defined by homophobia. That masculinity is plural and not monolithic has already been demonstrated, but theories of hegemonic masculinity have persisted in articulating dominant modes of masculinity as constructed dialectically against queer masculinities and femininity. This dialectical model has been fairly accurate for most of the twentieth century, but the dramatic changes in cultural norms of gender and sexuality have begun to shift how we think about normative masculinity. These changes can perhaps best be articulated using Raymond Williams's vocabulary of dominant, residual, and emergent cultural forms.<sup>36</sup> Broadly I will argue that while homophobia is probably best described as "dominant," anti-homophobic discourses and performances of masculinity are "emergent." Importantly, even if we assume homophobia will lose its dominant position (a proposition that is uncertain), it will not do so completely. It will almost certainly remain "residual," and in some parts of the United States it will remain dominant for the foreseeable future.

Eric Anderson has argued for the concept of "inclusive masculinity." He writes, "in cultures of diminishing homophobia, two dominant (but not dominating) forms of masculinity will exist: one conservative and one inclusive." Conservative "orthodox masculinity" remains homophobic and uncomfortable with "emotional and physical proximity" to other men, whereas inclusive masculinity demonstrates comfort with proximity and the absence of homophobia.<sup>37</sup> In an earlier article, Anderson interviewed the members of a college fraternity and found, "Their particular construction of masculinity overtly requires the acceptance of homosexuality, respect for women, and emotional intimacy among brothers."<sup>38</sup> Presented as a challenge to hegemonic masculinity theory, "inclusive masculinity theory maintains that, in such a zeitgeist, multiple masculinities will

proliferate with less hierarchy or hegemony.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, sociologist Steven Seidman in *Beyond the Closet: the Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life* argues that America is in a “post-closet” era and that the lives of gays and lesbians must be studied in light of these dramatic changes. Seidman cautions that homophobia is alive and well in America, but he emphasizes the demonstrable changes to gay and lesbian people’s lives legally, socially, and professionally. James Joseph Dean in his recent book *Straights: Heterosexuality in Post-Closeted Culture* attempts to chart the ways in which the post-closet culture has transformed male and female heterosexual identities. Dean’s book, a qualitative sociological study, divides his straight subjects into three categories based on, first, their explicit expression of homophobia or anti-homophobia and, second, the nature of their social boundaries with respect to gays and lesbians. Those with “strongly aversive boundaries” are explicitly homophobic; those with “weak boundaries” are explicitly anti-homophobic but still perform or assert their heterosexuality defensively; and those with “blurred boundaries” actively allow for ambiguity about their identity and interact freely with gays and lesbians.<sup>40</sup> I have numerous reservations about Dean’s study. His three categories are problematic as are his criteria. Nevertheless, his book provides an important first step in discussing how social changes that primarily affect LGBTQ peoples are also reshaping the nature of heterosexuality.

It is worth pausing to consider the signification of “post-” as it applies to “post-closet” (or for that matter “post-feminist,” as I will discuss below). To be clear, one thing that “post-” does not signify is that we are past “the closet,” past homophobia, or past hegemonic masculinity. As with similar temporal terms, such as “post-industrial” or “post-modern,” post-closet does not imply that all or even most of the distinct characteristics of the preceding era have disappeared. I would argue that “post-” in this way designates, for lack of a better word, a tipping point after which basic aspects of the preceding era are disrupted, challenged, and reevaluated in a manner that result in substantive change. By its very nature, such disruptions are met with contestation and resistance as

they confront dominant ideologies. Indeed, the post-closet era has been marked by divisive debates about gender and sexuality at all levels of American culture, and the examples I will examine throughout this document are characterized, not by the absence of homophobia, but the renegotiation of masculinities in light of anti-homophobic discourses. Such renegotiations are, by their very nature, contested and incoherent as they represent the fault lines between opposing discourses that are in tension with one another.

An important aspect of this reshaping, which Dean deals with only in passing, is the rather dramatic shift in how social capital operates relative to homophobia. For decades, men could secure their “masculinity” by making homophobic jokes, engaging in homophobic banter with other men, and even committing hate crimes against LGBTQ people. Increasingly explicit homophobia is regarded as offensive or simply in bad taste by a large swath of the American public. Consequently homophobia is more and more stigmatized, as demonstrated by the periodic apologies from actors and other public figures caught on tape using a homophobic slur. Granted causal and implicit homophobia is still common and in some communities and social groups explicit homophobia is still accepted and encouraged. Still, an increasing amount of social capital is attached to straight people who exhibit queer-positive attitudes and behaviors, especially in communities that similarly attach social capital to being educated, “cultured,” and political “progressive.” For many Americans, performing anti-homophobia is a marker of urbanity and sophistication, and, for some men, having gay friends or going to gay bars is the ultimate demonstration of how “secure” they are in their heterosexuality. Thus, just as we must continue to study how homophobia has and does shape our conception of masculinity, we must also attend to how anti-homophobia and a pluralistic view of gender and sexuality are being incorporated into contemporary heterosexual masculinities.

## Theories of Homosociality

For the most part, this dissertation will theorize homosociality in relation to homosexuality and the ideologically concomitant cultural construction of both. However, the role of gender, specifically misogyny and feminism, is inescapably important to the analysis I will present of homosociality and masculinity. Men may perform sexual aggression toward women, for example, for the benefit of other men or in order to affirm their heterosexuality. Likewise, the homophobic abjection of queer and effeminate men serves to affirm patriarchal power. Homophobia shores up the strict binary division between men and women and the subordination of women by categorizing gender non-conforming men as marginal.

Arguably the most important articulation of homosociality in the humanities is that of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her seminal *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Patriarchy, as Sedgwick observes, has been defined as the consolidation of power *between* men, making patriarchy appear to be synonymous with homosociality.<sup>41</sup> Across the different stages of the feminist movement, women's political and social solidarity has been similarly organized in opposition to patriarchy. Yet, homosociality between men and between women have otherwise appeared fundamentally different. Especially in the light of second-wave feminism, women's political relationships often appear continuous with emotionally and even erotically intimate relationships. Hence, Adrienne Rich's "lesbian continuum" imagines a fluid array of same-sex female relationships.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, the same cannot be said of men's relationship, where there is no such alignment between shared patriarchal power and same-sex love or eroticism. Homosocial power strictly policies against homoerotic affection. Sedgwick writes, "When Ronald Reagan and Jesse Helms get down to serious logrolling on 'family policy,' they are men promoting men's interests.... Is their bond in any way congruent with the bond of a loving gay male couple? Reagan and Helms would say no—disgustedly. Most gay couples would say no—disgustedly. But why not? Doesn't the

continuum between ‘men-loving-men’ and ‘men-promoting-the-interests-of-men’ have the same intuitive force that it has for women?”<sup>43</sup> Sedgwick’s analysis points scholars in two different directions. On the one hand, it dovetails with the more restrictive theories of hegemonic masculinity and, like those theories, sees any given instance of homosociality as a recapitulation of patriarchal power that simultaneously subordinates women and marginalizes gay men. Viewed through this lens homosociality is by definition patriarchal and homophobic. On the other hand, Sedgwick theorizes homosociality as a continuum between patriarchal “male bonding” and same-sex male desire including queer desire. In this light Sedgwick sees

correspondences and similarities between the most sanctioned forms of male-homosocial bonding, and the most reprobated expressions of male homosexual sociality. To put it in twentieth-century American terms, the fact that what goes on at football games, in fraternities, at the Bohemian Grove, and at climactic moments in war novels can look, with only a slight shift of optic, quite startling ‘homosexual,’ is not most importantly an expression of the psychic origin of these institutions in a repressed or sublimated homosexual genitality. Instead, it is the coming to visibility of the normally implicit terms of a coercive double bind... For a man to be a man’s man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being ‘interested in men.’<sup>44</sup>

Viewed through this lens (a “shift of optics”), queerness is always already latent in homosociality, however deeply repressed. This aspect of Sedgwick’s book has tended to produce more “optimistic” queer readings of male homosociality.

I will explore below the ways these two approaches to homosociality, optimistic and pessimistic, can be discerned in contemporary cultural studies, but I want to briefly outline the balancing act that has to be struck between these two approaches in the broader contexts of masculinity and gender studies. In general, I would argue that we should always approach specific instances of masculinity and homosociality through a sort of “double consciousness.” Nearly any instance of male same-sex sociality is deeply engrained with certain ideologies of gender, sexuality, race, class, nationality, ability, and other identity markers. No scholar or activist worth their salt should forget the simple fact that nearly any text we look at is crisscrossed with fields of power and

hierarchies, overt or covert, intentional or not. To paraphrase Saint Paul: there is not one innocent, no, not one. We must recognize that power saturates our daily institutions, experiences, performances, discourse, and implicit assumptions, but this fact can serve to flatten out how we see the world if we can only see it from this perspective. Glaring examples, such as college fraternities, express their ideologies overtly. The fraternal system has since its inception been a mechanism for recapitulating and conserving hierarchies of class, later race, gender, and sexuality. Yet, I have spoken to male students who simply cannot recognize this sort of description of their Greek organizations. We may shrug off this self-accounting as “false consciousness” or “unacknowledged privilege,” and certainly, like most straight white men, these men are unaware of the variety of ways power operates in their lives. It would, nevertheless, be reductive to erase such counter-factual evidence. Eric Anderson has presented evidence that fraternities today are increasingly able to accommodate “inclusive masculinities.”<sup>45</sup> In exploring these seemingly contradictory findings, we may have to assume a double consciousness, which can acknowledge the inescapable fact that something like hegemonic masculinity is at work in these examples, while also being able to recognize countervailing phenomenon that demand more nuanced explanations. Michael Messner has persuasively argued against the received scholarly view of male friendships as “highly homophobic, emotionally inexpressive, and competitive” and lacking the same depths as women’s friendship. Messner demonstrates that such views fail to account for “the depth of affection that so many of these men expressed for each other.”<sup>46</sup> Moreover, a careful reading of male homosociality must account for what Sedgwick characterizes as the always already interestedness of men for one another, especially where such may exceed “normal” homosocial attraction.

All of this begs the question of how we talk about male friendship in the post-closet era, as we begin to see the relationships between men changing in the light of emerging anti-homophobic discourses. We must discuss the way in which power relations continue to operate, but how do we

do this without reducing everything to a binary discussion of hegemony and subversion? How do we avoid simply giving passing and failing grades to cultural representations of friendships? Nils Hammarén and Thomas Johansson in their article “Homosociality: In Between Power and Intimacy” attempt to complicate the discourse of hegemony. They suggest talking about two different modes of homosociality. First, they define “hierarchical” or “vertical” homosociality as “a means of strengthening power and of creating close homosocial bonds to maintain and defend hegemony.” Second, “horizontal” homosociality refers to relationships between men “that are based on emotional closeness, intimacy, and a non-profitable form of friendship.”<sup>47</sup> This introduction of yet another set of binary terms (vertical/horizontal) will invariably fail to capture the complexity of homosociality, but Hammarén and Johansson’s approach is subtler than its tidy configuration would suggest. I would argue that we can use these two modes of homosociality as axes along which homosociality could be coordinated. Thus, playful homophobic banter between men may affirm the subordination of gay men but enhance the camaraderie between the men; but, a loving physical intimacy between straight men could be indexed as anti-homophobic and creating intimacy. We could imagine numerous permutations that would go a long way to creating a sort of double consciousness about homosociality. The two-axis system is still inadequate but goes a long way to complicate how we understand homosociality.

Hammarén and Johansson argue further that we should move beyond treating hegemony and subversion as mutually exclusive categories, especially with respect to homosociality. Building on the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hammarén and Johansson argue that hegemony is always subject to change and reformation, even where these changes are at some level tactical. They write, “We are not suggesting that, for example, metrosexuality or bromances aren’t shifts in acceptable forms of masculine performances. The idea that male friendships defined by homophobia and distance seems to loosen up, resulting in close and intimate friendship relations,

can still be interpreted in an accepted but still reformulated framework of hegemonic masculinity, although perhaps a more desirable one.”<sup>48</sup> As with Sedgwick’s seminal account of homosociality, Hammarén and Johansson leave us with a similarly ambivalent position. Male social bonds are, they suggest, always already constituted and reiterated within the confines of hegemony, but hegemony is never total and monolithic but is always being renegotiated. Indeed, the very possibility of hegemony depends upon its ability to adapt to shifting social circumstances.<sup>49</sup> There is, thus, no neat way to label the examples considered in this dissertation. Post-closet reformulations of male friendship may, on the one hand, be substantive and progressive changes to masculinity but, on the other hand, be tactical reorganizations that reconsolidate hierarchal power arrangements. The reorganization of male friendship to accommodate difference within sexuality may represent a genuine erosion of heteronormative culture, but it may also serve to reconsolidate other power relations, for example, by aligning gay and straight men in homosocial relations that marginalize women. In the analysis of my various case studies to follow, I will demonstrate how this analytical framework can be applied to narrative texts.

### **Homosociality and Patriarchy in a Post-Feminist Culture**

While this dissertation primarily focuses on sexuality, the role of feminism will also be important. I use the term “post-feminist” as a fairly generic way to refer to the broad cultural, economic, and legal changes that have taken place since the 1960s due largely to the concerted efforts of feminist activists of all stripes. In my use of ‘post-feminism,’ I certainly do not mean to imply that feminism has come to an end, has lost its utility, or has rectified gender inequality and heterosexism. Amanda Lotz in her *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* uses the term “post-second wave” to describe a similarly broad set of social changes, a period “marked by the contestation of patriarchy and revision of common gender scripts.”<sup>50</sup> Along the same lines, my use

of “post-feminism” suggests not the absence of patriarchy but the presence of a sustained public argument about gender that takes place on a national and even global scale. In this regard, 2014 was a remarkable year that witnessed an unapologetic and vociferous series of feminist critiques of rape culture, childcare, persistent wage gaps, reproductive rights, and similar issues.<sup>51</sup> Thus, post-feminist culture is defined as much by the political, economic, and social progress (e.g., higher college graduation rates among women) as it is by the resistance to further change (e.g., denying rape culture and misogynistic violence with the #notallmen hashtag) and even the roll-back of progress (i.e., the rolling back of abortion rights since *Roe v. Wade*). In light of the sustained resistance to feminism in politics, culture, and Americans’ daily lives, it must be admitted that the term “post-feminist” is of limited utility. The “post-” is less applicable here than with “post-closet,” as we see a more fundamental shift in views on sexuality, especially among younger cohorts of Americans. “Post-feminist” serves to heuristically designate a period after the 1960s, when feminism offered a thorough critique of patriarchal culture, but it does not represent a clear tipping point wherein feminism has succeeded in shifting the cultural center of the country.

From a feminist point of view homosociality is a critical aspect of patriarchy, as Sedgwick observes. Historically homosociality was important to feminism in part because of the legal and official exclusion of women from all-male institutions: suffrage, the public sphere, educational institutions, the military, sports teams, etc., but recent scholarship has also observed the way in which homosociality participates in more subtle ways in patriarchal culture. Rape culture provides a particularly powerful example of how patriarchy is materially present in male social groups. Social scientists have shown how all-male social interactions can underwrite rape culture. David Grazian writes about the “girl hunt” as a “ritualistic, performative, and homosocial” activity.<sup>52</sup> Grazian discusses how “contemporary courtship rituals operate as collective strategies of impression management that men perform not only for women but for other men. In doing so, interaction

rituals associated with the girl hunt reproduce structures of inequality within as well as across the socially constructed gender divide between women and men.”<sup>53</sup> The “girl hunt” is a logical extension of Sedgwick’s earlier theorization.<sup>54</sup> Messner observes how talking about sexual experiences with women is an important part of heterosexual male bonding, which can entail denigrating women to assert power over them. “Locker room” talk can be a sort of “rhetorical performance” that expresses sexual aggression and asserts masculinity for the benefit of other men.<sup>55</sup> More recent social science research has asserted a link between rape and how men talk about sex. Permissive attitudes within all-male groups may serve to validate sexual predation among members. Research seems to suggest that a fairly small number of men commit a large number of rapes, but that those men, serial rapists, are enabled by peer groups who implicitly sanction their behavior, if only through silence.<sup>56</sup> An important question that will be considered in this dissertation then will be, if male friendships are being transformed in a post-closet culture, are homosocial relations also evolving in ways that do not enable sexual predation and male privilege?

### **The Rhetoric of Crisis, White Male Victimhood, and Male Friendship**

This dissertation will advance a guardedly optimistic view of male homosociality as represented in contemporary American culture, but the very discourses that are helping to motivate these changes, feminism and LGBTQ rights, face strong headwinds. The cultural backlashes against feminism and gay rights often imagine white straight men as the victims of social change. These backlashes have been expressed in overt ways: right-wing campaigns against gay rights or reproductive rights for women, but I am more interested in the subtle way that backlash is expressed, specifically in the rhetoric of crisis and male victimhood. Some of this discourse is grounded in progressive ideas. For example, advocates for progressive models of masculinity have published discussions of how American men suffer from “touch isolation” or the loss of physical

“platonic male affection.” Most of these discussions position themselves as anti-homophobic. They emphasize that straight men should be aligned with gay men, because homophobia harms straight male intimacy.<sup>57</sup> Several writers have raised the specter of a “crisis” in male friendship. According to academic sociologist Lisa Wade, men do not have enough friends and their friendships are insufficiently intimate to provide for their emotional needs. Wade and other academic and popular writers seem convinced that male friendship is fundamentally troubled.<sup>58</sup> They offer several culprits, but homophobia is always central among them. I do not want to dismiss out of hand the concerns expressed in these popular and academic discourses. I agree whole-heartedly that male friendship is shaped by homophobia and misogyny and that, on balance, men are probably worse off emotionally for it. However, the discourses of “touch isolation” and of a “crisis” of male friendship present at least two significant problems.

First, the very idea that homophobia “limits” or “stifles” male friendships is itself problematic. For one thing, homophobia does not simply proscribe, repress, or inhibit authentic male intimacy. On the contrary, in many ways homophobia is integral to the expression of male homosociality. In this sense, homophobia is a “productive”<sup>59</sup> aspect of male interactions, generating an array performances and rituals for male interaction. Homophobia as a productive force can be seen in some media representations of male friendship. For example, bullying of an effeminate boy in a locker room may allow his classmates to imagine that all homoeroticism has been purged from the homosocial space of the locker room and showers. Under the auspices of established homophobia, they may feel more comfortable seeing each other nude and even engaging in homoerotic play. Thus, abjecting putatively queer men can even open up spaces for homoeroticism—for example, when hyper-masculine “gym rats” meticulously attend to one another’s bodies. The men on some television series, such as FX’s *The League* (2009-present) or HBO’s *Entourage* (2004-2011), also use homophobic banter to structure their intimacy, allowing for

spaces in which they can spend time together and even be loving to one another, while also clearly delineating between themselves and marginalize sexual and gender identities. Indeed, as noted above, Jane Ward has convincingly argued that homophobia is not actually a bar against homosexual contact between straight men. Homophobia is a mechanism that regulates who gets to be counted as “straight” and who is counted as “gay” without regard to the particular sexual acts in which they engage. While it is certainly true that homophobia *structures* homosocial relations between men, it is naïve to say simply that it inhibits or stifles intimacy between men.

The second problem with the discourse of “touch isolation” and a “crisis” of male friendship is that they tend to reiterate the rhetoric of “masculinity in crisis” and men as victims. A contemporary discourse around men as victims can be seen in Hanna Rosin’s book *The End of Men and the Rise of Women*. Rosin asserts that women have gotten the upper hand in the increasingly global economy, wherein traditional male traits have become less valuable and wherein women have taken greater advantage of educational opportunities. Rosin’s book suffers primarily from failing to separate out how the Great Recession has disproportionately affected poor and working class men, men with lower-levels of educational attainment, and men of color, as her critics have noted.<sup>60</sup> In other words, while there is a real crisis among some men, it is not a “man problem”; these are problems of persistent poverty, racial disparities, and educational achievement gaps. These problems are not new, though the economic disparities in the United States are growing in unprecedented ways. Gender, specifically masculinity, plays an important role in how we should think about these issues, but gender is less important than legacies of racism, persistent poverty, and failures to invest in education among working class groups. Rosin’s book obscures these issues in favor of talking about “men” as a single class, which allows white middle-class heterosexual men to imagine themselves as the victims, when they are in fact still the principle beneficiaries of systemic inequalities.

“Crisis” has been a keyword in masculinity scholarship for at least half a century.<sup>61</sup> Social upheavals in the nineteenth century—the Civil War, Emancipation, waves of European immigrants, urbanization, industrialization, and the emergence of various women’s movements—unquestionably shaped masculinity, but numerous scholars have criticized the rhetoric of “crisis” for being historically inaccurate and theoretically untenable.<sup>62</sup> For my part, it is problematic for several reasons. All gender identity categories are in continuous state of contestation and renegotiation. “Crisis” implies that masculinity was at some point stable and uncontested only to be later called into question, which is erroneous. Masculinities are multiple, and these different masculinities are continuously contesting their relative positions of privilege and marginality.<sup>63</sup> Crisis rhetoric really addresses itself to white middle class masculinity, imagining it to be static as a rule and in crisis as an exception, when in fact it was continuously being rearticulated and renegotiated.

While I dispute the scholarly application of “masculinity in crisis,” contemporaneous writers have asserted that masculinity was in crisis throughout American history. Thus, the notion is not merely the invention of scholars, but we should circumspectly evaluate the ways in which writers used this rhetoric strategically. For example, Arthur Schlesinger’s essay “The Crisis in American Masculinity” (1959) muses over the anxious uncertainty over manhood in his day. He writes, “Today men are more and more conscious of maleness not as a fact but as a problem.” He specifically attributes this uncertainty to the era’s “sexual ambiguity,” including shifting roles for women. These phenomena had left some men stricken with doubts about their masculinity and latent homosexuality.<sup>64</sup> Works of popular sociology during this period, such as William Whyte’s *The Organization Man* (1956) and David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), diagnosed an erosion of the traditional attributes of individualism and personal autonomy, which were replaced by a bureaucratic white-collar corporatism.<sup>65</sup>

*Look* magazine published three articles under the book title *The Decline of the American Male* in 1958.<sup>66</sup> The book presents a bizarrely paranoiac vision. Following Whyte and Riesman (both of whom are referenced in book), George Leonard's essay "Why is He Afraid to be Different?" worries about "conformity" in the corporate and suburban environs of middle class prosperity. While the New Left would express a complementary critique of middle class conformism in the 1960s, Leonard's critique aligns itself with a reactionary fear of the "increasing the power of The Group over the individual" (32). The entire book espouses nostalgia for the good old days of rugged individuals. It asserts that "scientists worry that in the years since the end of World War II, [the American male] has changed radically and dangerously; that he is no longer the masculine, strong-minded man who pioneered the continent and built America's greatness" (3). In an era of unprecedented prosperity for America's white middle class, these essays imagine white men as having lost something fundamental to their masculinity, while completely ignoring the economic and social inequalities of women and people of color. The most striking essay in the collection is Robert Moskin's "Why Do Women Dominate Him?" Men, we are told, are subjugated to women at every turn. Boys are dominated by their mothers and "damaged by the increase of competition with girls" (4). Adolescent boys are coerced into "going steady," a romantic practice that "imposes monogamy" on young men against their "recognized biological nature" (5). Wives demand that men work hard to pay for material things (6), and women's newly discovered sexual "aggressiveness and demand for sexual satisfaction" results in men suffering from fatigue, passivity, anxiety, and impotence (11-12).

I tarry over Moskin and Leonard, along with Schlesinger, Whyte, and Riesman, to demonstrate the longevity of the crisis and victimhood narratives. This midcentury fear of flagging manhood has its precursors in late nineteenth and early twentieth century writings that worried about male "over-civilization," worries which in part motivated Theodore Roosevelt's imperialist exhortation to manliness and the "strenuous life."<sup>67</sup> Likewise the myth of *white* male persecution has

a long history. Journalist Jelani Cobb has observed a continuity between the post-Civil War narratives of Southern victimhood and contemporary American politics. He says, “The kind of narrative thread that ties Reconstruction to the Civil Rights era to the current era we’re in is that, immediately after the Civil War, you began to see this narrative of Southern victimization, as if the conflict that culminated in Emancipation had been an attempt to exploit and oppress white Southerners, and that’s an idea we still see, we still encounter now.”<sup>68</sup> Writing in the 1990s, David Savran in his *Taking It Like a Man* observed a similar victim mentality among white men. He writes, “One recent survey compares the racial and sexual distribution of senior corporate executives between 1979 and 1989. It finds that in those ten years the proportion of African Americans had increased from 0.2 to 0.6 percent, of Latinos from 0.1 to 0.4 percent, and of women from 0.5 to 3 percent of the total. Yet many white American men now consider themselves an oppressed group, the victims of discrimination, intolerance, and ‘reverse racism.’” Savran notes the relationship “between the mythology of the white male as victim and the growth of the paramilitary Right,” such as the militia movement.<sup>69</sup> Racist and anti-government sentiments (often stoked by veiled “dog whistle” language by ostensibly “mainstream” media and politicians) have been newly galvanized in the Obama-era, and the internet’s capacity for anonymity has made it easier to express vitriolic sentiments, including anti-feminist misogyny, in a public forum without the risk of being outed as a hate-monger.

Savran also points to another example of male victimhood discourse, the “men’s rights movement.” Initially the men’s movement, as it took shape in the late sixties and seventies, was pro-feminist. However, a “men’s rights movement” soon emerged and developed an explicitly antagonistic position to feminism. This wing of the men’s movement argued that men were actually more oppressed by gender roles than women were and that feminism had made matters worse by “blaming” men or robbing men of their masculinity.<sup>70</sup> Mariah Blake has documented the lineage of

the men's movement to the contemporary men's rights culture online. She specifically charts the broad influence of Warren Farrell, whose *The Myth of Male Power* (1993) was a seminal catalyst for the then nascent men's movement.<sup>71</sup> Farrell's book echoes the basic rhetoric of *The Decline of the American Male* several decades earlier, as with its use of leading rhetorical questions in its chapter titles, e.g., "The Suicide Sex: If Men Have the Power, Why Do They Commit Suicide More?" and "Why Do Women Live Longer?" Farrell's writing impersonates a sober, even-handed reassessment of feminism, but the book includes a sustained and unabashed defense of date rape.<sup>72</sup> Men's rights groups became more visible after the 2014 Isla Vista shooting rampage, when it became clear that the shooter<sup>73</sup> had been an avid participant in the misogynistic "manosphere," made up of various misogynistic online communities including men's rights groups.<sup>74</sup> The Southern Poverty Law Center, a non-profit that monitors hate groups, has shown how men's rights groups are inciting violence against women and helping to facilitate systematic campaigns of harassment against women whom they deem guilty of crimes against men.<sup>75</sup> The so-called #Gamergate "controversy" brought to light how misogynistic groups have launched campaigns of criminal harassment, many of which include credible threats of physical and sexual violence.<sup>76</sup>

The men's movement and men's right groups specifically do emphasize homosociality as part of their agenda. Physical and emotional—but *not* sexual—intimacy between men is held up as ways of coping with the travails of being a male and as means of organizing anti-feminist politics. Their meetings often mimic feminist consciousness-raising sessions by having male participants describe their own personal problems as manifestations of systematic male oppression.<sup>77</sup> Lionel Tiger's *Men in Groups* (1969) introduced the term "male bonding" and argued that men have a hardwired need for homosocialization. Tiger implies that the integration of women into traditionally homosocial spaces, such as the workplace, may have dire consequences because it will deny men their basic need for same-sex male socialization.<sup>78</sup>

Robert Bly's influential book *Iron John* (1990) works within the mythopoeic vein, drawing on neo-Jungian theories, to advance a universalist account of "natural" masculinity. For Bly, male bonding is also essential. Young men need to be initiated into manhood by mentors. Shrew women have pacified and dominated men; possessive mothers psychically stunt their sons. Bly writes, "The male in the past twenty years has become more thoughtful, more gentle. But by this process he has not become more free. He's a nice boy who pleases not only his mother but also the young woman he is living with."<sup>79</sup> Men are the victims of modern effeminization, and they must band together to recover their primal masculinity. Other men's movement writers similarly see male bonding as the key to helping men recover from their oppressed and unhealthy state.<sup>80</sup>

I have dwelt on the rhetoric of masculinity in crisis and the men's movement for several reasons. For one, I wanted to challenge the underlying ideologies around male friendships in the aforementioned theories of "touch isolation" and a "crisis of male friendship." Such rhetorics, even when they are framed as anti-homophobic, risk reproducing the propaganda of male victimhood and enable a discourse of male oppression. As I have demonstrated, homophobia does not prevent male intimacy, full stop; rather some heterosexual men have strategically used homophobia to enable forms of male intimacy that abject gay and feminine masculinities. I certainly acknowledge that homophobia structures male friendships and that on balance this structuring is detrimental to men. However, in granting this fact, I still reject the regressive nostalgia for primitive male bonding that insists on "recovering" something lost to men. The real issue is not whether or not men can be intimate with one another, but whether we can imagine a mode of male intimacy that responds positively to a post-closet and post-feminist era and that does not depend upon the denigration of women and queer people.

### **Man Dates and Bromances: In Search of a New Lexicon of Male Friendship**

The discourse of male friendship has changed dramatically in the past decade and a half. Far from being defined by homophobia, male friendship has been shaped by a quasi-queer series of neologism such as “man date” and “bromance.” They carve out a lexicon for exclusively heterosexual male sociality, strategically delineating between platonic affection and homosexual desire. These terms also segregate the homosocial from the heterosocial, preserving male-only intimacy. Thus, these terms reinforce the patriarchal nature of homosocial bonds, which marginalize queer peoples and exclude women. Nevertheless, “man date” and “bromance” achieve these ends through an implicit incorporation of gay and heterosexual romance into the lexicon of male homosociality.

Elizabeth Chen has argued that a bromance “is comprised of three general constitutive elements: they are restricted to men, the relationship must be asexual, and they are locations for acceptable intimacy between men” (246).<sup>81</sup> A bromance is strictly heterosexual, an “intimacy without sex,” but one “of a sort that slips between the boundaries of sexual and non-sexual relationships” (248-9). Chen also grants that the bromance appears to disregard the “competitive” model of male friendship associated with hegemonic masculinity (258), but she sees the bromance in a decidedly negative light. She writes, “Bromances are a source of privilege and subordination,” in part because they rigidly exclude gay men and women. Chen also worries that bromances may “siphon intimacy from marital relationships, because the ‘bro’ relationship is an alternate source of intimacy for the man in a marital relationship” (259), but she contradictorily also worries that bromances shore up heteronormativity of marriage by mimicking it, reinforcing “the privilege given to marriage and marriage-like relationships” (259). Paradoxically the bromance at once damages marriage, even as it props it up ideologically.<sup>82</sup> This contradictory anxiety about the bromance indicates how difficult the term is to pin down.

Moreover, a basic review of these neologisms allows us to recognize how they were always already created with an implicitly queer subtext. In 2005, Jennifer S. Lee wrote an article simply entitled “The Man Date” in *The New York Times*. Lee writes, “Anyone who finds a date with a potential romantic partner to be a minefield of unspoken rules should consider the man date, a rendezvous between two straight men that is even more socially perilous. Simply defined a man date is two heterosexual men socializing without the crutch of business or sports.”<sup>83</sup> Lee continues, “Depending on the activity and on the two men involved, an undercurrent of homoeroticism that may be present determines what feels comfortable or not on a man date.” That basic male interaction, in the absence of sports or business, is so “perilous” is striking, since men have been spending time together casually quite since the beginning of time. Yet, even more interesting is the premise that unequivocally heterosexual men can still experience “an undercurrent of homoeroticism” and that this homoeroticism can be the death knell for male sociality. Paradoxically, homoeroticism is ubiquitous within but antithetical to male homosociality. The term “man date” announces homoeroticism as an absent presence. The man date implies romance (what else is a “date”?) but disavows erotic desire. Queerness is a specter that haunts straight male relations. To name this desire in order to disavow it creates the same double bind as homophobic banter does: it acknowledges while disavowing homoeroticism.

The neologism ‘bromance’ has become almost tiresomely ubiquitous in the American lexicon. *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the word back to 2001, but an early notable appearance was the 2005 article in *The Guardian* by Nirpal Dhaliwal entitled “A Fine Bromance.”<sup>84</sup> Dhaliwal writes that bromance refers to “gay-straight friendship,” friendships between gay men and straight men. He writes, I think mistakenly, “Close friendships between men of the same sexuality have never been an issue. It is the unconsummated intimacy of the bromance, its obvious but transcended sexual dimension, that makes it a relationship worthy of its own unique title.” Of course, at least in

American popular culture, bromance has come to refer to intense friendships between heterosexual men. Like, “man date,” “bromance” seemed to fit clearly into a lexical niche, which requires acknowledging the queer valences of intense male friendships while also rejecting those valences. Dhaliwal’s gay-straight definition is interesting, because of how he presents the gay-straight bromance as a higher-order male friendship. He writes, “A true bromance happens between men who know themselves, who are over their issues and just want to hang out with other intelligent and open men. There is a mutual attraction in a bromance (why else would people become close friends?), but the fact that there is no sex is liberating for both involved.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, Dhaliwal’s definition, despite being ostensibly queer-positive, ends up drawing a bright line between “platonic” friendship and romantic or erotic relationships. Dhaliwal acknowledges “mutual attraction” but banishes erotic desire from the bromance. How is this possible? Because the straight men in a bromance relationship are comfortable with and confident in their sexuality. In other words, only straight men who are *really, really* straight can pull off the “bromance.” Male homosociality had been dependent on homophobia to ward off the threat of homoeroticism, but Dhaliwal’s bromance strangely achieves much the same thing: gay friend is the ultimate proof of a straight man’s sexual certitude. The presence of gay men is embraced but only in so far as it can shore up straight masculinity.

Scholars optimistically argue that bromance and similar queer-inflected neologisms reflect a generally post-closet discourse that strategically enables male intimacy within an anti-homophobic context. Ron Becker writes, for example,

the bromance relies on the cultural awareness of and general positive associations connected to gay love to reframe straight masculinity and male homosocial relations. Homosexual relationships become an elucidating analogy or reference point that helps identify and, in many instances, validate the genuine affection and deep friendship that can exist between two (typically straight) men. Beyond the term bromance (which also encourages comparisons to conventional heterosexual relationships), the discourse enables men to go on “man dates,” be “gay for” another man, have “man crushes,” and... be bromosexual.<sup>86</sup>

Another, perhaps obvious, aspect of these terms is that they suggest that intimate male friendship cannot be defined within the public discourse except through parasitically borrowing from the lexicon of straight and gay romance. “Man date” and “bromance” suggest that male friendship is conceptually hollowed out, and it must be graphed onto the conceptual structures of romantic relationship. Thus, part of what I want to suggest is that the discomfort that American popular culture exhibits toward male friendship may have as much to do with the cultural centrality of romantic coupling as it does with homophobia. While “the family” is a contested notion in American politics and culture, the romantic couple is less so. Romantic partnership—whether in the confines of marriage, in serious dating, or cohabitation—is valued across often opposing political and cultural discourses. That is, both “marriage equality” and “traditional family” activists valorize the stable romantic partnership as a basic tenant of human fulfillment.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps part of the reason that the discourse of male friendship lives parasitically off romantic partnership is that romantic coupling has absorbed all of the conceptual energy within the American imagination. Indeed, a cliché of modern marriage is to say, “I married my best friend.” This sentiment suggests that the ideal romantic relationship consolidates everything sexual, social, economic, and emotional into one partner. The spouse-as-best-friend trope also suggests a hoarding of affective and social energies (to say nothing of sexual energies) and a commensurate hostility toward extra-marital relationships that compete in any way for those energies. I would argue that the couple-centric model of human happiness underwrites a neoliberal ideology that prioritizes the private, synonymous with the domestic home, over the broader social environment. The good of the “we,” the family, trump all other social concerns. The affective and social investment in the home or the family is a symptom of the larger neoliberal turn in American culture. The emerging discourse of same-sex friendship between men, and women, may represent a desire to formulate richer social categorizations, which

exist alongside and even interpenetrate the heteronormative domestic spaces, a positive development to the extent that it challenges bourgeois ideology.

There is, thus, no consensus on what we are to make of these newly emerged signifiers of homosociality. To the extent that we can agree upon their denotation, we cannot quite agree upon their larger ideological meaning. Even when we see the “bromance” carving out exclusively platonic same-sex male friendship, it does so through a conceptually parasitic relationship to queer desire and heterosexual romance. Even when we encounter an explicitly queer-positive model of the bromance, as with Dhaliwal’s, its queer positivity appears to be contingent upon the ability of the straight subject to be unequivocally heterosexual.

The ideologically ambiguous nature of the bromance is indicative of the larger theme I have been outlining in this introduction. “Hegemonic masculinity” theory and the “masculinity in crisis” rhetoric fail to account for the genuinely complex and often incoherent ways in which masculinity and homosociality manifest in discourse, performance, and representations. Hammarén and Johansson theorization of homosociality provides perhaps the clearest, if the least definitive, account that can accommodate these ambiguities. Hegemony is always being adapted through counterhegemonic challenges. Sometimes these changes represent merely strategic reorganizations that effectively reproduce social hierarchies; at other times these changes represent substantive changes that erode the structures of domination and subordination; but most of the time the evolution of cultural norms will be a mixture—with real progress occurring even as systemic evils persist.

### **Methodology: Cultural Studies, Interdisciplinarity, Ambiguous Texts, and Ambivalent Mythologies**

This dissertation operates in a rich interdisciplinary context. As a scholar formally trained in interdisciplinary theatre studies, my work is marked by a gregarious synthesis of numerous

disciplines: English, theatre, performance, film, television, media, and gender studies. Because this dissertation will engage so many different kinds of texts—film, television, literature, and theatre—my methodology must necessarily be pragmatically flexible. For example, in some chapters I rely heavily on psychoanalytic theories as reinterpreted through queer theory, and in other chapters I will be much more concerned with genre as a framework through which to analyze a selection of texts. However, this dissertation is best classified as a work of cultural studies. I hitch my wagon to this star in part because cultural studies provides a clearly interdisciplinary framework for working across the different media and texts. As important, cultural studies provides a framework that accommodates many of the methodological concerns I have for reading these texts in a way that does not produce the binary coding of optimistic-pessimistic analysis. That is, cultural studies provides sophisticated theoretical approaches that can accommodate contradictory and ambiguous texts.

Cultural studies in part emerges as a challenge to several previous approaches to studying literature and media. It critiques, for example, the positivist study of media, which imagines media to deterministically influence audiences, or the Marxist approach, which imagines popular and even high culture to merely prop up capitalist ideology. Along the same lines cultural studies rejected the notion that texts merely “reflect” the real world or that they simply reflect dominant ideologies. Rather, texts are produced (i.e., written, programed, adapted, directed, franchised, etc.), distributed (i.e., marketed, broadcast, downloaded, etc.), and received (i.e., read, watched, attended, etc.) by heterogeneous readers, viewers, and audiences within complex and manifold social conditions. Stuart Hall introduced the notion of encoding and decoding of texts. Hall contends that the signification that is encoded into the text as it is produced does not completely determine the way the text is received, or decoded. The audience or reader may assume a “dominant-hegemonic” position, in which she will receive the text in the “preferred” manner, decoding it in a way that is

consisted with its encoding. The audience may also take an oppositional position rejecting the preferred manner of reception. A queer person, for example, may take this position when encountering a homophobic stereotype on television. However, a third option exists, as Hall explains, “

Decoding within the negotiated position contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules — it operates with exceptions to the rule.... This negotiated version of the dominant ideology is thus shot through with contradictions, though these are only on certain occasions brought to full visibility.<sup>88</sup>

Other theorists would go on to extend Hall’s encoding and decoding model by arguing that the texts themselves are encoded with different, often competing, discourses, not a unified ideological point of view.

Within television studies, for example, we can see a more specific enactment of these methodologies. (I focus on television because it is the field that has developed most closely with cultural studies.) Newcomb and Hirsch’s model of “television as a cultural forum” for example challenged the more deterministic social science and mass communication model of television studies. Newcomb and Hirsch’s cultural forum thesis takes for granted the earlier “political economy” approach and its “concern with television’s presentation and maintenance of dominant ideological messages and meanings.” However, Newcomb and Hirsch are “far more concerned with the ways in which television contributes to change than with mapping the obvious ways in which it maintains dominant viewpoints.” Television, they assert, “is dense, rich, and complex rather than impoverished. Any selection, any cut, any set of questions that is extracted from that text must somehow account for that density, must account for what is *not* studied or measured, for the opposing meanings, for the answering images and symbols.”<sup>89</sup> John Fiske similarly proposed a “process” based model that collapses “the distinction between ‘text’ and ‘audience.’” He continues, “The textuality of television, the intertextuality of the process of making sense and pleasure from it,

can only occur when people bring their different histories and subjectivities to the viewing process. There is no text, there is no audience, there are only the processes of viewing, — that variety of cultural activities that take place in front of the screen which constitute the object of study that I am proposing.”<sup>90</sup> Television, Fiske argues, is defined by “its semiotic excess,” which produces a similar heteroglossic, not monological, character.<sup>91</sup> Within theatre studies, Marvin Carlson has similarly developed the idea of the semiotic excess in performance.<sup>92</sup> The cultural studies approach to texts is analogous to the approach to homosociality and masculinity I have advanced already.

The kaleidoscopic effect of these approaches can create certain methodological problems for scholars. The text in cultural studies is not a determinate object out of which a single, definitive reading flows; rather the text is a site of contestation and negotiation, whose signification is only available when triangulated with the text's cultural and historical context and specific conditions of production and reception. Scholars, in order to speak about any text, need to determine which of the seemingly endless series of cultural forces at work on a text should be considered to arrive at a coherent, yet adequately comprehensive, analysis. For example, Julie D'Acci's “integrated approach” to gender and television studies “conceives of its field of study as involving four interrelated sites or spheres: television production, television reception, television programming (or overall content), and television's social/historical context.”<sup>93</sup> However, D'Acci observes that most scholarly enterprises cannot cover all of these sites.<sup>94</sup> Television scholars have long argued over which of these sites are more important to the study of television, but D'Acci's integrated approach helps us to see these different sites and the different critical methodologies they entail, not as competing and mutually exclusive, but as complementary.

This dissertation will tend to emphasize textual analysis (or in television studies parlance programing), historical and cultural contextualization, and intertextual analysis. Each chapter will aim to put a set of texts into conversation with one another and with their historical context. Where

possible, discussions of specific audiences for texts and the industrial and technological character in which they were produced will also be examined. This introduction has already introduced some of the cultural and historical backdrop for the rest of the dissertation, i.e., post-feminist and post-closet American culture; but each chapter will add to this historical backdrop and will develop additional theoretical tools. For example, in the final chapter I consider the detective and serial killer drama NBC's *Hannibal*. To do so, I briefly consider the long history of how disability, criminality, and sexuality have been conflated in the American popular imagination. This historical and cultural background is considered alongside the intertextual relationship between the current *Hannibal* series and the novels from which it draws its main characters. I also briefly consider the online fandoms that have grown up around the series, thus, taking into account how specific audiences have appropriated the series for their own purposes and how the series creators and marketing team have actively engaged with those audiences. Most chapters will contain some sort of historical contextualization and discussion of intertextual analysis, but each adopts its own set of methodologies.

One important methodological issue raised by cultural studies is that of audience and reception. With regard to the present study: who are the audiences for the texts I will be considering? How do their identity positions affect their "reception" of these texts and affect how they "decode" them? Answering these questions is necessary to understand how we should interpret these texts' signification with respect to masculinity and homosociality. Importantly, viewers are heterogeneous. Historically this fact has tended to mean that marginalized peoples' interpretations of texts become marginal or effaced, leaving the dominant groups as the default viewing position for scholarship and criticism. However, marginalized voices are able to intervene and reshape public conversations about art, literature, and media. Especially with the advent of the internet, public conversations about cultural texts better reflect the heterogeneous nature of viewership. This trend

has in turn affected how even dominant groups understand the texts that they consume. Thus, it is difficult to single out one group of viewers, since different communities affect one another, and, moreover, most communities are themselves heterogeneous. Nevertheless, typically, I will default to discussing straight white American men as the audience, in large part because I am specifically concerned with how these texts might be shaping how such men understand same-sex friendship. In my case studies, I am interested in how straight white male characters may serve as psychological proxies through whom straight white male audiences and readers may explore, question, or renegotiate their own fantasies, mythologies, and “scripts” of masculinity. Yet, I am also interested in how marginalized peoples receive texts and how the public discussion of their reception affects the “dominant” audience. A major premise of this dissertation is LGBTQ peoples have effectively shifted the cultural ground on which straight men stand. In part, this fact is simply a consequence of the growing visibility of queer peoples, but, additionally, queer audiences increasingly advocate for queer readings of cultural works. As a result, dominant interpretations, which might have otherwise efface homoeroticism from putatively straight texts, must negotiate a newly queered cultural landscape.

### **The Straight Circuit**

A principle goal of the structural account of homosociality that I will offer below is to address a basic paradox. The normative structures of gender and sexuality are riddled with contradictions; yet, heteronormativity has proven to be a remarkably robust and resilient system. How does a system riddled with contradictions not collapse on itself? My basic account is that masculinity, even what we might call “hegemonic masculinity,” is not a fixed state with unchanging attributes; rather cultural norms for masculine performance are context-dependent scripts. It is not the case that hetero-masculinity is a rigid system demanding absolute uniformity of gender

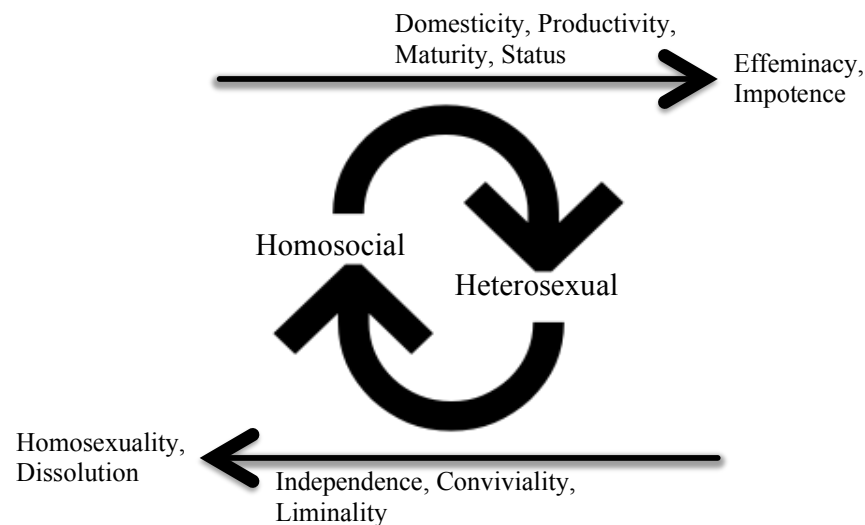
performance. Rather, across different social situations and stages of life, normativity can only be maintained by allowing for different performances of masculinity, which can be recuperated back into a unifying narrative of masculinity. Building on Spector-Mersel's exploration of temporal- and context-dependent "scripts," we can see how across different contexts different expectations of masculinity exist. These expectations may be contradictory but can be unified under larger stories we tell about masculinity. The theoretical framework I offer is designed to help illuminate broad characteristics of narrative cultural works—prose fiction, dramatic literature, narrative film, and television—as opposed to explaining the actual lived experiences of American men. Like any framework, it has blind spots and reveals as much as it conceals. I have dubbed this framework the straight circuit.

The straight circuit is inspired by Jonathan Dollimore's notion of the "perverse dynamic."<sup>95</sup> Dollimore challenges the received point of view that the "perverse" or "deviant" is defined in dialectical opposition to the normative. He notes that in the nineteenth century discourses about deviancy and perversion did not represent them as simply polar opposites of normalcy. Nineteenth-century theories of "degeneration" asserted that European "civilization" stood between two threats: at one extreme was the "primitive" barbarity of non-Western peoples and at the other end the decadence and degeneracy of over-civilized Europeans. Civilization develops out of primitivism, represented in European minds by Africans and other non-European peoples, but European civilization risked becoming over-civilized, moving toward degeneracy. The "pervert" is an ideological creation, who represents the division between the normal and the other, but the theory actually exposes the latent possibility of deviancy within normalcy.<sup>96</sup>

My own theoretical model will build upon this framework to explain how homosociality operates within a homosocial-heterosexual reproductive cycle, or the straight circuit. Like Dollimore, I am arguing that normalcy exists in an anxious zone of behavior continuously threatened at its

boarders and regularly breached by “perversion.” However, I will put my own spin on this framework. Part of the problem with the theory of hegemonic masculinity is that it fails to account for the internal contractions. No one is normatively masculine, because normative masculinity is not like an article of clothes one can simply put on and continue to wear. Maintaining the illusion of seamless normative gender requires radically different performances of masculinity that must change according to time—as discussed in Spector-Mersel notion of “scripts”—and across different contexts—as explained in Cole’s notion of “fields of masculinity.” In considering homosocial masculinity, I want to focus on two “vectors” that shape the performance of masculinity as represented in the narrative culture. These “social vectors” are loosely analogous to force vectors in Newtonian physics, wherein multiple vectors may act on an object. For example, two perpendicular forces act upon the earth’s moon: the downward pull of gravity and the moon’s inertial movement tangential to the earth. The sum of these two forces causes the moon to continuously orbit the earth. Vectors can be summed, producing a single direction of motion for the object. The aggregate motion superficially appears unified and coherent (the circular orbit of the moon), but it is in fact a product of multiple forces.

Different social vectors act upon men's social performance. The "straight circuit" models only two such vectors. A circular movement between the homosocial and the heterosexual, much like the lunar orbit, produces a sustained circular fluidity. At its most basic level this model represents the compulsive need to cycle between the homosocial and the heterosexual. The heterosexual vector represents what we typically think of as normative heterosexuality: middle-class domesticity. The homosocial vector represents what we could refer to as virile masculinity, which seeks to escape from the strictures of bourgeois civility. The main point of this model is to show how cycling through different modes of masculinity across different narrative stages explains how an internally incoherent system can present the fact or illusion of stability and coherence. The circular movement forms a circuit that prevents the normalcy from drifting into "deviation." Either of the



two vectors can, as in Dollimore's model, lead to deviation, if unchecked by the other vector. They are both necessary to close the normative circuit. This model is, admittedly, a distillation of the phenomena it sets out to explain. Throughout the dissertation, I will generally use this model gingerly and avoid flattening out complex phenomenon by making them fit too neatly into this framework, which is intended only as a lens through which common features can be brought into sharper relief.

Dollimore's account of perversion is based largely on European and British "degeneration theory." The straight circuit is intended to explain specifically American ideologies of normativity, masculinity, primitiveness, and civilization. For example, Gail Bederman in her *Manliness and Civilization* explains how, at the turn of the twentieth century, Americans feared the pseudo-medical phenomenon "neurasthenia." Neurasthenia was a condition of nervous exhaustion caused by the overly sensitive dispositions of "refined" peoples. Bederman writes,

In neurasthenia, physicians like George M. Beard had reconstructed middle-class men's discomfort with ideologies of civilized manly self-restraint as a physical illness. Neurasthenia resulted when white men, with highly evolved white bodies, overspent their scarce nervous forces on enervating activities of civilization. In neurasthenia, the problematic nature of civilized manly self-restraint was laid out as a paradox. Only civilized white men could lead civilization to ever higher stages; yet, civilization weakened white men's bodies and drained them of their scarce nervous force. How could white men retain their advanced civilized manliness, and still retain enough nervous energy to withstand tendencies of modern civilization?<sup>97</sup>

Reacting to the concern that white men, particularly middle-class Anglo-Americans, were becoming feminized to the point of debilitation, men engaged in vigorous activities intended to revitalize their masculine physiologies. One solution to the problem of over-civilization and neurasthenia was for men to tap into their "primitive" roots and reclaim their masculinity. Men and boys were encouraged to engage in sports, hunting, camping, bodybuilding, dieting, and other activities designed to promote masculine virtues.<sup>98</sup> Bederman notes how Theodore Roosevelt was the prime example of a highly cultivated easterner who went West to shape his manliness in the Dakota Territory.

"Going West" is the most mythic examples of how the straight circuit has played out in American narrative culture. The American western depends on the fantasy of men moving West, a homosocial space that imbues virile masculinity in its inhabitants. We may, at a very abstract level, imagine the compulsion to "go West" as one vector. From Theodore Roosevelt to John Wayne to George W. Bush's cowboy diplomacy, the image of the westerner represents one mode of authentic masculinity. The West, or more specifically the frontier, is coded as homosocial and masculine in

American mythology, while the East is feminine and heterosexual. The East often enters the West in the form of the eastern schoolteacher arriving in a dusty frontier town.<sup>99</sup> A western with a happy ending will cycle alternately through a homosocial adventure and a heterosexual romance. The westerner must prove his masculinity by committing violent acts commensurate with the “savage” landscape, but he must also join with the eastern woman at the end of the film and settle down into domesticity. (Both of these elements are indicative of two contradictory vectors, one pulling west and another pushing east. The cyclical movement of the narrative reconciles the two: masculinity being vindicated through homosocial violence can take up bourgeois domesticity without fear of neurasthenia or effeminate over-civilization. In subsequent chapters I will expand upon how the straight circuit can be applied to the western and further elaborate the framework in applying it to bachelor parties, stories of masculine maturity, detective stories, and similar genres and mythologies. In those chapters I will also expand upon how, beyond gender and sexuality, other identity categories—race, nationality, ability, class, etc.—also structure these narratives.

The straight circuit as a theoretical framework for reading narrative texts provides several advantages. First, like Dollimore’s perverse dynamic, it provides a way of articulating the intense anxiety around male homosociality without having to posit a static binary between normalcy and deviancy. That is, the straight circuit presumes that a perpetual movement between homosocial and heterosexual relations are necessary to the maintenance of normativity. The compulsive performance of normalcy is not the result of staying on the “straight and narrow” but of cycling through often contradictory performances of normative gender performance, each of which when taken to its extreme threatens to drift into deviancy, e.g., queer cowboys or effeminate white-collar easterners. As an example, as will be discussed in chapter four, the bachelor party represents the polar opposite of marital domesticity, but the bachelor party and the wedding are almost ritually connected in the American cultural imagination. One ritual represents the height of irresponsible and dissolute

homosociality, while the other the height of heterosexual domesticity. These disparate performances of masculinity do not fit neatly into a monolithic model of hegemonic masculinity, but theorizing these ritual performances in terms of a circuit helps to make sense of the shifting performative expectations.

Another advantage of the circuit framework is that it helps to explain the equivocal position of “marginalized” masculinities. White Americans, for example, have continuously appropriated African-American culture, from minstrelsy to jazz to hip-hop. The Beats are perhaps the most notable group of cultural producers who mimicked African-American culture, particularly be-bop jazz.<sup>100</sup> The strange attraction between the subaltern other and the dominant white male has a long history. John Augustus Stone’s 1829 play *Metamora; or, The Last of the Wampanoags* and James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstockings Tales* (1829-41) are two examples of the powerful attraction the Indian American other had over American men and women, despite the genocide Americans visited upon Indian peoples. Indeed, *Metamora*’s theatrical success was built in part on the white actor Edwin Forrest much admired performance as *Metamora*, a Wampanoag Indian.<sup>101</sup> Like Cooper’s Natty Bumppo, the white American “gone native,” Forrest’s fictive performance of Indianness offered an eroticized “primitive” masculinity. Throughout the history of American narrative culture, subaltern identities (particularly Indian and African-American) are symbolic of something fearful and primitive but also vitally and authentically masculine. The paradoxical and equivocal status of the subaltern—as the abject masculine other and as an idealized instance of unadulterated masculinity—can best be reconciled within the circuit model. The ability of white men to transgress identity boundaries can be seen in the vaguely queer, race-crossing, homosocial adventures in Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957). The rambling Beats—who slum it in rail yards, back roads, and jazz clubs—imbibe of black masculinity but can safely retreat back into their indelible whiteness, just as Edwin Forrest can take off his *Metamora* costume at the end of every

performance, just as Elvis could appropriate elements of rhythm and blues without fundamentally losing his racial privilege. In other words, the circuit explains how the white male subject may pass through dangerous and fearful otherness, so long as he returns to normalcy, newly invigorated. This transgressive cycle is, however, essentially a white masculine privilege. Subalterns, of course, may not pass in the opposite direction into whiteness, nor may women come into contact with the subaltern, lest they are besmirched by such contact (“a fate worse than death”).

Lastly, the straight circuit’s theoretical framework helps to reconcile the pessimistic and optimistic critical approaches to homosociality, which I will explore below. The opposing vectors of the circuit, if unchecked by one another, lead to “perversions” or “deviancy.” Thus, the social vectors inherent to normative masculinity are potentially destabilizing. Specifically, the homosocial vector can lead to dissolution and queerness. This aspect of the circuit theory fits into the optimistic scholarship on homosociality. However, because the circuit serves to correct the “excesses” of any one vector, it is able to establish a perpetual cycle that avoids the deviant extreme of either vector. Hence, what appears to be subversive within homosocial behavior is merely part of the normative cycling of social behavior. The possibility for deviation is inherent to the circuit, but the deviant movement is almost always reintegrated. Deviation and normativity, hegemony and subversion are able to exist alongside each other.

The structure of the straight circuit explains how narrative can contain deviation as a constitutive element of normativity, but this model also demonstrates how normativity carries within it the seeds of its own undoing. As we will see the homosocial vector tends to drift into homoeroticism, and, as I will discuss in chapters two and four, homoeroticism plays a foundational role in the constitution of the masculine self. These latent queer aspects of homosociality, which operate in the straight circuit, become harder to ignore or paint over in the post-closet era. It is less the case that homosocial narratives are queered in the post-closet era than that their inherent queer

elements are newly visible, and, consequently, the power of the straight circuit to contain deviation becomes attenuated.

## Chapter Outline

Each chapter in this dissertation will focus on one or more contemporary case studies, but each chapter begins by setting up the historical antecedents. My goal with this structure is to historicize male friendship in the post-closet era as part of a broader history of gender and sexuality in American culture.

The first chapter aims to offer a historical overview of how male friendship has been imagined in American narrative texts. I argue that, since the nineteenth century, representations of male friendship have transitioned from “romantic friendship” to austere and reticent friendships and back again to intimate and loving friendships. This cycle is driven in part by sexuality discourses of these periods, beginning with the emergence of a homophobic discourse corresponding with the decline of romantic friendships in narrative culture. Anti-homophobic discourses of the late twentieth century helped to shape a post-closet culture in the twenty-first century, wherein men are renegotiating the terms of male friendship in light of these emerging discourses. After discussing the historical factors at work and briefly examining texts that exemplify these periods, I consider the bromance genre and how it has evolved in a relatively short period, internalizing anti-homophobic discourse and elevating male friendship to a status nearly equal to heterosexual romance.

The second chapter examines the role of same-sex desire in the American western. I begin by analyzing the classic western in terms of the straight circuit and discerning how same-sex attraction underlies the classic western formula. My basic argument is that the western is a fantasy of recuperating masculinity through homosocial adventure. The post-closet era of the western is easily identified with the release of *Brokeback Mountain* in 2005. While westerns in the post-*Brokeback* era

have remained decidedly heterosexual, the newly queered light cast on the genre has made it difficult to fully sublimate homoeroticism. I will consider two films as particularly indicative of the anxious but poetic mediation on homosocial desire in the *Brokeback West*, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007) and *Appaloosa* (2008). The third chapter considers the bachelor party genre as a fantasy homosocial ritual, wherein men may reclaim their virility by transgressing social norms within a clearly delineated carnivalesque space. In many ways these films are fantasies of reasserting shared white patriarchal power particularly at the expense of women. The films within the bachelor party genre, I argue, are perhaps the most recalcitrant example of regressive hetero-masculinity.

The fourth chapter considers two mid-century texts, John Knowles's novel *A Separate Peace* and Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, which feature the death of a best friend in a "homoerotic" male friendship. Using Judith Butler's theory of gender as grounded in melancholic repression of homosexual desire, I will show how Knowles's novel demonstrates the "normal" maturation of the male protagonist who moves past the homoerotic relationship toward maturity, while William's protagonist degenerates following the death of his friend. The chapter concludes by looking at recent representations of gay-straight male friendships, focusing on the novel and film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, which moves beyond the need to suppress same-sex desire in order to move forward with male friendship. Chapter five will examine the evolution of the detective genre and specifically the detective character as a figure who maintains the line between normalcy and deviancy. In looking specifically at the NBC series *Hannibal*, I will show how increasingly male detective protagonists in contemporary television and film are characterized by "deviancy"—queerness, psychopathology, and neuroatypicality.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ward, *Not Gay*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> "Nerdist Writers Panel #129."

---

<sup>3</sup> Ward, *Not Gay*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*.

<sup>5</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 22–3. Cf. Chauncey, “Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War One Era.”

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–5.

<sup>8</sup> D’Emilio, “The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America,” 233–4.

<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically men of color and non-Anglo men would be defined as both hypersexual and completely desexualized.

<sup>10</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 117.

<sup>11</sup> “The Homosexual: Newly Visible, Newly Understood.”

<sup>12</sup> Wyden and Wyden, *Growing Up Straight: What Every Thoughtful Parent Should Know About Homosexuality*, 111.

<sup>13</sup> Kimmel, “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity,” 133.

<sup>14</sup> Carrigan, Connell, and Lee, “Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity.”

<sup>15</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 67–86.

<sup>16</sup> Messerschmidt and Connell, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept.”

<sup>17</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

<sup>18</sup> Messerschmidt and Connell, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” 832.

<sup>19</sup> In my own writing I tend to use ‘masculinity’ and ‘masculinities’ interchangeably, as I regard the form as a collective noun referring to the incoherent and multiple manifestations of the larger phenomenon of ‘masculinity,’ much as the term ‘scholarship’ can be understood to function as referring to diverse and contradictory bodies of scholarship.

<sup>20</sup> Berlant and Warner, “Sex in Public,” 168.

<sup>21</sup> Spector-Mersel, “Never-Aging Stories,” 68.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>24</sup> See also the psychologist Allen McConnell. McConnell theorizes a “multiple self-aspects framework (MSF),” which “conceives of the self-concept as a collection of multiple, context-dependent selves” (3). McConnell, “The Multiple Self-Aspects Framework.”

<sup>25</sup> Coles, “Negotiating the Field of Masculinity,” 30.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

---

<sup>27</sup> Hammaren and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 8. See also Stephen Whitehead’s critique of hegemonic masculinity in his *Men and Masculinities*, 88-94.

<sup>28</sup> Messerschmidt and Connell, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” 838.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 839-849.

<sup>30</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

<sup>31</sup> The other two male roommates present equally incoherent identities. Winston Bishop (Lamorne Morris) is a washed-up semi-professional baseball player with the most bizarre personality traits. Coach (Damon Wayans, Jr.) is a personal trainer with anger issues, who nonetheless is given to bouts of hysterical fear.

<sup>32</sup> For a similar critique of the *use* of hegemonic masculinity in contemporary media criticism see Amanda Lotz’s *Cable Guys*, 38-42.

<sup>33</sup> Todd Reeser takes up this approach to masculinity studies and contrasts it to R.W. Connell’s framework of hegemonic masculinity. He writes, “My approach here, however, tends to focus not on articulating what these relations [i.e., subordination, marginality and complicity] are or how masculine hegemony functions... but on the fluidity or the instability of these relations, on the cracks and fissures in these relations, or on the successful and unsuccessful attempts by hegemony to hide itself as dominant. In this way, hegemonic masculinity is thought of as a model not only inextricable from subordination, but also very dependent on it for its own definition. I focus, too, on ways in which a man oscillates between various relations of masculinity, how he never really simply in any one position in any relation, but often somewhere in between.” Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> See Traister, “Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies.”

<sup>35</sup> Silver, “How Opinion on Same-Sex Marriage Is Changing, and What It Means”; Saad, “Americans’ Acceptance of Gay Relations Crosses 50% Threshold.”

<sup>36</sup> Raymond, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory.”

<sup>37</sup> Anderson, *Inclusive Masculinity*, 8.

<sup>38</sup> Anderson, “Inclusive Masculinity in a Fraternal Setting,” 616.

<sup>39</sup> Anderson, *Inclusive Masculinity*, 9.

<sup>40</sup> Dean, *Straights*, 87–99.

<sup>41</sup> Gayle Rubin provides one of the most potent articulations of how women can operate as commodities traded between men in order to cement social bonds between them. See Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex.”

<sup>42</sup> Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” 135–41. See also Michael A. Messner, “Friendship, Intimacy, and Sexuality,” 253–65.

<sup>43</sup> Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>45</sup> Anderson, “Inclusive Masculinity in a Fraternal Setting.”

<sup>46</sup> Messner, “Friendship, Intimacy, and Sexuality,” 253–5.

---

<sup>47</sup> Hammaren and Johansson, “Homosociality,” 5.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>49</sup> Demetriou argues that dominant modes of masculinity maintain hegemony by incorporating elements of marginalized masculinities “to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy.” Demetriou, “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique,” 337. Arxer similarly argues, “Homosocial interaction, however, did not always promote clear distinctions between hegemonic masculinity and alternative masculinities. Non-hegemonic meanings, in these cases, were not suppressed or eliminated but instead were incorporated into the strategies of gendered domination. What follows is research showing how hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculine practices are not strictly segregated in homosocial interaction among men.” Arxer advances a pessimistic point of view that imagines any changes to dominant male behavior is done for the sake of maintaining patriarchal power over women. Arxer, “Hybrid Masculine Power,” 400.

<sup>50</sup> Lotz, *Cable Guys*, 27. Lotz’s nominal focus on second-wave feminism is, I think, a mistake, since third-wave feminism made significant contributions to developing an intersectional understanding of gender as inflected by race, sexuality, class, nationality, and other identity categories.

<sup>51</sup> See Solnit, “Listen Up, Women Are Telling Their Story Now.”

<sup>52</sup> Grazian, “The Girl Hunt,” 238.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>54</sup> Sedgwick observes that the “power relationships between men and women appear to be depend on the power relationships between men and men.” Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Messner, “Friendship, Intimacy, and Sexuality,” 258–63. Nicholas Syrett, in his *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities*, takes a longer historical view but arrives at the same results: within fraternities since at least the early twentieth century. Fraternity men shared predatory sexual practices and bragged about their sexual exploits in order to bolster their heterosexual credentials and, consequently, their masculinity for the benefit of their fraternity brothers. Syrett, *The Company He Keeps*, 185.

<sup>56</sup> Starecheski, “The Power Of The Peer Group In Preventing Campus Rape.”

<sup>57</sup> See Greene, “Touch Isolation: How Homophobia Has Robbed All Men Of Touch.” McKay and McKay, “Bosom Buddies: A Photo History of Male Affection.”; Lowder, “Another Casualty of Homophobia: Platonic Male Affection.” These articles are motivated by the relatively recent collection and curation of photographs from the nineteenth and early twentieth century of men in intimate physical poses, e.g., Deitcher, *Dear Friends*; Ibson, *Picturing Men*.

<sup>58</sup> Wade, “American Men’s Hidden Crisis: They Need More Friends!” Wade sites a half dozen academic articles that discuss a large set of social science research on the “male friendship crisis.” For more examples of this kind of popular writing about men and friendship, see: Schrank, “Can’t Guys Just Learn to Fight for a Friendship?”; Greene, “Why Men Have so Much Trouble Making Friends.”

<sup>59</sup> Here I mean productive in a value-neutral sense: homophobia produces different modes of interaction; it does not merely limit how men interact.

<sup>60</sup> Rosin's book has been rightly critiqued for overstating the significance of her data, perhaps the most common sin of upper-middle-brow online journalism. Cf. Homans, "Review of *The End of Men*, by Hanna Rosin" and Cohen, Philip N. "Still a Man's World, Review of *The End of Men*, by Hanna Rosin." While acknowledging the role of class and race, Rosin tends to again and again return to the narrative of a trade off in the economic distribution of power and social distribution of power between men and women, when in fact American culture has been shaped more by a simple decline in well paying low-skill jobs. In an academic context, James Heartfield back in 2002 addressed the "masculinity in crisis" notion in his article "There is No Masculinity Crisis." Heartfield argues, successfully I think, that the relevant losses experienced by men are not the tradeoffs between men and women or the result of feminism. This framework, reiterated by Rosin in 2012, figures the debate about men in terms of their losing economic and social power to women. Speaking specifically in the context of the United Kingdom (but occasionally referencing the US), Heartfield writes, "Rather it is in relation to capital that men and women alike have lost authority. The cumulative defeats inflicted upon working class organisations in the 1980s and 90s have created a condition in which working class subjectivity has been diminished. The crisis is not one of masculinity, but one of the working class." In the popular American press, Tracy Clark-Flory offered a similar critique in 2012. Addressing specifically popular non-fiction crossover writing about men and boys, she observes how often these texts fail to address men and boys specifically and in fact ground their observations in research that, in fact, addressed both genders. Clark-Flory, "The 'Man Crisis,' Continued."

<sup>61</sup> See Winter, "Crisis of Masculinity." See also Kimmel who frames his study of manhood in America as focusing on "moments of crisis": "I'm interested especially in moments of crisis when masculinity was seen as threatened and people worked hard to try and salvage, revitalize, and resurrect it. These crisis points in the meaning of manhood were also crisis points in economic, political, and social life—moments when men's relationships to their work, to their country, to their families, to their visions, were transformed." Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 7.

<sup>62</sup> James Penner, for example, eschews the "catchphrase" as "often misleading because it implies that one form of masculinity is approaching its end and that a new form of masculinity will somehow emerge and replace the previous form of masculinity. However, it is a foregone conclusion that the crisis in masculinity will never end. Hence, the phrase is often inappropriately used as a blanket term for describing opposing types of masculinity that co-exist in the same historical moment. In my estimation, the phrase is entirely inadequate for describing specific gender formations or understanding complex historical situations. Ultimately, we need a more nuanced way of discussing the fissures in masculine identity that exist both in the present and in the cultural past." Penner, *Pinks, Pansies, and Punks*, 15.

<sup>63</sup> See also Bederman's discussion of "crisis" rhetoric. She writes, "First of all, there is no evidence that most turn-of-the-century men ever lost confidence in the belief that people with male bodies possessed both a man's identity and a man's right to wield power." She continues, "Gender, which we have defined as an ongoing ideological process, implies constant contradiction, change, and renegotiation. Thus, change in the gender system—even extensive change—doesn't necessarily imply a 'crisis.'" Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Schlesinger, "The Crisis in American Masculinity," 240–1.

<sup>65</sup> Whyte, *The Organization Man*; Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*.

---

<sup>66</sup> Attwood, Leonard, and Moskin, *The Decline of the American Male*. One measure of these writings impact is that *The Dick Van Dyke Show* based an entire episode in 1962 around them. “The Bad Old Days” (1.28, April 4, 1962). The episode thankfully lampoons the notion the “decline of the American male” thesis.

<sup>67</sup> See Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*.

<sup>68</sup> Cobb specifically draws an analogy between Chief Justice John Roberts’s majority decision in the 2013 ruling of *Shelby County v. Holder*, wherein the Roberts implicitly asserts that the provisions of the Voting Rights Act in question “disadvantages” Southerners by presuming racism on their parts. Wickenden, Cobb, and Foner, “The Political Scene: The Legacy of Reconstruction.”

<sup>69</sup> Savran, *Taking It like a Man*, 206.

<sup>70</sup> See Clatterbaugh, *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity*, 69–75.

<sup>71</sup> Blake, “Mad Men.”

<sup>72</sup> Farrell writes, for example, “If a man ignoring a woman’s verbal ‘no’ is committing date rape, then a woman who says ‘no’ with her verbal language but ‘yes’ with her body language is committing date fraud.” Farrell, *The Myth of Male Power*, 314.

<sup>73</sup> I am specifically avoiding referring to the shooter by his name, as has been rightly advocated as a way to deprive shooters of posthumous fame. See Garfield, “Don’t Say His Name.”

<sup>74</sup> Friedman, “A Look Inside the ‘Men’s Rights’ Movement That Helped Fuel California Alleged Killer Elliot Rodger.”

<sup>75</sup> Goldwag, “Leader’s Suicide Brings Attention to Men’s Rights Movement.”

<sup>76</sup> For more about #gamergate see Rott, “#Gamergate Controversy Fuels Debate On Women And Video Games”; Duggan, “Online Harassment.”

<sup>77</sup> Blake notes examples of Warren Farrell’s meetings including men giving each other shoulder rubs, and, more disturbingly, she recounts how some men’s groups meetings can operate as supporting meetings for domestic abusers, who are enabled in rationalizing their violence. Blake, “Mad Men.”

<sup>78</sup> Tiger, *Men in Groups*, 194–217.

<sup>79</sup> Bly, *Iron John*, 2.

<sup>80</sup> Another foundational book in the men’s rights movement is Herb Goldberg’s *The Hazards of Being Male* (1976), which devotes an entire chapter to “the lost art of buddyship.” Buddyship, the most authentic form of male friendship, has been lost in contemporaneous America because of homosexual anxiety and malignancy wives who are jealous of their husbands affections. Goldberg, *The Hazards of Being Male*.

<sup>81</sup> Chen, “Caught in a Bad Bromance.”

<sup>82</sup> Chen seems to recognize that this basic logic can resolve some of the concerns she raised in the article, though she does not seem to recognize the basic contradiction between the two arguments. She writes,

What if we no longer constrained intimate friendship for men to only include men? In this case, gender hierarchy in friendship and relationships more broadly might be diminished and

possibly even eliminated. If 'pure' male friendship no longer had a special category, it would not retain the same privilege and concomitant boundaries. Marriage would not be the only location in which men and women could share intimacy. Gender roles as defined through friendship could diminish as a source of subordination and privilege because there would not be a line drawn between men's friendships and women's friendships. These friendships could have recognition, even if they existed at a distance from gender norms. If society would then permit men and women to have intimate friendships with each other and provide care outside of marital relationships, marriage would no longer be the model for intimacy for men, addressing some of the concerns raised in Part II. (Ibid., 261.)

<sup>83</sup> Lee, "The Man Date."

<sup>84</sup> Dhaliwal, "A Fine Bromance."

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Becker, "Becoming Bromosexual: Straight Men, Gay Men, and Male Bonding on U.S. TV," 241.

<sup>87</sup> See Michael Cobb's *Single* for a critique of the "coupling" as part of heteronormativity.

<sup>88</sup> Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 175.

<sup>89</sup> Newcomb and Hirsch, "Television as a Cultural Forum," 571.

<sup>90</sup> Fiske, "Moments of Television: Neither the Text nor the Audience," 57.

<sup>91</sup> Fiske in particular draws on Roland Barthes's notion of the "writerly texts," which interpellates the reader as a co-creator of the text. He also draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, referring to the plurality of languages (discourse) that are present in a single text. The heteroglossic novel is distinct from the "monological" novel, which expresses the author's point of view only.

<sup>92</sup> Carlson, "Invisible Presences—Performance Intertextuality." For example, when a celebrity, say Benedict Cumberbatch, takes on an iconic role, say Hamlet, the performance is saturated with intertextual references to, on the one hand, the actors previous roles and public personal and, on the other hand, the performance history of the role. Literature is subject to this mode of analysis. A novel is often written within a preconceived set of expectations, particularly when it fits into or "rebels against" genre conventions. A novel is then bought and marketed based upon the publisher's presumptions about who its audience is, which in turn shapes readers' preconceptions of the novel, as being, for example, a "literary" work or a work of "genre fiction." Yet, readers can quickly appropriate literary works through word of mouth, online communities, and fan fiction works that treat the ordinal novel as palimpsest to be overwritten with infinite variations.

<sup>93</sup> D'Acci, "Television, Representation and Gender," 387.

<sup>94</sup> D'Acci explains, "This is not to say that every individual study of gender and television needs to include an investigation of each of the four sites—it would be virtually impossible to do this. It is simply to say that the specific activities of each site and the potential interactions among them should be considered when conceiving a particular research project involving television and gender, when posing the questions that impel the research, and when drawing the final conclusions. In any actual study, an investigation into one or two of the sites may virtually eclipse the others." Ibid., 381.

---

<sup>95</sup> Dollimore advances this notion in several of his works including: Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*; Dollimore, “Civilization and Its Darkness”; Dollimore, “Perversion, Degeneration, and the Death Drive.”

<sup>96</sup> The perverse dynamic demonstrate how perverts “render unstable the very theory which creates and deploys them.” Dollimore, “Civilization and Its Darkness,” 71. Part of perversion is that it creates a link between the normative self and the perverse other, because through the perverse dynamic the normative self maintains its purity by disavowing its own deviation onto the perverse other. Dollimore refers to the perverse which is anxiously close to the normative social self as the “proximate other.” He writes, “perverse deviation discloses something within or about (in proximity to) the normal which the latter must disavow in order to remain itself—a split, a contradiction, a difference; this is one reason why perversion is regarded as dangerous. However, the original proximity (or identity) of the perverse with the normal also enables the normal to displace its own contradictions on to the perverse.” *Death, Desire, and Loss in Western Culture*, 139–40. In Dollimore’s model, normalcy, like Aristotle’s “golden mean,” is a moderated point between two extremes of deviation. Dollimore sees normalcy as essentially vulnerable because it must carefully walk the “straight and narrow” between these two extremes. As Dollimore explains, “More generally, civilization itself is only an intensity of concentration, a blinkered adherence to the straight and narrow, which is also therefore an inevitable and not an accidental blindness epitomized by the ‘civilized’ quest itself, the collecting of ivory: a brutal, industrious, determined operation executed by agents necessarily oblivious to all else.” “Civilization and Its Darkness,” 72. Normalcy depends on a constant labor to maintain this position, which makes the perverse all the more anxiety inducing.

<sup>97</sup> Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 118–9.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–23.

<sup>99</sup> See chapter two for a discussion of the “eastern woman” in the American western.

<sup>100</sup> Beat appropriation of black masculinity was most famously, if quite problematically, described in Norman Mailer’s essay “The White Negro,” but Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957) repeatedly expresses a desire to take up black and even Latino identities.

<sup>101</sup> Watt and Richardson, *American Drama*, 52–4.

**Chapter One**  
**Romantic Friendship, Passionless Pals, Straight Panic, and Bromantic Friendship:**  
**An Overview of Male Friendship in American Culture**

**Introduction**

A central goal of this dissertation is to examine how representations of male friendship have transformed alongside ideologies of gender and sexuality. In subsequent chapters I will track these changes, or the lack of change, by examining the evolution of specific mythologies, fantasies, genres, and similar meta-textual “scripts” through a set of case studies. This chapter aims to setup a historical framework for the remaining chapters and argues that depictions of male friendship have gone through four stages that correspond to and are mutually constitutive with contemporaneous changes in gender and sexuality ideologies. First, through much of the nineteenth century “romantic,” and even “erotic,” friendships appear in literature, including canonical literature. Intense and physically intimate male friendships were largely unremarkable in literature and in private expressions, such as letters and diaries. The second stage of development begins at the end of the nineteenth century. Masculinity was conceived in opposition to femininity and concomitantly in opposition to queer masculinities. Simultaneously medical and popular discourses began to identify homosexuality a distinct identity with discernably different character traits, most notably the “inversion” of gender differences. Homosexuality slowly came to serve as a dialectical opposite to hetero-masculinity. “Hard masculinity” and stoic friendship came to eclipse the earlier sentimental intimacy between men. Same-sex affection never disappears but, at least in narrative culture, is more carefully policed. By the mid-twentieth century, several events (including the Lavender Scare, psychiatric theories of gender and sexuality, and the recodification of gender norms after the Great Depression and World War II) coalesced to privilege the heterosexual, domestic bourgeois family as the ideal achievement for men. Juvenile male friendship continued to be important. The political, the

commercial, and other “public spheres” were still homosocial spaces. Yet, physical and emotional intimacy was ideologically centered on monogamous heterosexual relationships.

The third stage of development in the latter third of the twentieth century saw rigid gender norms subjected to significant criticism and transformation. Beginning in the 1960s and 70s second-wave feminist and the gay rights movements emerged to challenge the prevailing order of gender and sexuality. By the 1990s, hetero-masculinity, which had for much of the twentieth century been defined in opposition to “femininity” and gay sexuality, had to contend with the long-standing feminist and the emerging anti-homophobic discourses. A decade of remarkable contradictions, the 1990s saw the entrenchment of a virulently homophobic politics among right-wing Americans, even as gay men and women were more visible than ever. Among the liberal and progressive writers, directors, producers, actors, and other artists and entertainers, there was a bizarrely bi-polar response to LGBTQ politics. Increasingly, gay men and lesbian women were represented in less and less stereotypical and demeaning ways, though stereotypes and homophobic representations continued and were generally the dominant form. Prestigious entertainment and narrative arts became much more open to gay men. Gay themed works were widely celebrated. *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1993; *Philadelphia* (1993), a film about an HIV/AIDS-positive gay man, was a major critical success, winning a Best Actor Academy Award for its leading man, Tom Hanks; and the successful sitcom *Will & Grace* (1998-2006) premiered at the end of the decade. In this contradictory space, where hetero-masculinity was still imagined to be dialectically opposed to gay masculinity, but where queer identities were quickly gaining visibility, straight men needed to rearticulate their identities in new terms for which they lacked the basic vocabulary. The reaction was characterized by what Ron Becker calls “straight panic,” or “what happens when heterosexual men and women, still insecure about the boundary between gay and straight, confront

an increasingly accepted homosexuality.”<sup>1</sup> Straight panic shaped male friendship and same-sex male intimacy more generally.

Yet, this period would give way to one beginning around the mid-2000s, marked in part by a “tipping point” in gay rights. Less than a decade after the Defense of Marriage Act (1997), which defined marriage as an opposite-sex institution, passed Congress by overwhelming majorities, the Supreme Court in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) struck down the remaining anti-sodomy laws in the US. In 2004 Massachusetts became the first state to recognize same-sex marriage. *Lawrence* and Massachusetts would pave the way for *United States v. Windsor* (2013), which struck down the Defense of Marriage Act, and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), which made same-sex marriage the law of the land. Gaping holes in legal protection for LGBTQ peoples still remain—for example, the absence of a federal law protecting from employment and housing discrimination—but these cases were a remarkable turnabout in LGBTQ legal standing, and these legal changes were paralleled in media. It is within this “post-closet” cultural space that I contend male friendship has been renegotiated to accommodate anti-homophobic discourses.

The preceding four-part schema is admittedly an oversimplification of a long and complex history. In what follows I will aim to complicate the story. However, in order to provide the kind of sweeping historical context required for a project like this one, it is necessary to hew off the rough edges and simplify the historical picture to make it more manageable. These necessary simplifications are what I, borrowing from Anthony Appiah, call “tolerable falsehoods.” Appiah’s position is that powerful theoretical frameworks may be productive and yield valuable information, even if they at the same time conceal important facts that competing frameworks would reveal.<sup>2</sup> We only run into problems then if we forget that theories are always prone to such failures. I believe this framework will be productive, even if it fails to account for some important complexities, which I

have necessarily passed over, and I hope that future scholars will provide valuable corrective to any such deficiency in the present study.

A theoretical lens that might bring into focus particularly notable omissions is the emphasis on male sexualities. This dissertation focuses on the relationship between homosociality and homosexuality. Obviously, sexuality can never be separated from the range of intersectional identity positions that co-constitute sexuality, e.g., gender, race, class, dis/ability, citizenship, and so forth. If only for logistical reason, it is impossible to fully articulate how all of these identity categories intersect with sexuality in each of the case studies I consider, but I have done my best to avoid allowing these categories to become invisible. Additionally, this project focuses on the *dominant* ideological constitution of masculinity. Consequently, it focuses on white middle-class men, representations of whom have dominated much of American culture. Nevertheless, my intent is to regularly foreground race, class, and other categories of identity, rather than allow them to pass as unmarked. As Julian Carter has observed in *The Heart of Whiteness*, at least since the nineteenth century, the ideology of normative sexuality and gender has been implicitly coded as white, while black male sexuality is often coded in pathological terms and scrutinized through the lens of public health and public policy.<sup>3</sup> The erasure of non-white bodies and the naturalization of whiteness as normative are ideologies I challenge in this study. However, I will leave it to subsequent scholars to build on the success—and perhaps correct the shortcomings—of the present work and expand its scope.

This chapter, like much of the dissertation, moves rather freely between literature, theatre, film, and television for its key examples. However, I have tended to use literature and theatre as examples when looking at nineteenth through mid-twentieth century culture, while emphasizing film and television for the later twentieth century and twenty-first century, reflecting the relative cultural centrality of the genres across these time periods.

## Romantic Friendship

From the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century, romantic friendships and intimate homosocial relationships recorded in personal diaries and imagined in literature were so passionate, emotionally expressive, and physically intimate that to today's readers they look like romantic and even sexual relationships, not friendships. In his book *The Overflowing of Friendship*, Richard Godbeer details how central intense male friendships were to Americans before and after Independence. "Sentimental friendship" grew out of the culture of sensibility and sympathy, which took root among "cultivated" eighteenth-century Anglo-Americans.<sup>4</sup> Friendships look differently in this period than in our own, in part, Godbeer explains, because gender itself was understood differently. He writes,

Contemporaries often characterized the culture of sensibility as feminine, in large part because emotion itself was often associated with femininity. But that did not mean that the ethos of shared feelings was seen as the purview of women alone: indeed, cultivated men were expected to display this particular feminine attribute. Premodern Anglo-American culture made a clear distinction between masculine and feminine qualities, but attributes associated with either gender were not attached inflexibly to male or female bodies.<sup>5</sup>

The colonial, revolutionary, and early-Republic eras had, in one sense, a more fluid notion of gender expression, if a relatively strict notion of how the two genders could operate in public. Sentimental friendship was coded as feminine but not as distinctly the purview of women. Men who were refined to become sympathetic and cultured would necessarily develop a certain degree of "feminization," but doing so would not deprive them of their status as men, because one's biological gender was compatible with psychological and performative aspects of the opposite gender.<sup>6</sup>

Numerous scholars have similarly documented romantic friendship throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Alongside works of literature, letters, and journals, scholars have compiled photographs from the turn of the century, which show men in surprisingly intimate and loving poses.<sup>8</sup> Same-sex *sexual* relationships certainly existed during this period, but sentimental and

romantic friendships, though physically intimate, were not necessarily sexual. D'Emilio and Freedman write, "Until 1880s, most romantic friendships were thought to be devoid of sexual content. Thus a woman or a man could write of affectionate desire for a loved one of the same gender without causing an eyebrow to be raised."<sup>9</sup> Emotional and even physical intimacy between same-sex friends remained largely "unselfconscious" until the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Anthony Rotundo, in his discussion of white Northern middle-class men and boys, argues that romantic friendships became more "passionate" in the nineteenth century. Friendships of these sorts provided needed support as young men made the transition into adulthood.<sup>11</sup> Rotundo writes that "secret societies, lodges, and fraternities" were extensions of boy culture, which "offered social acceptance at a time of life when other bonds and commitments were in flux."<sup>12</sup> Some in the nineteenth century held up friendship as an antidote to the dehumanizing effects of industrialization. William Rouseville Alger in his essay "The Literature of Friendship" (1856) harkens back to classical and Renaissance writings. Alger contrasts the almost religious devotion between men in earlier periods to the instrumental and "common friendships" of his own period where commerce had eroded intimate sentiments between noble souls. True friendship depended upon a poetic and philosophical "refinement" that allowed for the development of the "sympathies" and "sensibilities."<sup>13</sup> Alger's view of friendship is unmistakably classist and elitist, but the nostalgic longing for prelapsarian friendship, which is uncorrupted by modern avarice and the bustle of mechanization, valorizes the intimacy between men as restorative, in much the way American culture today imagines heterosexual relationships to be revitalization.

Alger's uses literary sources in his discussion of friendship, which helps us to see how the literature and lived experiences served as mutually constituting. American literary and theatrical culture demonstrates how discourses of friendship and masculinity shifted between the nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century. Numerous scholars have provided extensive studies of

romantic friendship in nineteenth century literature.<sup>14</sup> Some relationships between men in this period even mimicked the trappings of marriage and promised the same level of emotional support.<sup>15</sup> Nissen's *The Romantic Friendship Reader: Love Stories Between Men in Victorian America* provides a concise collection of literary examples of romantic friendships that includes works of canonical authors, such as Herman Melville, Bret Harte, Henry James, and Mark Twain.<sup>16</sup> Leslie Fiedler, in his seminal essay "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey" (1948), was among the first to take note of the remarkable number of male friendship in canonical literature of this period featuring "homoerotic" relationships. Fiedler specifically notes the interracial same-sex male relationships, such as Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook in James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* (1827) and Huck and Jim in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885).<sup>17</sup> The marriage vow between Ishmael and Queequeg in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) provides one of the most explicit and notable instances of male friendships taking on the rituals of heterosexual marriage.<sup>18</sup>

### **Homophobia, Hard Masculinity, and Domestic Containment**

The decline of romantic friendship from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century is partly attributable to the emergence of homophobia and the ideological and discursive figure of "the homosexual" as a dialectical other that is concomitantly constituted with heteromascularity.<sup>19</sup> The emergence of homophobia, however, is related to two other phenomena that shape the norms of male behavior and, thus, male friendship in the twentieth century: first, the decline of sentimentality as a masculine norm, in favor of virile or hard masculinity, and, second, the ideology of "domestic containment" in the post-war era. While this dissertation is centered on studying the relationship between gay male (homosexual, queer, etc.) identities and straight male friendship in popular culture, it is important to see how the discourse of homophobia intersects with other discourses that similarly constitute masculinities and male friendships. Again, I will also

emphasize that I do not contend that male friendships are “inhibited” by homophobia, but that homophobic culture shapes how male friendships are able to operate, often “productively” generating new modes and performances of friendships. Nevertheless, it is certainly the case that representations of male friendship become more austere and guarded within narrative culture.

A heightened level of sentimental affection between men of the middle and upper classes was evidence of their refinement and cultivation. However, from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century sentimentality was increasingly regarded with suspicion. As Gail Bederman explains in *Manliness and Civilization*, beginning in the late nineteenth century Americans worried that “Victorian culture itself was ‘effeminate.’”<sup>20</sup> Medical doctors announced their concerns that middle-class men had become “overcivilized.” As a consequence, a broad cultural consensus emerged in which men and boys should cultivate, *not* their “refined” and “civilized” qualities, but their primitive and vigorous natures. Prior to this period, middle-class white manliness was defined in part in opposition to the “savage” otherness of “primitive” non-whites and working-class white men. As Bederman writes, “By the 1880s, however, as the power of Victorian manliness eroded, many middle-class men began to find this rough working-class masculinity powerfully attractive.”<sup>21</sup> Some doctors even advocated for cultivating the “savage” in young boys.<sup>22</sup> The anti-sentimental turn in defining ideal male qualities corresponded with the rise of homophobia, and, within this new ideological system, “the homosexual” is often conflated with effeminacy and aesthetic sensitivity. “Artistic” was one euphemism for homosexual. Theodore Roosevelt’s ideal of vigorous masculinity—physically strong, competitive, and even violent—provides a new mold for the twentieth century. As such, masculinity was less compatible with the sentimental manhood of the earlier era and, consequently, with sentimental, passionate, or romantic friendships. Again, it would not be accurate to say that male friendship declined, or even that they become less “intimate,” but that the cultural framework of sentimentality ceases to provide support for romantic friends *per se*.

Homosociality continues unabated in the twentieth century, to be sure, but it is increasingly channeled into forms of vigorous masculine expression, such as sports culture and socialization with professional colleagues or clients.

Vigorous masculinity was deeply engrained in the American consciousness, but, even so, the bourgeois Victorian husband also defined successful manhood. These complementary, or perhaps contradictory, visions of manhood subsist alongside one another. In the post-war boom of the mid-twentieth century, the middle-class husband became newly important as symbol of patriarchal authority and unchanging social order. The suburban family was a microcosm of the larger return to normalcy that marked this era. Cold War ideology insisted that husbands and wives find total satisfaction—sexual, social, emotional, and material—in the single-family home. Elaine Tyler May refers to this Cold War fixation on the middle-class home as a culture of “domestic containment.” May describes how the middle-class home was part of a larger ideology of political containment. The home was a site for quelling political dissent and personal deviation.<sup>23</sup> Domestic containment, like the intensifying anti-homosexual campaigns of the post-war era, as John D’Emilio argued, was part of a concerted effort to restore normalcy. A range of normalizing campaigns—such as suppressing homosexuality, moving middle-class women out of the workforce and back into the home, continued restrictions on birth control (until 1965), and increasing homeownership (at least for white families)—were designed to “reconstruct patterns of sexuality and gender relations shaken by depression and war.” The measures to stamp out sexual “deviancy” were ideologically tied to suppressing political dissent.<sup>24</sup>

Victorian culture had prized the patriarchal family, but in many ways this domestic ideal was limited to those wealthy enough to afford the trappings of the bourgeois home. Certainly immigrant and working-class families living in crowded tenements were regarded as festering social problems, and for much of the nineteenth century, even if bachelors were not conventionally respectable, they

were tolerated. Massive urbanization drew millions of unattached men to cities, and boarding houses, saloons, brothels, and pool halls sprang up to service these men.<sup>25</sup> By the turn of the century, however, the bachelor represented a dangerous deviation from the bourgeois husband-father figure, a role increasingly attainable for all white men. As Stephanie Coontz explains, in the 1950s, “marriage was seen as the only culturally acceptable route to adulthood and independence. Men who chose to remain bachelors were branded ‘narcissistic,’ ‘deviant,’ ‘infantile,’ or ‘pathological.’”<sup>26</sup> The home and marriage were regarded as mechanisms for “domesticating” men, because of the civilizing influence of women,<sup>27</sup> and, by the mid-twentieth century, “the unmarried state was unnatural and socially dysfunctional.”<sup>28</sup> Heterosexual marriage became a symbolic, economic, sexual, and emotional gateway to personal fulfillment. As Coontz writes, “In this unique period in Western history, marriage provided the context for just about every piece of most people’s lives.” She continues, it “was simply the be-all and end-all of life. In a remarkable reversal of the past, it even became the stepping-off point for adulthood rather than a sign that adulthood had already been established.”<sup>29</sup> Even as some men and women chafed at the claustrophobic nature of domesticity, the home was ideologically constructed to be the singular site of stability and fulfillment. As May writes,

Although political repression and institutional barriers constrained their options, many were deeply committed to the ideal of domestic security and happiness. Marriage promised not only happiness, but also a positive alternative to the lonely life of a single person. In the postwar years, many agreed with the experts that single women would be doomed to an unfulfilled and miserable existence, and that bachelors were psychologically damaged and immature, locked into ‘primitive and infantile modes of thinking,’ in the words of one psychiatrist.<sup>30</sup>

I do not mean to suggest that the suburban family completely displaced homosocial intimacy. Men continued to engage in various forms of social, civic, and professional homosociality, but, as some historians have argued, friendship “was diminished by a new focus on heterosexual intimacy.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, as we will see, narrative culture often imagines male friendship in some sort of contention

with heterosexual intimacy, either because of the specter of homoerotic desire (as in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*) or because it threatens to pull the male paramour toward infantile and self-destructive behavior (as in *The Hangover*).

### **Male Friendship in Twentieth Century American Literary and Theatrical Cultures**

By the early twentieth century, American literary culture began to reflect this valorization of “virile” or “vigorous” masculinity. James Penner discusses this development at length in his *Pinks, Pansies, and Punks: The Rhetoric of Masculinity in American Literary Culture*. He observes how in the early twentieth century leftist critics in particular took aim at the old upper-class model of literary “gentility,” which these critics saw as over-civilized, effeminate, sickly, and impotent. Leftist “realism,” which offered a hard austere look at social reality was celebrated as masculine, while the refined prose of Henry James was disparaged for its “effeteness and fastidiousness.”<sup>32</sup> John Steinbeck, Richard Wright, James T. Farrell, and Sinclair Lewis, authors who “write about the working class and class struggle tend to be the writers who pass the virility test” of leftist critics.<sup>33</sup> Penner argues that twentieth century literary culture defines masculinity in terms of a hard/soft binary. Desirable masculinity was hard, rational, emotionally closed, aggressive, and laconic; soft masculinity was porous, attracted to the irrational, emotionally open, and expressive.<sup>34</sup> The “hard boiled” novels of James M. Cain exemplified the former category. Cain’s characters were of the “hard-shell variety that is impervious to emotionalism and sentimentality. The hard-boiled, which signifies being unfeeling and callous, is presented as the antithesis of the archetypal feminine. The converse of the hard-boiled is flaccidness, mushiness, or anything that lacks hardness and solidity.”<sup>35</sup> These novels reject the sentimentality that had been so valorized in literature of the previous century. The hard-boiled novel, the *roman noir*, or even the film noir of the early to mid-twentieth century exemplified hard masculinity and its emotionally guarded model of male friendships. Male

friendship plays a central role in several classic works of noir fiction, such as Dashiell Hammett's novels *The Glass Key* (1930) and *The Maltese Falcon* (1929), David Goodis's *Dark Passage* (1946), and Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953) (all of which were adapted for film or television). In these novels, the protagonist's relationship with another man is the impetus for central plot developments, often in the name of revenge. Yet, all of the male friendships in these novels are austere and laconic, devoid of sentimentality and passion, or else the slivers of sentiment that come to the surface are actively suppressed. Only the relentless pursuit of violence and vengeance persist as evidence of the protagonist's devotion to his same-sex partner.

The guarded and anxious vision of male friendship is not unique to pulp fiction. It is also present in canonical "literary fiction." Ernest Hemingway's collections of short fiction *Men Without Women* (1927) and *In Our Time* (1925) capture the same sense of masculine hardness and anti-sentimentality, while frequently focusing on homosocial relationships. His laconic and austere prose is famously masculine, and, as Penner demonstrates, his style became something of a model for male writers who desperately wanted to avoid the taint of effeminacy. Hemingway characterized his *In Our Time* as "tight and hard." He was renowned for what went unsaid in his stories and famously described his theory of omission in the adage: "The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water." In Hemingway's writing the *dignity* is by its very nature laconic. The silence of men, especially *between men*, confers upon them a stoic grandeur, while also alluding to the depth of their feelings. His men—a wounded soldier or a prizefighter or bullfighter down on their luck—suffer deep physical or psychological pain but remain nobly taciturn. Hemingway's "minimalism" was a model for a certain kind of masculine writing that would be particularly fashionable in the 70s and 80s, with Raymond Carver being its most famous practitioner.<sup>36</sup> Minimalism's claim to dignity viewed through another lens becomes the "aestheticization of shame, a mode of self-retraction."<sup>37</sup> It further valorized "hardness" as the

privileged form of literary masculinity. Homosocial desire is similarly laconic in Hemingway. Same-sex male desire is often palpably felt without being expressed. In “Cross-Country Snow,” George and Nick briefly discuss their desire to continue skiing and bumming around Europe, even as the two recognize that Nick’s impending marriage to the recently pregnant Helen will put an end to their homosocial adventures. The deep longing for male companionship is clear but remains below the surface. In this way, homosocial attraction persists in twentieth century literary fiction but is effaced or muted. For example, in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Nick Carraway’s intense fixation on his mysterious neighbor Jay Gatsby runs throughout the novel. Yet, Gatsby’s pursuit of Daisy Buchanan motivates the main action. The heterosexual plot obscures the homosocial desire between narrator and protagonist. Even Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957), one of the most explicitly homoerotic—yet unmistakably masculine—canonical novels of the 1950s, submerges much of the erotic tension between Sal Paradise (Jack Kerouac) and Dean Moriarty (Neal Cassady) by triangulating sexual desire through the misogynistic mistreatment of women whom the two men occasionally trade. Thus, canonical American literature in the nineteenth century was unselfconsciously homosocial, but mid-twentieth century literature tended to efface or submerge (to extend the iceberg metaphor) these desires.

American theatre for much of the twentieth century has similarly showed an ambivalence toward same-sex male intimacy. Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur’s *The Front Page* (1928) provides one titillating example from early in the century. A hit on Broadway, the play has been adapted for film and television numerous times over more than half a century. The play follows Hildy Johnson, a star investigative reporter, as he attempts to extricate himself from his position at *The Herald Examiner* and its scheming editor Walter Burns. Hildy, tired of the rough and tumble world of the Chicago newspaper game, plans to marry Peggy, a respectable woman, and settle down. As the play begins, Hildy’s colleagues from other papers can scarce believe Hildy is quitting or that Walter will

allow him. One report comments, “Walter wouldn't let him get married. He'd kidnap him at the altar.”<sup>38</sup> Through the course of the play, the fast-talking, amoral Walter tries everything to sabotage Hildy's escape and wedding. He successfully beguiles the reporter into working on a fast-breaking story. Hildy, like an addict, cannot resist a good story, even as he and Walter bicker and insult one another. Homophobic slurs are bandied about the play, and one “effeminate” reporter is the object of needling. In the end, Hildy does escape with Peggy. As he departs, Walter gives him his watch as a present. Hildy says, “Aw, Jesus, no, Walter! You make me feel like a fairy sometimes or something!”<sup>39</sup> Thus, the homosocial desire between the men is repeatedly overwritten with hostility and homophobic distancing gestures. Yet, the strange desire between the two men is so central to the play that in its most famous film adaptation, Howard Hawks' *His Girl Friday* (1940), Hildy's gender is reversed. Hildy is played by Rosalind Russell, opposite Cary Grant as Walter Burns. *His Girl Friday* was remade as *Switching Channels* (1988), maintaining the same opposite sex relationship. In both films, Hildy and Walter are divorced and get back together at the end of the film, as Hildy rejects her fiancée and the stable, but boring, life he offers her. The ease with which Hildy toggles between genders speaks to the equivocal nature of same-sex attraction between the two men, especially Walter, who desperately tried to win back his star reporter from “the other woman.” Yet, this attraction is effaced by their performance of “hard” masculinity, combative interpersonal exchanges and homophobic discourse.

Theatre in the middle of the twentieth century featured some of the most daring public depictions of gay men. In one sense, we might imagine this represented a legitimate challenge to heteronormativity. Yet, the representations of gay men, and even lesbians, may have transgressed codes of silence, but they did not necessarily challenge prevailing homophobia. Tennessee Williams's plays, for example, while bold, often reiterated existing stereotypes about gay men. In both *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), presumably gay characters commit

suicide out of shame for their sexuality. These plays fulfill the trope of the doomed, tragic queer who dies off-stage. Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* (1934, revived successfully in 1953) provides a lesbian version of this trope, when a woman hangs herself after being convinced that she is a lesbian. Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* provides the most conspicuous early example of intimate male friendship being policed against homoeroticism (see chapter four). Similarly, in Robert Anderson's *Tea and Sympathy* (1953) Tom, a boarding school student, is suspected of being gay after spending time with a similarly suspect teacher. Tom has already failed to perform masculinity properly and be a "regular fellow." He prefers listening to and playing music and talking with Laura Reynolds, the wife of Bill, who is the supervisor for Tom's dorm. Bill suspects the boy of being "queer," noting how Tom walks or stands as evidence. In the end, Tom sleeps with Laura, and Laura unmask Bill as gay. The play has a subversive edge, inverting the initial expectations of the audience, and unearthing homosexuality in the most vocal homophobe, Bill. Still, Bill is a tragic hypocritical figure, and Tom is only saved and made whole by enacting straight sexuality. The play does little to ease the underlying paranoia about male sexuality that erupts when Tom's homosocial association with a suspect teacher is discovered.

The most canonical of American playwrights, Arthur Miller, captures the anxiety of masculinity in this period. Miller's leftist political leanings notwithstanding, his theatre is very much about isolated individuals. Certainly his plays reflect the trauma of anti-Communist hysteria that he experienced first hand. Jeffrey Mason writes, "Miller's political theatre, rooted in the psychology and chronic suspicion of the postwar period, returns all questions to the heart and mind of the isolated individual. Miller wrote, 'If there were one concept that might stand for the Thirties avant-garde, it was the solidarity of humanity, and if the Fifties had an emblem, it was loneliness.'"<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Miller's theatrical manifesto "Tragedy and the Modern Man" squarely focuses on the lone individual struggling against an indifferent world. In his quintessentially American play, *Death of a Salesman*

(1949), Willy Loman is a man who believes in the power of social connections to ensure one's place in the world. Handshakes and friendships are the currency of the world, as Willy sees it. Yet, the capitalist economy in which he lives discards him like a piece of half-eaten fruit. David Savran argues that Biff and Willy Loman are

liberal tragic heroes (and 'organization men') struggling against a society growing increasingly mechanized and indifferent. Both are crushed by the highly competitive postwar economy, with which they are ill-equipped to cope, and crippled by their well intentioned lives and desperate self-deception. Both long for the frontier—an unspoiled world lies far beyond the suburbs of an impressive city whose 'angry' sheen glowers over the salesman's fragile house.<sup>41</sup>

The frontier about which Willy and Biff dream is a sort of homosocial utopia. Willy fantasizes about his deceased brother's epic journey into the wilderness, where he made his fortune in diamonds; likewise, Biff clings to a fantasy of the western cattle ranch. This "fantasy of a community defined by strictly homosocial bonds and yet aggressively heterosexual" entails a tense policing of masculinity, as demonstrated by Willy's belittling of the bookish Bernard and Biff's mocking of his lisping school teacher.<sup>42</sup> Thus, while Miller's characters are solitary men, they fantasize about a space of homosocial unity with other men, away from women and excluding men who fail to meet the norms of masculinity. This dreamed of place, however, remains a fantasy that lacks substance: a prelapsarian arcadia that cannot be recovered.

In later twentieth, women, people of color, and LGBTQ persons came to greater visibility in theatre, particularly as playwrights. Many of these playwrights challenged long-held notions of normative masculinity. Yet, among the most prominent playwrights at the end of the twentieth century were stereotypically hetero-masculine white writers, such as David Mamet, Sam Shepard, and Neil LaBute. Mamet's *American Buffalo* (1975) and his iconic *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984) are about men locked in exploitative and even violent struggles with one another. Like Miller's *Salesman*, Mamet's early plays have an embedded critique of capitalism's dehumanizing consequences, though in Mamet the violence of capitalism is interpersonal, internalized, and formulated as a hyper-

masculine struggle for power. Sam Shepard's plays—for example his more experimental *The Tooth of the Crime* (1972) and his famous realist play *True West* (1980)—also imagine men as locked in bitter struggles that are emotional and even violent. Both Mamet and Shepard's plays ritualize the antagonism between men. Their dialogue, though quite different from one another, shares an incantatory quality. Mamet creates a poeticized Americanese, and Shepard with *The Tooth of the Crime* contrives a science-fiction pastiche language that is equally poetic and mythic in its vision. Similarly Neil LaBute's work, e.g., *In the Company of Men* (1992) and *The Distance from Here* (2002), enacts a sort of ritualized poetry of the quotidian in which male friendship manifests as little more than a pitched power struggle. Robert Vorlicky in his book *Act Like a Man: Challenging Masculinities in American Drama* (1995) catalogues and analyzes dozens of all-male-cast American plays from the later twentieth century.<sup>43</sup> Vorlicky's approach is perhaps too focused on the quality of male communication, classifying the characters discourse as "cooperative" or "uncooperative."<sup>44</sup> The men in these plays fail to "express" themselves or to achieve "intimate" communications because of the institutional structures in which the male characters find themselves. Vorlicky's analysis supports the basic argument I have been making, but we should pause to complicate the rather simplistic analysis that narrowly theorizes male communication as cooperative or uncooperative. That is, Vorlicky unearths an ideological presumption of the texts he studies, which imagines men as suffering their masculinities, but we should not take at face value that these men are victims. As with Hemingway's fiction, the inability of male characters to give words to their pain and vulnerability constitutes them as dignified. They suffer without making a big deal about it. Their suffering arouses pity and their silence garners respect. Likewise, as I explained in the introduction, drawing on David Savran's book *Taking It Like a Man*, the image of men as victims can be ideologically strategic. White male victimhood can become the pretext for misogyny and for conserving power among white, straight, American men.

## Male Friendship in Late Twentieth Century Film and Television

For much of the twentieth century, film and television followed much the same pattern as literature and theatre in the twentieth century. Certainly hard masculinity was represented in gangster films of the 1930s, film noir of the 40s and 50s, war films of 40s, and the staple genre of the western (see chapter two). In the 1960s and 70s, cinema and even some television would begin to alter the landscape of gender. Lynn Spangler offers an overview of male friendship in American television in her essay “Buddies and Pals” (1992).<sup>45</sup> Spangler observes that the male casts of TV westerns in the 1950s and action adventure series in the 60s were comrades but rarely emotionally intimate, effectively fitting into the “hard masculinity” category, and comedies in the late 1950s and 60s were predominantly set in the middle-class home.<sup>46</sup> The picture complicates somewhat beginning in the 1970s with series such as ABC’s *The Odd Couple* (1970-5), *M\*A\*S\*H* (1972-83), ABC’s *Barney Miller* (1974-82), and NBC’s *Bosom Buddies* (1980-2), which centered on male relationships and even, in the case of *Barney Miller*, depicted gay men in humanizing ways.<sup>47</sup> Spangler argues that the small progress made in the 70s was effectively eroded in the more conservative environment of the 1980s. She writes, “This decade saw a resurgence of nuclear family comedy and action dramas.” Action dramas, she continues, “stress the bonding of men” but do so without emotional depth.<sup>48</sup> Yet, the 1980s also saw the emergence of what would come to be known as “quality television,” serialized comedy and dramas that had more complex storytelling and greater psychological depth. With the exception of *thirtysomething* (1987-91), even “quality television” programs—*Hill Street Blues* (1981-87), *St. Elsewhere* (1982-88), and *L.A. Law* (1986-94)—focused mainly on the professional relationships between men. When vulnerable emotions did penetrate the tough guy exterior, it was usually because the demands of *the job* had become too great. The basic model of hard masculinity is maintained, since reaching the “breaking point” is evidence of a man’s ability to endure his trauma, stress, and tragedy up to that point.

If we turn to film, we can observe a similar ebb and flow in male friendship. The “buddy picture” became an almost singular site for scholarly reflections on male friendship in the 1980s and 90s. Pairing two male leads was nothing new, and the buddy picture can be traced back through film history for decades.<sup>49</sup> However, the classic “buddy picture” differs from the “countercultural” buddy films that appeared in 1969: *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Easy Rider*, and *Midnight Cowboy*. Critic Robin Wood, in his essay “From Buddies to Lovers” discusses this countercultural era of buddy films, guardedly celebrating its subversive possibilities. He writes,

Within their social context, the 70s “buddy” movies seem to me more interesting than is generally recognized. They have frequently been explained, or explained away, as a reaction to the women’s movement. This is doubtless an important factor in their constitution, but it is not the only one nor necessarily the prime determinant. Certainly the treatment of women in the films is extremely demeaning, both in their relegation to marginality and in the nature of the roles they are allocated. However, an interesting corollary accompanies this: if women can be dispensed with as easily, a great deal else goes with them, including the central supports of and justification for the dominant ideology: marriage, family, home.<sup>50</sup>

In these films, Wood argues the male bonds marginalize women, setting the genre apart from the traditional Hollywood film with its central emphasis on the “love interest.” Wood argues that these films are “male love stories.” He writes, “the emotional center, the emotional charge, is in the male/male relationship, which is patently what the films are about. Obvious, of course: yet the fact stands in direct opposition to the usual account of the Classical Hollywood text in terms of the happy ending in heterosexual union, promising the continuance of the nuclear family.”<sup>51</sup> The male protagonists in these films are on a journey, having become disconnected from any sense of home where they belong. Gay characters appear in many of these films, but the death of one or both of the buddies operates to head off the possibility of homosexual intimacy (see chapter four for more on this trope).<sup>52</sup> Thus, in these films we see the “disintegration of the concept of home” or the concept of “normality,” i.e., “the heterosexual romance, monogamy, the family, the perpetuation of the status quo, the Law of the father.”<sup>53</sup> Yet, these films also violently prevent the possibility of their embedded homoeroticism from flowering.

The buddy cop film was perhaps the most visible homosocial cinematic genre of the 1980s. Some of the most successful films and film franchises of the decade fit in the buddy cop genre, including *48 Hrs.* (1982), *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984), *Running Scared* (1986), *Lethal Weapon* (1987), and *Die Hard* (1988). Intimacy between the mismatched partners in the buddy cop genre is usually mediated by their hyper-masculine jobs, their dogged pursuit of bad guys, and the deployment of violence. The genre resembles the hardboiled detective, western, police or medical procedural, military, or similar genres that embed homosociality within stereotypically masculine institutions and jobs.

The buddy cop genre of the 80s repurposes the 60s countercultural buddy films for a more conservative era. The buddy cop film does not reject “straight” society, but seeks to defend that society from criminals who are beyond the pale. The buddy cops do “break the rules,” but they do so only because the official bureaucracy is inadequate to confronting the present threat. In films like *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Lethal Weapon*, or *Die Hard*, the buddy protagonists must “go rogue” to take down devious criminals whom the legal system is impotent to stop. The anarchic violence that is characteristic of these films—destructive car chases, explosions, wild shootouts, etc.—is a necessary stage of chaos that precedes the restoration of the normalcy. This narrative is of a piece with Reagan-era conservatism and the on-going “War on Crime.”<sup>54</sup> After the Warren Court expanded and strengthened the rights of criminal suspects, for example in the *Miranda* case (1966), and as violent crime increased in the United States through the 1990s, the police and courts were seen as impotent to secure justice and safety. In this environment, the countercultural fantasy of breaking all the rules is recuperated as a reactionary right-wing fantasy. The law must be restored by ruthless violence; a narrative prototype established by the vigilante film *Death Wish* (1974) and the good-bad cop film *Dirty Harry* (1971). The camaraderie of men is the foundation of this mythic recuperating of power and order through the liberation of violence. In the buddy cop film, the buddies are, in a sense, brought together through the use of “moral” but extrajudicial violence. This homosocial power

substantiates their masculinity and provides cover against the accusation of homoerotic desire. Ames writes, “Indeed, the broader appeal of the ‘buddy’ subset of adventure film lies in the growing emotional bond of the male heroes that takes the place of a traditional romantic plot or subplot. . . . The trajectory of the ‘idyllic anti-marriage’ is familiar: open hostility gives way to grudging respect that evolves into close friendship and love—with the mutual engagement in murderous violence or averting deadly threats serving as catalysts to each development.”<sup>55</sup> If the male camaraderie is the groundwork for the heroes’ extra-legal defeat of the villains, the hyper-masculine violence inoculates them against homophobic anxiety.<sup>56</sup>

### **Straight Panic: Homosociality, Queer Visibility, and 1990s TV and Film**

Positive and empowered queer characters became more common in the 1990s, as the homophobic consensus of the mid-century eroded. Especially among urban liberals and those who identified with “generation X,” gay and lesbian visibility was an increasingly normal aspect of daily life. Media played a leading role for the generation who came of age in the 1990s. Perhaps most notably, MTV’s pioneering reality TV series *The Real World: San Francisco* (1994) featured Pedro Zamora, a gay Latino who was HIV-positive. Zamora negotiated his new roommates varying degrees of homophobia and AIDS paranoia and by proxy educated millions of mostly-young Americans. Zamora’s marriage to his partner, which was shown in the final episodes of the season, and his death, while the season was still running, were dramatic and transformative moments in popular culture’s depiction of gay men. While the film *Philadelphia* (1993) and play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1993) were much acclaimed, Zamora’s real-life story, told with the quotidian aimlessness and intimacy that characterized *The Real World*, was startling.<sup>57</sup> In the same year, Ben Stiller’s prototypical gen-x film *Reality Bites* (1994) featured Steve Zahn as a young adult struggling to come out to his parents, who is otherwise accepted and loved by his gen-x friend

group. By the end of the decade, *Will & Grace* (1998-2006) would feature two gay male leads and become a wildly successful series for NBC, consistently holding ratings in the top ten or top fifteen in the early 2000s. In 2012, Vice President Joe Biden famously attributed his changing views on gay marriage to watching *Will & Grace*, saying that the series “probably did more to educate the American public than almost anything anybody’s ever done so far.”<sup>58</sup> Biden’s comments became the object of a great deal of satiric ridicule, but Biden makes an important point. The changing political and legal standing of LGBTQ people and the emerging post-closet culture are inextricably bound up with media representations of LGBTQ peoples. The latter is in turn driven by LGBTQ activism and lobbying by groups like GLADD (formerly the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation). Ron Becker writes, “By the 1995-6 season, for example, even the relatively casual viewer might have spotted several openly gay characters in just one night. At least two dozen openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual recurring characters have been featured on over twenty shows.”<sup>59</sup> The willingness of networks to develop “quality programming” in order to attract valuable demographics, according to Becker, explains in part the increasing presence of gay characters on network television in the 1990s. Networks aimed to appeal to a smaller but more valuable demographic, specifically the younger, liberal, urban, and educated groups that advertisers prized. The cachet of programs that included gay and lesbian characters was designed to appeal to LGBTQ audiences but also to the “quality” demographic.<sup>60</sup>

Yet, we would be mistaken to think that the 1990s represented an unmitigated triumph for LGBTQ people in life, politics, and the media. Homophobia became in many ways more entrenched in some sectors of American life. Right-wing politics, specifically avowedly religious Republicans, became increasingly virulent in their opposition to feminism and gay rights. The success of gay politics paradoxically fed reactionary homophobic politics. Ron Becker has argued that the 1990s

were a period characterized by “straight panic,” which he compares and contrasts with “homosexual panic.” He writes,

If male homosexual panic held sway in a culture unsure about the ontology of sexuality but utterly convinced of homosexuality’s depravity, then straight panic arises in a culture not only uncertain about the ontology of sexual identity but also uncertain about heterosexuality’s moral authority. More simply put, male homosexual panic describes what happens when heterosexual men, insecure about the boundary between gay and straight, confront the threatening specter of a socially prohibited homosexuality. Straight panic describes what happens when heterosexual men and women, still insecure about the boundary between gay and straight, confront an increasingly accepted homosexuality.<sup>61</sup>

If homosexual panic is a socially sanctioned anxiety within a heteronormativity, straight panic is an anxiety provoked by an insipient anti-homophobic culture. Becker notes that the “straight panic was fueled by the center’s *perceived* loss of moral, political, and cultural authority over the margins.”<sup>62</sup> This perceived loss of privilege is not limited to sexual identity but also gender, race, and class. Right-wing ideologues fixated on associated political issues—abortion, affirmative action, government support for the poor, immigration policies, and gay marriage—which are characterized as assaults on the “security and stability of mainstream (heterosexual) culture.”<sup>63</sup>

These cultural sheering forces—queer acceptance by progressives and virulent homophobia on the right—interacted with the film and television in complex ways. Writing later, Becker argued that the presence of gay characters or gay themes in 90s television was often a manifestation of straight panic, in that some gay characters were little more than challenges to straight characters’ identities and social privilege, causing a panicked response.

I would also argue that much of the era’s gay-themed programming reflected the ambivalence certain viewers likely felt about both multiculturalism and homosexuality.... aspirations to celebrate diversity could often coincide with fears about the loss of one’s privilege, and a sincere desire to support gays and lesbians could exist side-by-side with lingering prejudices. Difference and equality could be as difficult to reconcile for individual viewers as for the American political system. Gay-themed programming often reflected such ambivalence, mixing homophobic stereotypes with narratives.<sup>64</sup>

Queer characters and themes on television in the 90s were, then, negotiations. As heterosexual privilege bumps into progressive ideas, they produce nervous comedic situations that expose both

anti-homophobic aspirations and lingering homophobia. In the early 1990s, a remarkably common trope was the straight character mistaken for gay. Chandler and Joey on *Friends* are mistaken for gay (1.8, 2.6), and Frasier on *Frasier* finds himself on a date with a man (2.3).<sup>65</sup> George and Jerry on *Seinfeld* are mistaken for a couple (4.17), and in an early episode George questions his heterosexuality when he receives a massage from a man and his penis “moves” (3.1). Liberal minded but desperately worried about being or being mistaken for gay, these characters are befuddled by how to navigate these situations.

At the end of the twentieth century, mainstream and independent films featuring gay characters, such as *Philadelphia* (1993), *The Birdcage* (1996), *Reality Bites* (1994), and *Threesome* (1994), proved financially and critically successful. “Queer cinema” proper also flourished with films such as Jennie Livingston’s groundbreaking documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990), Gus Van Sant’s *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), Stephan Elliott’s dreamy Australian road movie *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), Gregg Araki’s campy surrealist *The Doom Generation* (1995), Jamie Babbit’s lesbian coming-of-age comedy *But I’m a Cheerleader* (1999), and John Cameron Mitchell’s rollicking queer musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001).

Still, straight panic was the most common feature of much cinema that featured queer characters but was not specifically marketed as “gay cinema.” For example, in Miguel Arteta’s independent film *Chuck and Buck* (2000), Buck O’Brian attempts to rekindle his childhood sexual relationship with estranged friend Charlie. Buck’s sudden appearance represents an anxious threat to Charlie’s decidedly straight, upper-middle-class life and his impending wedding. The return of Charlie’s repressed childhood homosexual affair with Buck has all the characteristics of straight panic. Similarly, the 1994 film *Threesome* focuses on a gay-straight love triangle between three roommates. Eddy, a gay man, is attracted to the straight Stuart, who is attracted to their female roommate Alex, who is attracted to Eddy. The intimacy and friendship that forms between the

mismatched would-be lovers is ended when they have an impromptu *ménage à trois*. While the three remain friends, they drift apart losing the intimate friendship they had as roommates. If television sitcoms negotiated straight male panic with light-hearted comedy, independent films in the 1990s anxiously confronted latent queer desire as a threat to male friendships and stable male heterosexuality with its attendant privileges.

*Chasing Amy* (1997) was a notable example of this phenomenon. Directed by Kevin Smith, at the time one of the biggest names in independent film, the film was much talked about for its frank, if frequently fetishized, representation of lesbian sexuality. In the film, Holden McNeil (Ben Affleck) and Banky Edwards (Jason Lee) are roommates and co-creators of an indie comic book series. Everything about the two best friends—their profession, gen-x slacker clothing, and cohabitation—suggests a mutually enabled arrested development and dysfunctional homosociality. Holden falls in love with Alyssa Jones (Joey Lauren Adams). Alyssa is ostensibly a lesbian but begins an affair with Holden. Banky is relentless in expressing his hostility toward the budding romance and laces his every reference to Alyssa with a string of homophobic slurs. Holden's friend Hooper (Dwight Ewell) suggests that Banky is jealousy: "that boy loves you in a way that he's not ready to deal with." After Holden discovers that Alyssa had a long sexual history with other men—bursting his fantasy that he was her only male lover—they breakup. Holden's relationship with Banky has also been damaged. Eventually, Holden comes up with a preposterous scheme to resolve all of these conflicts: he, Banky, and Alyssa should have a threesome. He imagines this will alleviate his own feelings of insecurities about Alyssa's past. He goes onto explain,

And Banky—you can take that leap that everyone else but you sees that you should take. And it'll be okay, because it'll be with me—your best friend for years. We've been everything to each other but intimates. And now, we'll have been through that together too. And it won't have to be a total leap for you, because a woman will be involved. And when it's over, all that aggression you feel toward Alyssa will be gone. Because you'll have shared in something beautiful with the woman I love. It'll be cathartic. A true communion. We have to do this. For me, for both of you... for all of our sakes. This will keep us together.

Surprisingly Banky consents, implying that he at some level acknowledges his homoerotic desire for Holden, but Alyssa emphatically rejects the proposal. All three characters lose contact and move on with their lives.

*Chasing Amy* discerns a latent homoeroticism even among putatively straight men. This reflected a broader emerging queer politics in 1990s films and their Gen-X target audience, but at the same time homoeroticism is destabilizing. It threatens to undermine not only straight privilege but also homosocial bonds and even heterosexual relationships. Queer desire is a Rubicon that cannot be crossed but can neither be ignored. 1990s film and television dramatically changed how gay and lesbian people were imagined in the public consciousness, but the era retained a panicked attitude to same-sex male attraction, which represents a fundamental challenge to the unmarked character of straight privilege.

### **Post-Closet Culture and the Bromance: from Homophobia to Male Partnership**

For LGBTQ peoples, the new millennium has seen one of the most dramatic reversals in American civil rights and cultural history for a minority group. The preceding two decades were marked by a “culture war” between emerging anti-homophobic discourses and the growing power of newly entrenched “social conservatives.” The notable progress of the last half of the twentieth century was matched by tragic setbacks: the devastation of HIV/AIDS, the failure of US AIDS policies in the 1980s, the right-wing backlash against gay rights and feminism, the explicit attack on gay artists such as the NEA Four, and the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act (1997). By the time the Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) that gay marriage was a universal right in the United States, effectively incorporating same-sex relationships into the most cherished heteronormative institution, American’s very basic attitudes towards LGBTQ peoples had changed dramatically. Between 2001 and 2015, views on gay marriage have nearly reversed, going from 57%

of Americans opposing same-sex marriage to 55% favoring it.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps more important than views on laws and statutes were the changing attitudes towards family and friends. In 1985, 89% of respondents said they would be “upset” if they discovered their child was gay; by 2004 the number had fallen to 60%; and, by 2015, that number was 39%.<sup>67</sup> The negative numbers are still disconcertingly high, but the polls point to a tipping point in how most Americans think about LGBTQ peoples

A dramatic shift in the representation of queer peoples in popular culture would come with the increasing number of series that made queer characters permanent and even central. *Ellen* (1994-8) would lead the way with *Will & Grace* following close behind. More edgy series that showed queer men and women in sexually explicit situations appeared on cable television in the twenty-first century. Based on the British series by the same name (1999-2000), Showtime produced *Queer as Folk* (2000-5), a series that revolved around the lives of young gay men in Pittsburgh. Showtime also produced a lesbian companion series, *The L Word* (2004-9). The LGBTQ-themed network Logo produced *Noah's Arc* (2005-6), about a group of middle-class gay black men. HBO's *Looking* (2014-present) about gay men living in the Bay Area is a recent example of queer “prestige” television, which typically has low ratings but high critical praise. Most recently, the Logo cable channel imported a pair of scripted British series *Cucumber* and *Banana* (2015) about LGBTQ people living in Manchester, England. Almost all of these series attract relatively small audiences made up of LGBTQ peoples and progressive straight audiences. Yet, queer characters also became mainstream in the twenty-first century. In “quality TV” programming, it became almost *de rigueur* to include a queer character. HBO's *Six Feet Under* (2001-5), *The Wire* (2002-8), and *True Blood* (2008-14) all included main characters that were gay and often gay people of color. The highly successful television series ABC's *Modern Family* (2009-present) offers a distinctly post-closet depiction of gay men, featuring a same-sex couple with an adopted daughter. ABC Family's *The Fosters* (2013-present), about a lesbian

couple and their children, is another mainstream series that integrates queer people into middle American family normativity. The LGBTQ media advocacy organization GLAAD recently discontinued its annual *Network Responsibility Index* report. Though the report noted that greater diversity of representation was still need, the report was discontinued in part because of a dramatic increase in representation of queer peoples in network, cable, and streaming providers. Notably, the FOX network was singled out for particular praise, as its percent of LGTB-inclusive hours of programing increased from 6% in 2006 to 45% in 2014.<sup>68</sup>

In the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, I will examine various examples of how the transition to a post-closet culture has reshaped male friendships in American narrative culture; in the remainder of this chapter, I will consider the bromance genre specifically, as it is perhaps the most visible media phenomenon addressing male friendships. The bromance genre, I contend, provides a useful index of how representations of intimate male friendship have changed in the twenty-first century. Early instances of the bromance in the mid-2000s are indicative of how intense homosocial bonds are often still constituted through homophobia and misogyny. Casual homophobia, particularly homophobic banter, is commonly used to acknowledge but disavow the possibility of homoeroticism. In later iterations of the bromance, however, we see how homophobia (and to a lesser extent misogyny) are attenuated or even displaced by explicitly anti-homophobic themes. In the most notable instances, male friendships adopt the discourse and performance of romantic intimacy, much as romantic friendship in the nineteenth century did. We also see intense friendships between straight and gay men. Male “partnership” and the gay best friend, then, radically rewrite male intimacy by challenging or at least attenuating the homophobia that had underpinned straight male friendship in the latter twentieth century. To be clear, I am not arguing that homophobia or misogyny disappear from the genre, but that they become significantly less central as anti-homophobic discourse reshapes the bromance in significant ways.

“Bromance” refers to a loose genre of films where the central male characters’ homosocial bonds resemble those of a romantic relationship, though they are almost always “platonic.” The genre often explicitly and self-consciously thematizes male friendship. Precursors to the bromance are found in 1990s independent films, such as *Swingers* (1995), *Kicking & Screaming* (1995), *Bottle Rocket* (1996), and *Fight Club* (1999). However, most scholars point to the mid-2000s as the critical turning point in the mainstreaming of the bromance.<sup>69</sup> The catalogue of these films includes *Dude, Where’s My Car?* (2000), *Zoolander* (2001), *Saving Silverman* (2001), *Old School* (2003), *Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004), *Sideways* (2004), *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005), *Wedding Crashers* (2005), *Superbad* (2007), *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby* (2006), *Pineapple Express* (2008), *Stepbrothers* (2008), *I Love You, Man* (2009), *The Hangover* (2009), *Funny People* (2009), *50/50* (2011), *21 Jump Street* (2012), *Ted* (2012), *The Interview* (2014), *22 Jump Street* (2014), and *The Wedding Ringer* (2015).

Television series that could be classified as bromances or which feature bromance relationships include: *Scrubs* (2001-10), *Entourage* (2004-11), *House, MD* (2004-12), *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (2005-present), *Psych* (2006-14), *Big Bang Theory* (2007-present), *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-14), *The League* (2009-present), *Community* (2009-15), *Men of a Certain Age* (2009-11), *Bored to Death* (2009-11), *Sherlock* (2010-present), *Wilfred* (2011-14), *Workaholics* (2011-present), *Legit* (2013-14), *Hannibal* (2013-15), and *Silicon Valley* (2014-present).

Judd Apatow’s *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* was in some ways the prototype for the successful bromance film in the mid-2000s, and it demonstrates two main features of the bromance in this era that are worth noting. First, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* demonstrates how male intimacy is partially constituted by, *not* inhibited by, homophobia and misogyny. Homophobic banter serves to disavow queer desire within the homosocial group, whose central project throughout the film is pursuing women as sex objects. Michael Messner argues that homoerotic desire between men is “neutralized through overt homophobia and through the displacement of the erotic toward women as objects of

sexual talk and practice.”<sup>70</sup> Second, the film’s protagonist ultimately abandons the homosocial group in favor of a monogamous heterosexual relationship. Narratively, the film enacts the straight circuit, in which the protagonist moves through the liminal homosocial space but ultimately arrives at heterosexual domesticity. While the film gleefully wallows in juvenile male camaraderie, it carefully codes these episodes as abject and untenable. The main thread of the plot is built around the titular 40-year-old virgin Andy (Steve Carell), a nerdy nice guy who has, against all odds, never had sex. The main action of the film falls into two plot lines: Andy’s budding romance with the age-appropriate single mother Trish (Catherine Keener), and his buddies’ increasingly disastrous attempts to end his virginity. We can see this film, in addition to fitting into the bromance genre, as hybridizing two genres, the romantic comedy and the adolescent sex romp. The adult storyline of Andy and Trish’s slow burning romance serves as a contrast to the juvenile and intentionally offensive antics of the homosocial group. In the latter storyline, the growing intimacy between the men is largely mediated by the misogynistic pursuit of women simply as sex objects. Andy’s co-workers David (Paul Rudd), Cal (Seth Rogen), and Jay (Romany Malco) run through various stratagems to help Andy: taking him to a dance club, going on drinking benders, offering him pornography, taking him speed dating, and hiring a prostitute. At the club, Jay instructs Andy in how to “run down [i.e., pick up] some drunk chicks.” Jay explains that men have an instinctive desire to “tackle drunk bitches.” In addition to being misogynistic, Jay is implicitly embracing rape culture, as he advocates picking up women who are extremely drunk. Andy is made uncomfortable with Jay’s language and tutelage, saying it does not feel right. The film codes Jay’s dialogue ambiguously, but Jay is ultimately a foil for Andy and his desire to have a loving romantic relationship with Trish.

Apatow’s films are among the most popular and seminal in the bromance genre. Critics have long noted that his films are ideologically heteronormative and bourgeois. They valorize faithful domesticity above adolescent sexual escapades but are most recognized for their over-the-top

raunchy comedy.<sup>71</sup> *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* is typical in this regard. Its most energetic comedic moments are those in which the men engage in puerile adventures, but the film moves inexorably toward Andy and Trish's marriage. In this regard, we also see the *straight circuit* at work. Andy's story must end with his heterosexual coupling, but the action of the story first takes him on homosocial adventures with his buddies. They believe that Andy must first lose his virginity before he can settle down with Trish, but in the end homosocial adventures fail at their intended goal (getting Andy "laid") and instead demonstrate for Andy how pointless and grotesque loveless casual sex is. The all-male sex romp is necessary as a stage in Andy's heterosexual development, but not for the reasons his buddies think. We see this same pattern in Apatow's *Knocked Up* (2007), in which the protagonist, Ben (Seth Rogen), must "grow up" before he can marry Alison Scott (Katherine Heigl), who is pregnant with his child. A key signifier that Ben is maturing is his decision to move out of the house he shares with his stoner buddies. Disavowing juvenile homosocial bonds is a marker of maturity, but, in the case of *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, those homosocial bonds were part of the maturation process that culminates in heteronormative coupling. The pattern is pervasive in the bromance genre. *Old School*, *Saving Silverman*, *Wedding Crashers*, *Superbad*, and *Ted* are all examples of juvenile homosocial comedies where in the protagonist must in some way renounce the buddy adventures to embrace heterosexual maturity, even as the adventure is a necessary stage in heterosexual maturation. The straight circuit, thus, reconciles homosociality to middle-class masculinity by treating the adolescent antics as a necessary but temporary stage of development.

We also find a great deal of homophobia in the early bromances. One of the most egregious examples from *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* is when Andy's buddies hire a prostitute for him, who turns out to be "trans."<sup>72</sup> The surprise "tranny" prostitute is one of the oldest transphobic clichés to be found in juvenile male comedy. The trope is often used to cordon off a special area of "deviancy" that is uniquely forbidden. Indeed, Andy becomes uncharacteristically angry over the incident, which

motivates him to ask Trish out on a date. More pervasive in the film is homophobic banter. Andy's buddies and coworkers exchange these barbs mostly by asking one another "You know how I know you're gay?" For example, while hanging out with Andy, David and Cal have the following exchange.

David: You know how I know that you're gay?

Cal: How?

David: You like the movie *Maid in Manhattan*.

Cal: You know how I know you're gay?

David: How?

Cal: I saw you make a spinach dip in a loaf of sourdough bread once.

David: You know how I know that you're gay?

Cal: How?

David: You have a rainbow bumper sticker on your car that says, "I love it when balls are in my face."

Cal: That's gay?

David and Cal engage in this banter while playing the classic martial-arts video game *Mortal Combat*, which allows them to violently attack one another through digital mediation. Because they are playing the game, they never look at one another during the back and forth. The ritual exchange of homophobic banter fits the received notion that such performances operate to inoculate homosociality from homoeroticism.<sup>73</sup> The film is not alone in this regard. Two seminal bromance film *Swingers* and *Superbad* are rife with explicit homophobia, including liberal use of "fag" and mocking imitations of gay stereotypes.

By the end of the 2000s, the bromance films begin a subtle evolution, one that was present much earlier in television. The most important evolution is the blunting of homophobia, which never disappears and often becomes a subtler figure in these comedies. Misogyny is sometimes attenuated but is more persistent. Amanda Lotz, like Ron Becker, argues that shifting public discourse and media representations of LGBTQ peoples have forced a reexamination of intimate

male friendships.<sup>74</sup> Male intimacy is increasingly depicted as a part of a healthy adult relationship, compatible and even necessary to heterosexual maturity. Moreover, many of these films explore intimate and loving bonds between men without the need for homophobic banter. However, ironic and even anxious comedic plays on how homosocial bonds give the appearance of gay romantic relationships become quite common.<sup>75</sup> My contention is that, whereas homophobic banter of an earlier generation of film served to distance men's friendships from gay desire, newer bromances revel in this ambiguity as a strategy for renegotiating these bonds and even allowing the borderlines between homosocial and homoerotic affection to become blurred.<sup>76</sup>

Arguably the quintessential bromance film is John Hamburg's *I Love You, Man* (2009), in which Peter (Paul Rudd), newly engaged to Zooey (Rashida Jones), realizes that he has no real male friends and, thus, has no candidates for the best man at his wedding. With the help of his brother, who is gay, Peter goes on a series of "man dates" attempting to find a best friend and best man. The film plays with the way seeking out a new male friend is homologous with pursuing romantic relationships. On one outing, his date mistakes his intentions and gives him a loving goodnight kiss. Yet, the comedy the film generates is not really homophobic. It does not abject same-sex sexuality but ironically plays with the similarities and misunderstandings. Peter finally meets, by accident, Sydney (Jason Segel), a devil-may-care bachelor, and the two form an instant bond. The friendship develops quickly but causes problems with Peter's fiancée. Zooey is particularly bothered by the men's physical intimacy when they dance together at a Rush concert, and the two men have a falling out. Through a montage sequence we see the two men pining for each other but unable to pick up the phone and reconcile. As with any good romantic comedy, the climax of the film is a wedding, and, at the last minute, Sydney appears and the two men confess their love for one another. *I Love You, Man* was an inevitable film, the bromance in its purest cinematic form, a film about nothing other than the affection between two men with little pretext. It offers a specific narrative of the male

friendship in relation to heterosexual domesticity. Peter's quest for a best friend begins with his marriage proposal, and Zoey's friends are troubled when they realize that Peter does not have any male friends. One warns her, "I mean, I think this is kind of serious. A guy without friends can be really clingy." Interestingly, we get the sense that "healthy" male affection is a prerequisite for normative heterosexual marriage. Zoey endorses this idea. She calls Sydney and invites him to the wedding, telling Peter, "I realized I couldn't let you get married without your best man."

Turning from the big screen to the small screen, similar patterns can be seen within post-network twenty-first century television. In many ways, television got a head start on film with the bromance genre. Partly this is a product of the medium's inherent investment in long-term storytelling. Male relationships are often stable in the "classic" sitcom, while heterosexual relationships might evolve over time. As already noted, by the 1990s, straight panic was a common theme in television, in series like *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, and *Frasier*. By the 2000s, the formulation becomes more complex. In the post-network era, storytelling in sitcoms becomes more complicated, as do the relationships between men. For example, CBS's highly popular sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-14), featured a deeply bromantic friendships between male leads Ted and Marshall. Similarly, HBO's *Entourage* (2004-11), which ran for an impressive eight seasons, focused exclusively on five men living the high life in Hollywood. Yet, both series stuck mostly to heterosexist scripts. The men on *Entourage* in particular are hyper-hetero-masculine, and their interactions are mediated by explicit or implicit homophobic and misogynistic banter. Likewise, both series end with the male leads getting married and the homosocial partners drifting apart as they build bourgeoisie families.

Perhaps the most visible bromance of the period is the relationship between Turk (Donald Faison) and JD (Zach Bragg) on NBC/ABC's *Scrubs* (2001-10). The two men's intensely loving friendship was given its clearest expression in a duet they sang on a musical episode:

Our guy love,  
That's all it is.

It's guy love.  
 He's mine, I'm his.  
 There's nothing gay about it in our eyes. (6.7)

As the song indicates, the relationship is often played for comedic value, but this is primarily because of JD's over-the-top expressions of love. Otherwise, their relationship is taken for granted, even by their heterosexual partners (however begrudgingly). The relationship is treated as a lifelong partnership often compared to a marriage, incorporating both elements of heteronormative marriage and gay marriage discourses. Amanda Lotz agrees with other scholars, such as Becker, that *Scrubs* is not homophobic and that "DJ and Turk's relationship does contrast the type of underlying anxiety about mistaken gay identity," which was common in 1990s television.<sup>77</sup> However, she points out that JD's pledges of affection are performed as conspicuously incongruous with normative male friendship, often for comedic effect. For example, when JD blurts out to Turk, "I miss you so much it hurts sometimes," he is visibly embarrassed at "sounding like a girl." Turk, the more conventionally masculine of the two, feels compelled to say, "I'm gonna let that go for now" (1.3). Lotz writes, "The series recurrent attention to the panic JD and Turk articulate about their intimacy being construed as gay love constructs it as, in Simpson's terms, the 'wrong kind' of male intimacy, and the consistent positioning of their friendship as something to laugh at severely undermines the challenge the series might present to heteronormativity."<sup>78</sup> Lotz's basic analysis seems correct here, but it in many ways fails to account for the multi-dimensional way that the series plays with JD's performance of failed masculinity. JD is often the butt of jokes in the series for his fumbling and awkward manner, but, for most of its run, JD is also the show's protagonist, whose voiceovers provide its narration. We see much of the world of the series through JD's eyes, and consequently we feel his embarrassment, when his gender performance is marked as incongruous. We may laugh at him but we also identify with him, sharing his genuine desire to be close to Turk. Indeed, JD and Turk's strange relationship is wonderfully odd and pleasurable to watch. It is not abjected any more

than the rest of JD's clumsy socially inept behavior, all of which are part of his appeal. For example, in scene with Turk, JD expresses his concern that he will not be a sufficiently masculine role model for his son Sam.

JD: I need to be a strong male role model for Sam.

Turk: But, dude, that's my job. Remember? When Sam gets older, I teach him about sports and stuff, and you're in charge of Izzy's [Turk's daughter] emotional crap. We agreed that's how we'd raise our kids.

JD: *Our* kids? Turk, we're not married.

Turk: Dude, we're a little married.

JD: I know. I love it. (7.8)

In this moment, Turk, again the more masculine of the two men, endorses the view that the two men are effectively life partners, to which JD eagerly agrees. JD's last line serves a punch line, but the fact that Turk articulates the pseudo-marital relationships helps to present it as authentic and almost inescapable.

NBC/Yahoo's cult TV series *Community* (2009-2015) provides another example of a bromance that actively transgressed the performative bounds of hetero-masculine friendship. Troy Barnes (Donald Glover) and Abed Nadir (Danny Pudi) are two members of the ensemble, who attend a third-rate community college. The two men quickly develop a bromance that is characterized by child-like play in which they indulge together. Like JD and Turk, other characters in the series raise eyebrows and make comments about Troy and Abed's friendship. Unlike JD who often becomes embarrassed by how other see his affection for Turk, Troy and Abed usually dismiss or are simply oblivious to the judgment of others. When another character makes a comment about "about Abed and Troy's weird relationship," the two men simultaneously say to one another, "They're just jealous." Troy even rejects a woman, whom he had been pining after for weeks, when she calls Abed "weird." He leaves her at a Valentines Day dance and runs to Abed. He shouts, "I hate her!" and declares lovingly to Abed, "There's someone out there for us." Abed replies, "Happy

Valentines Day,” and Troy replies, “It is now.” The two men embrace and hold each other lovingly (2.15). Later in the series, Troy enters a long-term relationship with Britta Perry (Gillian Jacobs), who must patiently cope with always playing second fiddle to Abed. At one point, Abed becomes friends with a British sci-fi geek, who begins usurping Abed’s time. When Troy tries to downplay his disappointment, Britta rejects his sanguine attitude, “You are not being crazy. That dude is trying to steal your boyfriend” (4.3). In many ways, Troy and Abed’s bromance ceases to be something that is remarked upon or that stands out as strange and is simply woven into the structure of the series. This is not to say that the relationship is not a source of conflict or that their unusual affection is not played for comedy, but that the conflicts and comedy are built on top of the taken-for-granted nature of their intense bromance. Thus, *Community* extended and developed the post-closet bromance that had been developed in *Scrubs*; just as *I Love You, Man* developed earlier bromances, such as *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*. Bromances increasingly sidelined homophobia and explored the logic of male friendship by mapping onto it many attributes of gay or heterosexual romance, explicitly using the language of marriage, “boyfriends,” and tropes of romantic comedies (e.g., romantic clichés such as “I miss you so much it hurts sometimes.”). Additionally, these relationships are often imagined as long-term partnerships that provide profound support and intimacy.

### **Male Partnership, Gay Marriage, and the GBF**

As marriage equality became the defining gay rights issue of the late 2000s and early 2010s, male “partnership” became an increasingly common theme in the bromance genre. Many queer critics have decried the singular focus on same-sex marriage because it ignores other equally important issues (such as employment discrimination) and it reifies marriage as a heteronormative institution. Still, as we will see, the visibility of same-sex marriage and other modes of same-sex romantic partnership have provided a structure for the self-conscious reimagining of intense

homosocial bonds. Initially same-sex marriage was an irresistible comedic device for some films and TV series. In some cases, this device served as little more than the occasion to work over already tired homophobic comedy. Dennis Dugan's film *I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry* (2007), for example, offers just such a representation. Chuck (Adam Sandler) and Larry (Kevin James) play hyper-masculine firefighters. They get married in order to circumvent a bureaucratic hurdle concerning Larry's life insurance benefits. *Chuck & Larry*, however, uses the notion of two straight guys getting married as farcical comic device to generate low-brow comedy. The film often makes explicitly anti-homophobic statements, decrying homophobic bullying and arguing for same-sex marriage, but the film's juvenile comedic tone is homophobic, tiresomely sexist, and remarkably racist.<sup>79</sup>

CBS's *Two and a Half Men* (2003-15) was an unlikely candidate for progressive exploration of the bonds of male friendship. *Two and a Half Men* is among the least funny and most tediously sexist series of the past decade. It centers on roommates Alan (John Cryer) and Charlie (Charlie Sheen), who, despite being repulsive humans, manage to sleep with a ceaseless parade of conventionally attractive women. Charlie was replaced by Walden (Ashton Kutcher), but the episodic formula remained essentially the same. One critic aptly described the series as "aggressively redundant and gleefully misogynistic."<sup>80</sup> As the final season of the series began, Walden suffers a heart attack and comes to realize he wants a child. His attempt at adoption fails because he is a single man. In a flash, he realizes the solution to his problem and proposes to Alan. I have reproduced the ensuing conversation in detail to capture the flavor of the scene, which expresses an utterly incoherent attitude toward the proposed relationship:

Alan: Wait. You seriously want to marry me?

Walden: Yes. Alan Jerome Harper, would you be my wi...? Hus...? Life buddy?

Alan: Okay, I'm a little confused, and not like the time I got that massage from that lady-boy.

- Walden: Look, I want to adopt a kid, and the quickest way for me to do that is to get married, and if I'm gonna settle for someone, it might as well be you.
- Alan: That's exactly what my first wife said.
- Walden: Listen, I know this sounds crazy, but you would be doing me the biggest favor of my life.
- Alan: Walden, there are literally millions of women who would marry you at the drop of a hat.
- Walden: Yeah, but I wouldn't be half as happy with any of them as I would be with you.
- Alan: Go on.
- Walden: When I think of the ten things I want in a wife, you have nine of them. You're my best friend, you're trustworthy, you're loving, you're smart, you'll never leave me.
- Alan: Married or not, till death do us part.
- Walden: You're funny, you're understanding, you don't care if I leave the toilet seat up.
- Alan: I actually prefer it. Although, the other night, I forgot it was up, and I had a surprise splash-down. I was like a turtle on its back.
- Walden: Right there. That's another one. As long as you're around, I will never be the most awkward guy in the room.
- Alan: So, what's the one thing you want in a wife that I don't have? Oh. Right, right. I do not have one of those. I barely have one of these. I mean, how would this work exactly? I mean, we're gonna pretend to be a couple?
- Walden: We wouldn't pretend. We're actually going to be a same-sex married couple, and like most married couples, we will not have sex.
- Alan: Not even on my birthday? Sorry, sorry flashback to the first wife. So, so, I can have crazy, anonymous sex with any woman I want?
- Walden: No. You will still be you. (12.2)

What I find interesting about the scene is the tension between sincere male affection and juvenile comedic shtick. Walden offers a plausible, mostly heartfelt, case for why he and Alan should be life partners, but nary two sentences go by before an insipid joke is inserted to remind the viewer of how silly the whole proposition is. The scene manages to even get in a transphobic joke. Walden's wedding vows similarly read as expressing genuine affection,<sup>81</sup> but throughout the vows Alan whimpers, trying to hold back his tears. There is a basic incoherence in the text, which wants us to see the "sham marriage" as "real" and, at the same time, laugh at the ridiculousness of two men

getting married. Eventually, Alan and Walden get divorced, after Alan strikes up a serious relationship with a woman, undermining the argument that the marriage was in any sense “real.” *Chuck & Larry* also ends with both men chatting up prospective romantic partners, who will presumably become their real spouses. Neither *Two and a Half Men* nor *Chuck & Larry* can get their politics straight (or queer). Their humor is incessantly homophobic, but both profess an anti-homophobic politics. Both sentimentally describe profoundly intimate male relationships, using gay marriage as a sort of metaphor for that intimacy, but neither can stomach male intimacy (gay or straight) for very long without mocking it.<sup>82</sup>

ABC’s *Boston Legal* (2004-8) provides a striking contrast. In it, Alan Shore (James Spader) and Denny Crane (William Shatner) get married in the final episode. Crane is a wealthy eccentric lawyer who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. Over the course of the series, he develops an intimate friendship with Shore. Episodes are often punctuated with the two men talking and smoking cigars on Crane’s office balcony. Crane proposes marriage to Shore so that Shore will inherit all of Crane’s wealth tax-free, but also so that Shore can be his proxy for medical and legal affairs as his mental faculties deteriorate. Despite this nakedly pragmatic explanation, Denny clinches his appeal to the reluctant Shore by saying simply, “Like it or not, you’re the man I love.” Later in a court proceeding on the legality of their union, Shore similarly asserts emphatically, “I love him. I love the man. He loves me. We’re partners.” Both men are unambiguously heterosexual, womanizers, and given to sexual impropriety and even sexual harassment, and, consequently, the proposed marriage avoids any real erotic connotations. Nevertheless, their heartfelt and public proclamations of love and Shore’s commitment to caring for Crane as his health declines must be juxtaposed to the adolescent camaraderie of many bromances and the “sham marriages.” Shore and Crane commit to a life-long partnership out of mutual affection and in order to provide mutual support (financial and medical), not simply to circumvent bureaucratic roadblocks (as with *Two and*

*a Half Men* and *Chuck & Larry*). Amanda Lotz argues for a strong queer interpretation of the series, “The relationship between Alan and Denny radically suggests that sex is not a prerequisite for the most intimate relationship two people might share, a profound challenge to the heteronormative organization of society that affords greatest privilege—socially and legally—to the coupling of a man and woman.”<sup>83</sup> Still, the elegiac tone of the relationship gives me pause. Shore and Crane are not marrying in the prime of their lives but as Crane’s life appears to be coming to a close.

Nevertheless, same-sex marriage operates in this series as a way to reimagine male friendship as a profound and long-term relationship of care and support. Indeed, this model comports with many calls, including from queer activists, to reform marriage as an institutions. For example, Tamara Metz has argued that marriage as a specific romantic-sexual institution should be separated from the civil-legal institution, which should be redrawn to recognize “intimate caregiving unions.” She writes, “The state should cease participating actively in the creation and privileging of marriage, as such, and the use of marriage as a category for dispersing benefits.” Rather, she continues, it should reform marriage or replace “it with a system of private contract, an intimate caregiving union status, narrowly and carefully tailored to recognize, protect, and support intimate caregiving in its many forms.”<sup>84</sup> Though their childish and offensive comedy mar this fact, even *Two and a Half Men* and *Chuck & Larry* hint at the basic idea that marriage, as currently constructed, fails to account for the plurality of long-term caregiving relationships. *Boston Legal* more clearly points toward a reimagining of, not only marriage, but of intimate male friendship as a relationship that can stand alongside romantic relationships in quality and importance.

The USA Network’s *Psych* (2006-14) provides a similarly complex example. A mixed-race comedy about a pair of beta-males, it dispenses for the most part with the sexist, racist, homophobic, and sexually powerful male figure we have seen up to this point. Shawn Spencer (James Roday) is a white juvenile ne’er-do-well, who uses his keen powers of observation to pass

himself off as fake psychic detective. “Gus” Guster (Dulé Hill) is his buttoned-down, African-American childhood best friend, who always gets pulled into Shawn’s wacky adventures. The entire series is a mystery of the week comedy, but the real draw of the show is watching the slapstick comic duo bumble their way to success. A painfully slow-developing romance progresses between Shawn and police detective Juliet “Jules” O’Hara (Maggie Lawson). In the final season of the series Juliet moves to San Francisco, and Shawn decides to follow her in the series finale, entitled “The Break-Up.” He must, however, figure out how to break up with his best friend. Shawn leaves in part after recognizing that their friendship has held back Gus romantically and professionally. Thus, the episode is setup as a completing the straight circuit: the too-close male best friends disavow one another in order to move toward maturity and heterosexual coupling; but this outcome is reversed in the last ten minutes. Gus abandons his new job and his would-be love interest and runs after Shawn. Gus proclaims to Shawn, “I am an adventurer now, with a friendship for the ages, and if I have to live in another city to make that happen, then so be it. That’s the way it’s gotta be.... I found myself, and not at a nine-to-five, but with my closest friend, solving crimes, living life to the fullest.” Gus’s harried race to San Francisco and his dramatic pledge to stay the course with his best friend allude to the grand romantic gesture of running after a love interest in romantic comedies. The allusion is all the more clear because Gus has interrupted Shawn in the midst of making a similar proclamation to Juliet. Moments later, Shawn with Gus at his side proposes marriage to Juliet, but throughout the proposal he turns to Gus for support and Gus offers continuous commentary and encouragement. Shawn finally says, “Jules, will you marry us? Me. Mostly me. Even though Gus is always gonna be part of the deal, and then some day, he’ll have his own Juliet, and her name will be Juli-ay, and she’ll be Jamaican, and together, we’ll be one big, giant, frosted, black-and-white cookie.” This vision of the future, synthesizes the seemingly irreconcilable homosocial world of adventure and juvenile hijinks with the adult world of middle-class heterosexual coupling. Shawn and Gus are united in a

genuine life partnership, not a sham wedding or even in an awkward appropriation of martial discourse, but simply on their own terms. They embrace a vision of life-long partnership with no overt homophobic anxiety.

Lastly, perhaps the most striking shift in how intimate male friendships are being represented in television is the emergence of the gay-straight best friendship. The gay best friend (or GBF) has for some time been a common phenomenon for male-female friendships, as best exemplified by *Will and Grace* (1998-2006) or more recently in the high school teen comedy film *G.B.F.* (2013). Gay-straight male friendships have been less common but have proliferated in recent years, and these examples frequently revolve around life-long homosocial “partnerships.” In ABC’s *Scandal* (2012-present), President Grant and his Chief of Staff, Cyrus Beene, are so close that Cyrus’s boyfriend calls the president Cyrus’s “other boyfriend.” ABC’s *Happy Endings* (2011-13), an ensemble comedy, features Max Bloom a slovenly, cubby gay man who is best friends with two straight guys. USA’s *Sirens* (2014-15) pairs Johnny and Hank, stereotypically masculine EMTs who are best friends. Hank a gay black man and Johnny a straight white guy. Their friendship is seamless, and Johnny rarely displays homophobia.<sup>85</sup> The two men talk about sports, trade insults, and get drunk, but they also talk about sex in a relatively free manner. In a conversation about what their last words might be, Hank says, “I hope my dying words are, “That was the best blow job ever. Thank you, Neil Patrick Harris”” (1.4). Johnny chuckles heartily at the comment. Certainly Hank’s relatively conventional masculine gender performance has something to do with Johnny’s ease. In CBS’s short-lived *Partners* (2012-13, created by *Will & Grace* co-creators David Kohan and Max Mutchnick), Louis and Joe are life-long friends and business partners. Both men are in long-term relationships, but a recurring joke in the series is that Joe and Louis form a third couple. Despite both being in long-term romantic relationships, Joe and Louis frequently behave and talk like a couple, a “we” who share a life together.<sup>86</sup>

MTV's high school comedy *Faking It* (2014-present) features a straight-gay best friendship between Liam (Gregg Sulkin), a hunky artist, and Shane (Michael Willett), who is openly gay. Liam and Shane's friendship is notable for its lack of homophobic anxiety. For example, in the lead up to a gay-friendly homecoming dance, Shane asks Liam, "So we're going to this thing [the dance] together, right?" Liam asks with a sly smirk, "Oh, I figured you'd be taking one of your college boy toys." Shane wonders if Liam is "feeling squeamish about" going to the dance with him. Liam matter-of-factly dismissed the accusation of homophobia, and the two young men go to the dance together. At the end of the episode, they dance together, their hands chastely on each other's shoulders, but, after Liam laments his failed hookup with his love interest Karma, Shane says sympathetically, "Here, rest your head on my shoulder." Liam replies, "No, I can't. You're too short." Then Shane rests his head on Liam's shoulder. Liam smiles and embraces his best friend as they continue to dance. Shane and Liam even cruise gay bars together: Shane hits on the guys and Liam hits on their straight girlfriends, often brandishing his anti-homophobic credentials to impress them. *Faking It* is set in a fictional ultra-liberal high school in Austin, where being gay is not just accepted but enthusiastically embraced. The series then presents an idealized world, where gay-straight friendships are largely normalized and, indeed, function as a more perfect union between men who can support one another in pursuing their respective love interests. Aspirational though it might be, this vision of male friendship between gay and straight men undisturbed by homophobia is ever more real in our post-closet world. These television series provide a vision of a future to come that appeals to many viewers and perhaps provides them with a model to follow.

## Conclusions

Arguably, male friendship in the American imagination has come full circle. After a long period of hard masculinity and cautiously policed friendship in the mid-twentieth century, the

bromance may be seen as reviving the romantic friendships of the nineteenth century. This evolution is on the whole positive, if only because it begins to breakdown some of the boundaries between homosocial camaraderie and other forms of intimacy, particularly heterosexual and homosexual affection. A part of post-closet culture, these new depictions of male friendship are in dialogue with emerging queer discourses, which challenge the binary notions of companionship and intimacy. They also push against the straight circuits normative construction of maturation, which imagines that male maturity entails disavowing intense male intimacy in order to “progress” toward heterosexual coupling. Instead, these emerging narratives begin to offer a more fluid notion of male maturity, in which men of various stripes may forge lasting life partnerships. These partnerships may be in tension with romantic ones, but they may also exist along side them and even provide a complimentary kind of support. These examples suggest, while homophobia is still an active discourse in our lived experiences, it is less inhibiting on how masculinity and homosociality are preformed in cultural texts. Moreover, these examples challenge the mid-century consolidation of affective and social energy in the suburban bourgeois home.<sup>87</sup>

We should, however, be circumspect. In even the most radical reimaginings, homophobia is still latent. Moreover, even as homophobia appears to be waning, misogyny is a common ingredient in many homosocial texts. As Lotz argues, these “homosocial enclaves” may operate as safe spaces in which men can negotiate a shifting cultural landscape, but homosocial enclaves also facilitate a homosocial discourse that can be regressive and toxic. It is still a common trope to see a best friend rescue his buddy from a shrewish woman, or to hear men engaging in locker-room banter about women. As Hank on *Sirens* demonstrates, gay men may participate in locker-room conversations about their sexual conquests, and gay male sexual discourse becomes, surprisingly, a continuation of straight male objectification of women.

I hasten to add here that there has been a complementary, if lagging, explosion of female homosocial television series and films. In television, the most obvious example is HBO's *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) but has been followed by a rich array of women-centered series: Showtimes *The L Word* (2004-9), CBS's *2 Broke Girls* (2011-present), HBO's *Girls* (2012-present), Netflix's *Orange is the New Black* (2013-present), Comedy Central's *Broad City* (2014-present), MTV's *Faking It* (2014-present), IFC's *Garfunkel and Oates* (2014-present), HOB/Sky Living's *Doll & Em* (2014-present), Lifetime's *UnREAL* (2015-present), Comedy Central's *Idiotsitter* (2016-present). Notably, most of these series fit in the category of "quality programing" and are critically well received. Cinematic examples of homosocial comedies, which paralleled the glut of bromance films, include Paul Feig's *Bridesmaids* (2011, written by Kristen Wiig and Annie Mumolo) and *The Heat* (2013, written by Katie Dippold), Leslye Headland's *Bachelorette* (2012, see chapter 3), and Noah Baumbach's *Francis Ha* (2012, co-written by star Greta Gerwig).<sup>88</sup> Many of these examples play with the ambiguity between ostensibly platonic female friendships, queer desire, and same-sex domesticity. *Girls*, *Orange is the New Black*, *Broad City*, and most explicitly *Faking It* foreground the blurred boundaries between friendship and homoeroticism.

It is also important to observe how my own analysis has privileged the point of view of straight white men. This decision was strategic, as this dissertation is examining the shifting landscape of "hegemony," which is still centered on white men, but it is important to explore the way in which gay men and other queer peoples—as well as women—experience these social changes. As I have already alluded, some GBF may be expected to perform conventional masculinity or else to participate in regressive male discourse in order to fit into "homosocial enclaves." It is unclear how female masculinities, such as those examined by Jack Halberstam, can fit into homosocial enclaves. This problem becomes particularly acute if we accept Lotz's account that men seek homosocial enclaves as a way to escape the observation of those who would scrutinize

male behavior and subject it to feminist or queer criticism.<sup>89</sup> In this case, homosociality again becomes a regressive space that enables men to reclaim the privilege of “unmarkedness” in their performance. Thus, the presence of women or many queer peoples—as well as people of color, disabled persons, and other minoritized groups—are antithetical to the conviviality of the homosocial enclave so conceived. Thus, the generally “optimistic” outlook of this chapter and this dissertation has to be subjected to a countervailing critique that recognizes how the ultimate index against which to evaluate homosociality is, not the degree of intimacy between men, but the degree to which masculinity can accommodate otherness.

In the next few chapters, I will look at specific genres, themes, and tropes of narrative texts that intersect with the larger topic of homosocial representation. In many cases, I will be looking at instances in which we see a similar trajectory away from midcentury homophobic masculinity to a new post-closet masculinity, though in other cases we will see that homophobia and misogyny remain latent. The present chapter serves to set out the broadest historical contours I have identified but will give way to the specific to be considered hereafter.

---

<sup>1</sup> Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America*, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Appiah, “Tolerable Falsehoods: Agency and the Interests of Theory.”

<sup>3</sup> Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness*.

<sup>4</sup> Inspired in large part by the sentimental novels of Samuel Richardson and the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment, the cult of sensibility prized the cultivation of highly sensitive and refined affective dispositions, particularly in one’s comportment to friends and family. Godbeer, *The Overflowing of Friendship*, 156–60.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>7</sup> See Rotundo, “Romantic Friendship”; Nissen, *Manly Love*; Crain, *American Sympathy*; D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 120–122; Caine and Brodie, “Class, Sex, and Friendship: The Long Nineteenth Century,” 223–5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibson, *Picturing Men*; Deitcher, *Dear Friends*.

<sup>9</sup> D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 121.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>11</sup> Rotundo, “Romantic Friendship,” 75–91.

<sup>12</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 63.

<sup>13</sup> Alger, “The Literature of Friendship,” 125. Friendship is for Alger’s an oasis from the ravages of modernity. Again and again, Alger juxtaposes the sentimental refinement of true friendship in opposition to the self-interested struggle of modern materialism and commercialism. He writes, harkening to the pagan alters to friendship, “Pausing on these pages in a respite from mere earthly interests, wooing a season of thought and emotion over better themes, let us too rear, amidst the alluring shrines of ambition, labor, and vanity that throng the crowded avenues of secular life and absorb the worship of mankind, an altar to Friendship” (104). Imagery of industrial mechanization—“iron-handed morality” and “clanging machinery, the din of traffic”—is conflated with the puritanical reserve and “the unsentimental spirit,” against which, in the spirit of John Ruskin, Alger evokes the brotherly devotion of chivalrous medieval knights (105). Cf. Nissen’s discussion of Alger in *Manly Love*, 14–36.

<sup>14</sup> Caleb Crain and Axel Nissen have provided more focused studies on the romantic friendship in nineteenth-century American literature. See Crain, *American Sympathy*; Nissen, *Manly Love*; Nissen, *The Romantic Friendship Reader*. As I will discuss in chapter two, Susan Johnson and Chris Packard have similarly examined the role of same sex intimacy in nineteenth-century Western literature. See Johnson, *Roaring Camp*; Packard, *Queer Cowboys*.

<sup>15</sup> As D’Emilio and Freedman explain how the form of marriage was often appropriated to same-sex relationships, “Although they differed in formal structure from courtship and marriage, intimate relationship between members of the same sex often mirrored the underlying themes in nineteenth century family life. In them, women and men expressed passionate longing for emotional, spiritual, and physical intimacy, without the traditional association of sexuality and reproduction.” *Intimate Matters*, 121. Anthony Rotundo writes of the friendship between James Blake and Wyck Vanderhoef in the mid-nineteenth century. James in writing about his relationship with Wyck “used the rhetoric of nineteenth-century marriage and domesticity: ‘Long have I desired a friend, one whom I could trust myself with upon this journey of life; long have I endeavoured to find and select one from this cold self-interested world.’” “Romantic Friendship,” 5. See also Chris Packard’s *Queer Cowboys*, which similarly observes pseudo-marriages between men in cowboy fiction and culture of the period. These literary depictions of romantic male friendship had their real life counterparts in the relationships of white middle-class men in New England at the end of the nineteenth century, as Anthony Rotundo has described in his *American Manhood*. Daniel Webster, for

example, saw his friendship with James Hervey Bingham “as occupying the same ground as marriage—to the point where the two seemed to be mutually exclusive” (78-9). So closely did they resemble marriage that Rotundo argues that these intimate male relationships “offered a rehearsal for marriage” (86).

<sup>16</sup> Nissen, *The Romantic Friendship Reader*.

<sup>17</sup> Fiedler, “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in, Huck Honey”; Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*.

<sup>18</sup> See chapter ten of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, entitled “A Bosom Friend.”

<sup>19</sup> Rotundo, for example, acknowledges the emergence of homophobia as one factor in the decline of male friendship, but he also points to the codification of youth as a stage of transition. He writes, “The modern, rationalized, age-graded system of education grew and spread in the closing years of the 1800s; this system established a ladder of progress from boyhood to manhood. One advanced toward middle-class manhood by ascending this ladder through the grades and upward into business or a profession. This process smoothed the transition from boyhood to manhood, and it placed that transition much more closely under the supervision of concerned adults.” Rotundo, “Romantic Friendship,” 20.

<sup>20</sup> Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 172–4.

<sup>23</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 15–18.

<sup>24</sup> D’Emilio, “The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America,” 236.

<sup>25</sup> Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 35.

<sup>26</sup> Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 230.

<sup>27</sup> Kimmel, *The History of Men*, 201.

<sup>28</sup> Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 255.

<sup>29</sup> Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 226–7.

<sup>30</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 31.

<sup>31</sup> D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 300.

<sup>32</sup> Penner, *Pinks, Pansies, and Punks*, 4–7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 50–11.

<sup>36</sup> Realist minimalism became deeply engrained in MFA creative writing programs, defining a sort of artistic reticence that would be particularly popular among male writers. See Duvall, “Introduction,” 6.

<sup>37</sup> Mark McGurl quoted in Menand, “Show or Tell: Should Creative Writing Be Taught?”

<sup>38</sup> Hecht and MacArthur, *The Front Page*, 60.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>40</sup> Mason, “Arthur Miller: A Radical Politics of the Soul,” 336.

<sup>41</sup> Savran, *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers*, 35.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 39–41.

<sup>43</sup> See also MacDonough, *Staging Masculinity*.

<sup>44</sup> Vorlicky, *Act like a Man*, 4–5.

<sup>45</sup> Spangler, “Buddies and Pals.”

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 97–99.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 105. Spangler only locates a significant counter example in *thirtysomething* (1987-91).

<sup>49</sup> See Casper, *Hollywood 1963 - 1976*, 249.

<sup>50</sup> Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, 227.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Admittedly, Lyndon B. Johnson popularized the notion of a War on Crime, and Nixon introduced the “War on Drugs” rhetoric. The War on Drugs was at its introduction racially coded political speech, designed to appeal to white anxieties about African Americans in the post-Civil Rights era. However, in the post-Watergate era, government was seen as impotent or corrupt. Anti-government sentiments (which would come to fruition in the 1990s with intensified militia movements) combined with neo-libertarian fantasies of the sovereign citizens and the radicalization

---

of gun rights activism—the product of which was a paramilitary fantasy of vigilante justice that would be palpable in American cinema.

<sup>55</sup> Ames, “Restoring The Black Man’s Lethal Weapon Race & Sexuality in Contemporary Cop Films.”

<sup>56</sup> A notable evolution across these texts, one which defines the view of male homosociality, is the way queerness figures. Certainly hard masculinity, associated with heterosexuality, is privileged in the mid-century, and countercultural cinema attenuates normative masculinity, while the 80s seems to recuperate hard masculinity. Cinema of the 1980s tended to be rather casually homophobic. For example, in *Lethal Weapon*, when Martin Riggs’s clothes catch on fire after an explosion and Murtaugh jumps on top of him to put out the flames, Riggs shouts, “What are you a fag?” The throwaway homophobic comedy barely registers if you’re not paying attention. In *Beverly Hills Cop*, Axel Foley plays gay to insinuate himself into an exclusive club. The performance is a homophobic hype-feminine gay stereotype.

<sup>57</sup> For a more extensive account of Zamora’s cultural impact see Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 143–60.

<sup>58</sup> Barbaro, “Biden Expresses Support for Same-Sex Marriages.”

<sup>59</sup> Becker, “Prime-Time Television in the Gay Nineties,” 36.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America*, 23.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 212–3.

<sup>65</sup> See Becker for a comprehensive list of gay themed episodes of 1990s TV, Ibid., 227–32.

<sup>66</sup> “Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage.”

<sup>67</sup> Gao, “Most Americans Now Say Learning Their Child Is Gay Wouldn’t Upset Them.”

<sup>68</sup> “2015 Network Responsibility Index,” 6.

<sup>69</sup> DeAngelis, *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*, 1–3.

<sup>70</sup> Messner, “Friendship, Intimacy, and Sexuality,” 258.

<sup>71</sup> See Rodrick, “Judd Apatow’s Family Values.”

<sup>72</sup> Given the essentially heterosexist nature of the storyline, I simply refer to her as “trans,” even though she is a stereotypical “trannie,” a projection of homophobic anxiety and mockery. See chapter three for more on this trope.

<sup>73</sup> This bit is called back in a later scene of the film, when Jay breaks down after his girlfriend breaks up with him because of his serial infidelity. As Andy comforts Jay, the two men hug and Jay declares, “I’m sorry. I love you, man.” The scene is punctuated by a co-worker who walks in and says, “Do you know how I know you guys are gay? You’re holding each other ever so gently.” Again, the homophobic banter operates to acknowledge the same-sex affection expressed between the two men and to disavow that affection as potentially homoerotic. Likewise, when David declares that he is celibate, Cal insists, “that sounds gay.” Cal equivocates celibacy with homosexuality, seeing the former as a first step in coming out as gay. This example, then, brings together homophobia and heterosexism in a way that is characteristic of the film as a whole.

<sup>74</sup> Lotz, *Cable Guys*, 147.

<sup>75</sup> Michael DeAngelis, in his article “Queerness and Futurity in *Superbad*,” offers a provocative queer reading of *Superbad* (2007), one in a series of raunchy Judd Apatow-produced bromance films. Drawing on a large range of queer theorists, DeAngelis asserts that most films, including most bromances conform to the narrative conventions of “straight time.” Straight time is inexorable narrative movement toward maturity, heterosexuality, and reproduction. A similarity to my notion of the straight circuit may be seen here. The centrality of heteronormative coupling renders “homosocial relationships primarily as plot complications whose anticipated resolutions serve to reinforce the integrity” of opposite-sex relationships. DeAngelis, “Queerness and Futurity in *Superbad*,” 215–6. DeAngelis argues that *Superbad* resists the demands of straight time. He argues that Seth embodies a failure to conform to straight time. His “actions are nonlinear and his thinking entirely nondirective.” *Ibid.*, 221. Seth thus falls outside the linear, normative logic of futurity that structures heteronormativity. DeAngelis writes, “Seth perceives the sexual rite of passage... as nothing more than that—a requisite heteronormative ritual that might get either of them somewhere but that ultimately leads nowhere.” *Ibid.*, 223. I fundamentally disagree with DeAngelis’s analysis of *Superbad*, which I contend is squarely focused on reaching a heteronormative resolution,<sup>75</sup> but his basic insight can have broader applications. The tendency in American film has been for the protagonist to move away from his homosocial bonds to heterosexual ones. As I will argue this has begun to change somewhat with a greater emphasis placed on the preservation of homosocial bonds in the post-adolescent stage of life.

<sup>76</sup> John Alberti observes that many critics see the bromance “as reactionary” because it excludes women. He notes how critics “point to the substitution of the emotional relationships between these conflicted and confused men for the traditional heterosexual relationship between a man and a woman as part of a trend to isolate and even banish women from romantic comedies through the combination of homosocial longing with homophobic panic.” Granting the “the androcentric and even misogynist cultural logics at play in these movies,” Alberti suggests “another way of understanding their particular versions of objectification and gender panic in terms of the current moment: as part of a project of reconstructing the heterosexual romantic comedy male hero, a hero who preserves the logic of heterosexual desire but who also questions the very subject position of masculinity itself within the romantic comedy.” Alberti, “I Love You, Man,” 163.

---

<sup>77</sup> Lotz, *Cable Guys*, 171.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Early in *Chuck & Larry*, we see both men anxiously observing Larry's son, who exhibits "feminine" traits and loves musicals (a textbook queer stereotype played to the hilt). Throughout the film the comedy flows out of Chuck and Larry's discomfort at pretending to be gay men. The film is rife with gay stereotypes designed to offer audiences opportunities for derisive laughter. The film is also remarkably sexist. Chuck aggressively comes onto a woman doctor. His behavior quickly rises to sexual harassment, but in a later scene we discover that the doctor and Chuck engaged an orgy with other women.

The film features one of the most racist characters in recent memory. Rob Schneider plays an Asian-American minister. The performance is an egregious example of "yellow face" that rivals Mickey Rooney's performance in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

Still the film does try to offer an anti-homophobic message. Larry helps his son to defend himself from a homophobic bully, and Chuck, despite using homophobic epithets, makes a trite plea against such language later in the film.

<sup>80</sup> Viruet, "'Two and a Half Men.'"

<sup>81</sup> Walden recites his vows, "Today, I'm marrying my best friend... In the last four years, I've been through a lot. There's been good times and bad times, but through it all, you were there, and I can't imagine a future without you. I guess what I'm trying to say is I love you." *Chuck & Larry* makes a similar bid to legitimize the "sham marriage" when Chuck and Larry articulate the intimacy of their friendship at the end of the film. Chuck describes how "Larry stayed with me all that night" after Chuck failed to save the life of a drown child; Larry refers to how Chuck supported him after his wife died. Larry says, "What we have is beyond friendship."

<sup>82</sup> At one point a lesbian character accuses Walden of trivializing the hard won rights of gay and lesbian couples, to which Walden replies (as if reading from something written by CBS's Standards and Practices Office), "All right, look, we're not making a mockery of anything, and I get the challenges that gay couples face, but I also know that there are a lot of kids out there that are just looking for a good home, and I think we can provide that."

<sup>83</sup> Lotz, *Cable Guys*, 159.

<sup>84</sup> Metz, *Untying the Knot*, 14.

<sup>85</sup> One example demonstrates how the Hank negotiates his discomfort with gay sexuality. While at an upscale gym, both men talk openly about the attractive people they are checking out. Later, Hank describes men's abdominal muscles, and Johnny responds negatively.

Johnny: Don't want to talk about that.

Hank: Well, I don't want to talk about under-boob. I don't care for it.

Johnny: What about asses?

Hank: Well, I love asses.

Johnny: Everyone loves asses.

---

Hank: You're right. Everyone loves asses.

Johnny: We can all agree on asses.

Hank: Asses are the sexual town square.

Johnny: Asses unite us! (2.4)

The two men then proceed to sing and dance about the pleasure of seeing “fine asses” at the gym. Even when Johnny becomes uncomfortable with Hank talking about men, they manage to find common ground.

<sup>86</sup> Several episodes of *Partners* revolve around the conflict between Louis and Ali over the new boundaries created by Ali and Joe’s engagement. Louis compulsively meddles in Joe’s relationship with Ali or else refused to recognize the new boundaries. However, more often than not, the narrative arc concludes, not with Louis being chastened, but with Ali adjusting her expectations regarding heteronormative boundaries. Often Louis intervenes in conflicts between Ali and Joe in ways that violate such boundaries. For example, after Ali and Joe’s engagement is called off, because Louis said the wrong thing, Louis goes to Ali and re-proposes to her in Joe’s stead, getting down on one knee and offering her a ring. The attempt, though Ali calls it “completely inappropriate,” is successful. Throughout the episode Louis talks of himself and Joe as a “we” in relation to Ali, configuring the homosocial “we” as primary and the heterosexual “we” as secondary. Joe explains at one point, Joe: “We will always be a we, even if we have other we’s.” In a later episode, Louis insists that Joe give Ali his grandmother’s engagement ring, because Ali will be part of “our family.” Ali is taken aback and says, “Wow! It’s like engaged to both of you.” Thus, rather than adapting the homosocial to the heterosexual, the heterosexual relationship must adapt to the preexisting homosocial relationship.

<sup>87</sup> In some ways, the valorization of friendship fits in with another trend in quality television to depict traditional domesticity in a bleak and cynical light, as in three recent series: FX’s *Married* (2014-present), Showtime’s *Happyish* (2015-present), and HBO’s *Togetherness* (2015-present).

<sup>88</sup> Running parallel to women’s homosocial films has been the increasing number of unapologetically lowbrow comedies with women in the lead, such as Paul Fieg’s *Spy* (2015, starring Melissa McCarthy), *Trainwreck* (2015, directed by Judd Apatow and written by and starring Amy Schumer), and Paul Feig’s *Ghostbusters* (2015, starring Kristen Wiig and Melissa McCarthy). Amy Schumer’s sketch television series *Inside Amy Schumer* (2013-present) is a notable example of a woman-centered and explicitly feminist but raunchy work of entertainment, which has garnered critical acclaim. All of these examples are notable for challenging the dominantly male nature of lowbrow comedies.

<sup>89</sup> Lotz, *Cable Guys*, 124–7.

**Chapter Two**  
**How Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em in the Closet Once They’ve Seen *Brokeback Mountain*:  
 Homosociality and Fantasy in the American West**

**Introduction: Whatever Happened to the Gay Cowboy?**

The word “cocksucker” is uttered roughly eight times in the premiere episode of HBO’s neo-western *Deadwood* (2004-6). *Deadwood* went out of its way to break all the rules that had governed the classic American western, most notably by including every imaginable swear word in its dialogue. The homophobic epithet was one of the most commonly and casually used obscenities that peppered the series’s scripts. The explicit and repeated invocation of gay sex was itself a revolutionary act within the genre, even if it always operated as an insult and, thus, reinforced the heretofore implicit homophobia of the genre. The following year, Ang Lee’s *Brokeback Mountain* also broke the taboo against acknowledging queer sex, but, instead of merely referencing it, Lee’s film showed it. It was hailed as a landmark in LGBTQ cinema. It was part of a larger shift in how American cinema represented queer peoples, but within the western genre it was a seismic shift. Shortly after *Brokeback Mountain* was released, country music icon Willie Nelson issued the queer cowboy ballad “Cowboys Are Frequently, Secretly Fond of Each Other” (written by Ned Sublette). The song brazenly, if rather ironically, attributes latent queerness to all cowboys: “And there’s many a cowboy who don’t understand the way that he feels for his brother, /and inside every cowboy there’s a lady that’d love to slip out.” The song had been performed and recorded by various artists, but Nelson’s version caused a stir. The song was “his highest-charting solo appearance on” the Billboard Hot 100 since 1982.<sup>1</sup> Always a subversive figure in the country music world, Nelson was nonetheless perhaps the most iconic cowboy singer alive, making his recording particularly scandalous. The last great cowboy songman had declared, if somewhat ironically, that all cowboys were at least a little gay. Other less visible instances of queer cowboys appeared around the same

time.<sup>2</sup> Yet following this unprecedented outing of the cowboy and western genre, the most notable western films since 2005 have remained resolutely heterosexual: *3:10 to Yuma* (2007), *True Grit* (2010), *Cowboys & Aliens* (2011), *Rango* (2011), *Blackthorn* (2011), *Django Unchained* (2012), *Lone Ranger* (2013), and *Slow West* (2015). A few recent westerns have taken up vaguely feminist themes, such as the films *Meeek's Cutoff* (2010) and *The Homesman* (2014) and the CBC series *Strange Empire* (2014-present), and lesbian or bisexual women have made a few appearances, notably in *Deadwood*. Television westerns have been mostly heterosexual, e.g., AMC's *Hell on Wheels* (2011-present) and A&E's *Longmire* (2012-present). Whatever happened to the gay cowboy? After *Brokeback Mountain*, the western mostly put queer male sexuality back in the closet, but, as I will argue in this chapter, two films, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007) and *Appaloosa* (2008), demonstrate how the post-*Brokeback* western became newly fascinated with same-sex male desire.

Queer desire in the American western is a vexing topic. The genre, with very few exceptions, is devoid of overt homosexual expression and appears resolutely heteronormative. However, the genre is also resolutely homosocial. Heterosexual love interests are common to the western, but the relationships between men are fundamentally more important to the western than heterosexual ones. Whether a gang of outlaws, a pair of lawmen, or a group of cattle drovers, the fortunes of westerners usually rise and fall depending on the trustworthiness of their male companions. Historian and literary scholars have divined within the intense homosocial landscape of the West signs of something queer. For example, Susan Johnson has observed that the world of the California Gold Rush was “a place where customary gender relations were disrupted for many years.”<sup>3</sup> Johnson addresses both the lived experience of men in the West and the ways in which literature represented these men. She observes how the strict boundaries of ethnicity and gender, rigidly enforced in eastern cities, were more fluid in the West.<sup>4</sup> As I have observed in the previous chapter, “canonical” nineteenth-century American literature features numerous stories of men fleeing domesticity toward

homosocial adventure. Chris Packard's *Queer Cowboys: And Other Erotic Male Friendships in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* observes how classic western fiction of the era includes homoerotic relationships and pseudo-marriages between cowboys.<sup>5</sup>

Queer studies scholars have likewise excavated film history for instances of queer representation. Howard Hawks's *Red River* (1948) is often singled out for the seemingly veiled homoerotic exchange between Cherry Valance (John Ireland) and Matt Garth (Montgomery Clift).<sup>6</sup> More overtly queer male characters can be found in Roy Ward Baker's neo-western *The Singer Not the Song* (1961); Andy Warhol's cult film *Lonesome Cowboys* (1968); the Cheyenne "heemanah," or two-spirit, Little Horse (Robert Little Star) in Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* (1970); the trio of backwoodsmen (played by Iggy Pop, Billy Bob Thornton, and Jared Harris) in Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* (1995); and the minor character Billy Breckenridge (Jason Priestly) in George Cosmatos's *Tombstone* (1993). Scholars have asserted gay relationships or at least homoerotic attraction between other western characters, such as Clay Blaisedell and Tom Morgan in Edward Dmytryk's *Warlock* (1959), Jake Wade and Clint Hollister in *The Law and Jake Wade* (1958), and Jesse James and Robert Ford in Samuel Fuller's *I Shot Jesse James* (1949).<sup>7</sup> Yet these examples are the exceptions that prove the rule. These films notwithstanding, the western gives little space to explicit queer desire, and most of the examples here are far from overt in their expression of same-sex eroticism.

This chapter is primarily concerned with homosociality, not gay male sexuality, but the representations of intimate male friendship are intertwined with popular understandings of queer sexualities. As I will argue below, silence about sexuality underwrites a great deal of the possibilities for same-sex intimacy in the American western. This silence in many ways opens up these texts to queer readings. Given that queer sexuality could not be openly acknowledged in western films and texts until quite recently, we cannot make too many inferences from its seeming absence. It does not follow that queer sex was absent from these texts, but neither does it follow that queer sex is

ubiquitous but hidden. Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate, from the very beginning the western genre was built on an ambiguous same-sex desire that often carries an erotic charge.

The western superficially offers stories of men who depart from normalcy. The westerner—outlaw, lawman, or cowboy—rejects marriage, “civilization,” and bourgeois domesticity. He abandons the stabilizing social structures that were so prized in the mid-twentieth century. However latently, this movement away from “civilization” threatens normalcy: the homosocial nature of the West threatens to turn homoerotic, and its anarchic rejection of the Law in favor of frontier justice threatens social stability. Yet, this deviation is quickly reconciled with heteronormative demands. The narrative structure of the western requires that the westerner return to civilization or else be lost forever in the “wilderness.” The outlaw is either killed or he goes “straight” and settles down.<sup>8</sup> The lawman/gunman bests the bad guys and marries a nice girl. He may hang up his guns, as Gary Cooper does at the end of *High Noon* (1952), or simply live in the contented knowledge that law and order has been established, clearing the way for heterosexual coupling. On the other hand, the inveterate gunman—such as Doc Holliday—usually dies alone. Where the protagonist achieves the normative end of marriage and civility, we have a happy ending; where he cannot—either because of his temperament or because of circumstance—we have a tragic ending. As he rides off into the sunset, the tragic hero is briefly mourned, but his memory is displaced by the happy domestic tranquility left in his wake. Homosocial partnerships, which are essential to the main action of the western, are disavowed or lost in the heteronormative endings of the western. The latent subversive potential in the western is, thus, always transfigured and rechanneled back into the heteronormative project that was initially rejected by the westerner. The western adventure vindicates masculinity through homosocial struggles, but ultimately this vindication only serves to support the pre-existing social order. This narrative structure is essentially one form of the straight circuit and lies at the heart of the western film.

In this chapter, I will use three films to consider how homosociality operates in the western: one is the pre-*Brokeback* comedic western *City Slickers* and the other two are *Appaloosa* and *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, two westerns that followed quickly on the heels of *Brokeback* and focus on the relationships between their two leading men. In examining these films, I will discuss the way in which the western often operates as a fantasy of the homosocial utopia, a space of pure male partnership, unfettered by the demands of family or corporate capitalism. The homosocial utopia of the West is a dialectical opposite of the urban or suburban bourgeois domesticity. It is a site of “recharging” masculinity and provides the mythic context of American renewal through ritualistic violence. I will also examine how the western negotiates desire and identification between men. Put simply, I will argue that the homosocial desire of the western sublimates erotic attraction into identification. It sublimates *wanting to be with* into *wanting to be like*. The western carefully obscures homoeroticism, but in the post-*Brokeback* era, which coincides with the post-closet era, it has become harder to obscure the latent eroticism in the western. Homosocial desire in the western becomes increasingly vexed, and the innocence of hero worship, which is so essential to the genre, becomes suddenly subject to queer revisionism.

### **Masculinity, Homosociality, and the American West**

Ron Underwood’s 1991 film *City Slickers*<sup>9</sup> is a modern day comedy in which three late-thirties urban men—Mitch Robbins (Billy Crystal), Phil Berquist (Daniel Stern), and Ed Furillo (Bruno Kirby)—spend their vacation working a cattle drive through the southwest. Despite being a comedy that maintains an ironic distance from the classic western, *City Slickers* participates in the ideological fantasy that America continually must return to the West in order to recover its fading vigor. American masculinity is renewed through exposure to the untamed West, reversing the degenerative effects of “civilization” that feminize men.

The main character of *City Slickers*, Mitch, is inexplicably unhappy. He has a beautiful, funny, and understanding wife and two adorable kids. He has a comfortable middle class life. Yet, he cannot shake a deep ennui. He asks his boss, "Did you ever reach a point in your life where you think, "This is the best I'm ever gonna look, the best I'm ever gonna feel, the best I'm ever gonna do, and it ain't that great?" His best friends are similarly discontent. Ed seems to have it all. He is successful and is married to a tall model but is conflicted about monogamy and the prospect of having children. Phil, on the other hand, hates his wife and resents his father-in-law, who is also his boss. He exclaims to his friends, "I'm telling you, they got me by the balls. She's got one, he's got the other." When his mistress has a pregnancy scare, Phil's life blows up, leaving him divorced, homeless, and unemployed. Faced with these problems, the three men embark on their adventure vacation. Upon arriving, they encounter the awe-inspiring trail boss, Curly (Jack Palance). Mitch describes him as "the toughest man I've ever seen in my life." However, this admiration is tempered with fear. Mitch also says of Curly, "This guy is not normal. Did you see his eyes? He's got crazy eyes. He's a lunatic." Ed disagrees, saying, "This guy's a cowboy, one of the last real men. He's untamed, a mustang. We're trained ponies. It'll do us good to be in his world a while." After a rocky start, Curly becomes a mentor to Mitch, schooling him in the ways of a trail hand and teaching him life lessons. Curly himself is an isolated figure, who never pursued love or domesticity. "A cowboy leads a different kind of life," he tells Mitch. Curly dies midway through the cattle drive, and the city slickers must continue the cattle drive on their own. At first, Mitch thinks the plan is crazy, and he leaves Ed and Phil, who struggle to keep the herd moving. Mitch later returns and appears suddenly atop his horse, riding over a desert hill. Through adversity and at peril to their lives, the three city slickers deliver the cattle to their final destination. Along the way, the three men talk about their various problems and share intimate personal stories, and each comes to their own epiphany. Phil decides to embrace the opportunity to start his life over. Ed enthusiastically declares his intent to

have a child with his wife. Mitch realizes that the most important thing in his life is his children, a realization that allows him to return to his life with new vigor.

*City Slickers* illustrates two kinds of homosocial relationships found in the western. On the one hand, the three city slickers band together to complete their quest and, in doing so, recover their masculinity. Homosocial camaraderie is a central element of the western, which presents a sort of homosocial utopia. The men's unguarded conversations about their lives mimic group therapy. The honest exploration of their feelings (peppered with jocular locker room talk) appears to be only possible because the men are removed from their quotidian lives. This fantasy imagines friendship purified of the cynicism and pettiness of urban capitalist America. On the other hand, Curly's mentorship of Mitch is indicative of another homosocial bond found throughout the western tradition: a younger, less experienced man (or boy) learns from a mentor figure. The novice emulates and incorporates aspects of the mentor into his own identity. Mitch, a "tenderfoot" easterner, learns the ways of the West and the attendant ideals of rugged masculinity. Curly is a sort of aberrant male figures, even frightening. He is a life-long bachelor, and Mitch briefly fears that Curly will rape him.<sup>10</sup> He cannot be assimilated into the "civilized" social body and dies on the trail, but Mitch is able to graft pieces of his mentor's persona onto himself. *City Slickers* visually represents this identification. In the middle of the film, Mitch dispenses with his New York Yankees cap and dons Curly's black Stetson and a tan leather vest. At the beginning of the film Mitch is clean shaved, but he steadily grows a short, full beard that lends him a rugged appearance. Mitch visually becomes a westerner and incorporates aspects of Curly's persona into his own. *City Slickers* makes visible the long-standing fantasy offered by the western: the fantasy of being revitalized by the dangers of the frontier.

The narrative structure of *City Slickers* fits into the straight circuit model. The city slickers flee their bourgeois lives and embark on a homosocial adventure,<sup>11</sup> which vindicates their

masculinity and allows them to return to their middle-class work and family. More broadly, this cycle of masculine renewal demonstrates the larger mythology of the West, which imagines that American masculinity can be regenerated through contact with “the frontier.” Frederick Jackson Turner’s “frontier hypothesis,” for example, argues that the essential American character emerged from the encounter of European settlers with the frontier. Outlined in his 1893 address “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” Turner sees the American democratic character as continually shaped by cycles of settlement and pioneering which perpetually pushes the frontier further west.<sup>12</sup> The process is a sort of dialectical synthesis. European “civilization” and the “primitive” West are synthesized to produce a unique American identity. For Turner, American individualism and democracy are born out of the frontier dialectic. Writing at almost the same time, Theodore Roosevelt had his own frontier thesis. Roosevelt’s thesis intertwines masculinity and nationalism, with the westerner as a model of masculinity, whose brand of vitality and grit was necessary for the national health. He saw the conquest of the American West as merely an intermediate stage in the expansion of American power, which in the twentieth century would extend past North America and even the western hemisphere.<sup>13</sup> American expansionism and imperialism were necessary activities; they were the crucibles that formed the vigorous masculinity of the nation.<sup>14</sup> Roosevelt compulsively celebrates American masculinity as resolute, willful, and courageous, and he stresses the anxiety of waning masculine power in an age of increasing luxury.<sup>15</sup> Both Turner and Roosevelt’s vision are racist. For Roosevelt, subjugating the “Red Indian” was laudable because it was the triumph of a “civilized” race over a “savage” race, but the exposure to the savage was paradoxically necessary to infuse new life in civilized whites.<sup>16</sup> Even more racist theories abounded: Owen Wister believed the conquest of the West was the racial destiny of Anglo-Saxon men. The act of conquest allowed them to recover their Viking heritage.<sup>17</sup> The American West, in this view, does not transform Anglo-American men; it allows them to *recover* their true nature. The cycles of imperialist

conquest are necessary to reawaken American manhood and stave off the toxic effects of luxury and civility. For Wister and Roosevelt, the West is a contact zone between eastern “civilization” and western “savagery,” where the easterner may recover his atavistic masculine self, tempered by Anglo-American “civility.” However, the newly recovered westerner must return to civilization or else be lost to the wilderness.<sup>18</sup>

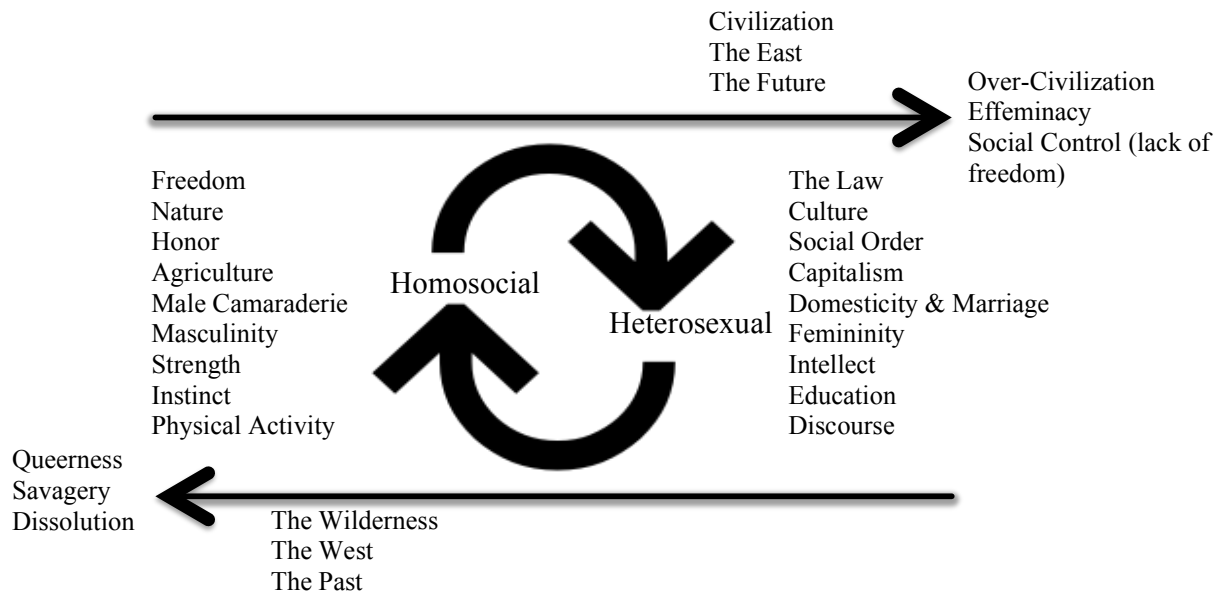
Previous scholarship demonstrates how these mythologies persist in the western film genre. Jim Kitses, for example, theorizes how certain dialectically opposed concepts, “shifting antinomies,” form the basic constituents of the western film. These dialectical pairs are not fixed opposites. Rather, they interplay in richly polyvalent ways within any given text. Kitses enumerates the antinomies as follows:

<b>The Wilderness</b>	<b>Civilization</b>
<i>The Individual</i>	<i>The Community</i>
freedom	restriction
honour	institutions
self-knowledge	illusions
integrity	compromise
self-interest	social-responsibility
solipsism	democracy
<i>Nature</i>	<i>Culture</i>
purity	corruption
experience	knowledge
empiricism	legalism
pragmatism	idealism
brutalization	refinement
savagery	humanity
<i>The West</i>	<i>The East</i>
America	Europe
the frontier	America
equality	class
agrarianism	industrialism
tradition	change
the past	the future <sup>19</sup>

These shifting antinomies capture how the western is defined by a dialectical synthesis of the “wilderness” and “civilization.” The chart demonstrates how these opposed terms have shifting signification. The West is at once savage and pure, egalitarian and tradition bound, free and solipsistic. The West and the East are dialectical pairs that must make contact to move forward evolutionarily, historically, and narratively.

This schematic account also allows us to integrate the straight circuit as a theoretical framework in analyzing the western. The straight circuit provides a model for this narrative development and an explanation of the ideological tensions that motivate it. While not universal, a quite common narrative trajectory of the western goes from a relative state of “civilization” to one of violence and back to stability. This structure is common to adventure stories of all sorts,<sup>20</sup> but the western overlays Kites’s ideologically charged antinomies. The journey into the “savage” West becomes an opportunity for the protagonist to demonstrate or rehabilitate his masculinity, though camaraderie or combat with similarly rugged men. Yet, the westerner cannot continue to function at the fringes of civilization or he risks becoming irremediably savage. Another latent, if completely repressed, danger is that he becomes queer in this all-male environment. Still, these risks are necessary in order to escape the countervailing threat of “over-civilization” and effeminacy that result from middle-class eastern society with its decadent materialism. By adding some of Kites’s

antinomies to the straight circuit model, we then arrive at the following visualization:



The movement is necessary because the western hero, by entering the wilderness, escapes the dangers of over-civilization (as Roosevelt saw it), but, if he stays too long in the West, he risks disappearing into the wilderness, perhaps even into sexual deviancy. The most “successful” outcome of the western, then, is the revitalization of the Anglo-American subject’s masculinity and the reinvestment of that recovered vitality and power into the bourgeoisie social system through marriage. This narrative structure is mythic, and, as such, obscures the many ideological commitments that underlie it. Manifest Destiny, imperialism, and racism become invisible or at least unquestioned, and masculine violence becomes normalized and necessary.

While *City Slickers* perfectly demonstrates how this fantasy is played out narratively, the film is also characteristic of its own historical period and can be seen to enact the particular male anxieties of the 1990s. Appearing as it did at the height of the Men’s Movement, *City Slickers*’s narrative structure has much in common with Robert Bly’s vision of homosociality and masculinity, best expressed in Bly’s *Iron John*, which was published one year before the film was released. Contemporary men, Bly argues, suffer from the neglect of their cold withdrawn fathers and the

feminizing influence of women, who have deprived them of their primitive masculine essence.<sup>21</sup> “The warriors inside American men have become weak in recent years,” Bly writes without irony.<sup>22</sup> Bly’s reactionary misogyny is aimed at overbearing mothers who “civilize” young boys (11), but most of all he decries the feminist-influenced culture that has created “soft” men (2-4). In Bly’s view, young men need to be initiated into masculinity by other men (15-6). Bly, along with others in Men’s Movement, advocated for a sort of homosocial therapy to ameliorate the stifled condition of American masculinity. Men’s retreats, which parallel the western’s retreat into the wilderness, became popular in the 1990s.<sup>23</sup> Like the fantasy of the West, the men’s retreat and the Men’s Movement were fantasies of recovering masculine power through homosocial ritual.<sup>24</sup> *City Slickers* unifies these narratives into a single fantasy, where men—even healthy, well off, and married men—are impotent, “soft,” and miserable. These men find masculine redemption through homosocial bonding and the mentorship of a more seasoned man, a “wild man” who lives outside of “civilized” society.

Up to this point, I have theorized the western as a genre freighted with ideologically conservative impulses. Taken as a whole, the narratives of the western seem to offer a hegemonic fantasy, where white middle-class men can recover hetero-masculine power through homosocial bonds in a womanless space. Most westerns are fantasies of violence, wherein white men act outside the limits of the social constraint. This basic critique of the genre is correct, but, as numerous scholars have pointed out, genre is never an ideologically closed structure. Genre is a space wherein ideologies can be set at play and renegotiated.<sup>25</sup> Westerns often reflect ideological *tensions* rather than a coherent ideological hegemony. Jennifer Peterson has argued that, with regard to gender, westerns should be read for their “multiple and contradictory discourses” and “polyvalence.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, as I have already indicated, the narrative structure of the straight circuit suggests how the western is pulled between countervailing impulses, which in their extremes would subvert normalcy. The

western and the westerner are liminal, existing between the mobile antinomies that are continuously shifting positions of valuation. Buried in the westerns continuous drive toward a normative resolution (Gary Cooper marries Grace Kelly) is an impulse toward deviation, the excess that would short circuit the path to normalcy. Since the circuit travels through these poles of deviation, the aberrant savagery of the West and the effeteness of the East, it always threatens to short circuit into deviancy. Curly is one example of a man who never settled down and dies with no real family. He leads a noble but sterile existence. Mitch imagines him as a crazed, violent murderer and a sodomizing rapist. That fear is presented for comic effect, but it demonstrates how, if only superficially, the western resembles an ideological boogie man, rather like the sexual psychopath discussed in chapter five. In many ways, Curly resembles the queer cowboy Chris Packard finds in nineteenth century literature. For Packard, the cowboy's queer status is not reducible to sexuality but constituted by his entire existence. He writes, "the cowboy is queer: he is odd; he doesn't fit in; he resists community; he eschews lasting ties with women but embraces rock-solid bonds with same-sex partners; he practices same-sex desire."<sup>27</sup> The cowboy shirks the normative requirement of marriage, its coextensive commitment to domesticity, and the requirements of civilization and normality that are intertwined with matrimony. Packard continues, "A cowboy's partner, after all, is his one emotional attachment, aside from his horse, and he will die to preserve the attachment. Affection for women destroys cowboy *communitas* and produces children, and both are unwanted hindrances to those who wish to ride the range freely."<sup>28</sup> This homosocial *communitas*, a liminal social space that I have called the homosocial utopia, is a fantasy space in that it carries within it the menace of deviancy: not only of queer sexuality, but also the rootlessness of the itinerant cowboys, the danger of the outlaw, or the moral ambiguity of the frontier lawman.<sup>29</sup>

For the remainder of this chapter, I will explore how two films, *Appaloosa* and *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, explore the ambiguities of homosocial desire in

the western. Homosocial desire is the foundation of the western's normalizing project. The interdependence and intimacy between western partners are often the sources of their power to defeat the villain and establish social order. Likewise, the constitution of the ideal masculine figure is a product of identification and desire. But the centrality of same-sex desire is precisely what is exposed in and redefined by post-closet culture and post-*Brokeback* cinema.

### **Cowboys Are Frequently, Secretly Fond of Each Other: *Appaloosa* and Male Partnership in the American Western**

Chris Packard's queer reading of cowboy partnership provides an entry point for thinking about homosocial partnership in the western. The homosocial partnership imagines a more perfect union between men who reflect one another's strength and form a utopian relationship of equality. Packard writes,

almost every Western includes a love story between friends drawn together under dire circumstances. This friendship inspires the roistering cowboy to live up to communal standards without relinquishing his identity as a nomad. Same-sex bonds permit the universal human need for companionship and stability in an often hostile or chaotic wilderness, but because there are neither domestic nor reproductive consequences, the intimate friendship does not hinder the cowboy's spontaneity.<sup>30</sup>

We can juxtapose the circumscribed world of opposite-sex domesticity with the liberating nomadic life cowboy partners share in the fantasy West. The cowboy resists "the normalizing function of marriage to women, and the domesticating influence of femininity."<sup>31</sup> They are bachelors who rely upon same-sex partnership. Packard's feisty and lively reading of nineteenth century western literature leads him to the scandalous conclusion that "if there is something homoerotic about the partnerships [the cowboy] forms in the wilderness, then there is something homoerotic about American national identity as it is conceived in the literary West."<sup>32</sup> In most of the works considered here, I take for granted that homoeroticism is present, but I am doubtful that we can conclude that homosexual sex is present in most. My project is not a hunting expedition to "uncover" gay men in

putatively straight texts. While in the next section of this chapter I will focus on the possibility of homoeroticism between men, in this section, focusing on the film *Appaloosa*, I am most interested in a more general sense of desire or attraction between men in the western. The subversive possibilities of such desire is not predicated on its relation to sex per se, but on how such desire is connected to social structures meant to organize sex. Sexuality is organized through social norms of marriage, monogamous heterosexuality, and the cultivation of bourgeois domesticity. In so much of American cinema a happy ending is synonymous with achieving these goals, and this is often the case with westerns. Yet, *Appaloosa* privileges male companionship over heterosexual coupling.

The homosocial fantasy of the West is often juxtaposed with the world of urban and suburban middle-class men. As David Savran has argued, the West operates as a sort of homosocial ideal, devoid of women and post-Fordist organizational labor, where men are liberated from the strictures of urban capitalism and heterosexual domesticity. Savran points to Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Biff Loman's idealistic description of his job in Texas, which he contrasts with the demands of corporate capitalism.<sup>33</sup> Biff describes the white-collar business world, saying that you "suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off."<sup>34</sup> Corporate capitalism, in Biff's description, is little more than competition between men masquerading as civility. He laments the relentless competition: "always having to get ahead of the next fella."<sup>35</sup> His brother Happy comments in passing that he is just waiting "for the merchandise manager to die," so that he can replace him.<sup>36</sup> Biff proposes to Happy that they should move out west and get a ranch together: "Raise cattle, use our muscles. Men built like we are should be working in the open." He continues, "Baby, together we'd stand up for one another, we'd have someone to trust."<sup>37</sup> Biff imagines that he and his brother could be fully actualized physically and psychologically and could support one another absolutely, if only they could escape the stifling white-collar corporate world of New York in favor of the open country of

the West. In the mid-twentieth century, the long disappeared frontier became a fantasy space of independent and powerful men who are the antithesis of the “organizational man” of mid century capitalism. However, this homosocial utopian dream is always under the pall of its own inevitable demise. As quickly as he invokes the dream of living in the West, Biff dismisses it: “I’m mixed up very bad. Maybe I oughta get married. Maybe I oughta get stuck into something. Maybe that’s my trouble. I’m like a boy. I’m not married, I’m not in business, I just—I’m like a boy.”<sup>38</sup> In this short scene we see the basic organization of the homosocial utopia as a fantasy space. The West as homosocial utopia is defined by the voluntary bonds with other men who provide support and camaraderie—and defined *against* being “stuck” in marriage and organized capitalism. Yet, these ideal homosocial bonds are either indicative of arrested development (“I’m like a boy.”) or merely a transient phase that must give way to “settling down.” The paradox being that the homosocial utopia is a space of purified masculinity, wherein male prowess is liberated from constraints and uncontaminated by femininity, but it is also juvenile and pathological. Because it is positioned against marriage, this fantasy also presents the threat of queer sexuality.

Perhaps the most famous male friendship in the western tradition is that of Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday. In his 1907 account of the Earp and Holliday friendships, lawman Bat Masterson expresses moral disapproval of Holliday and notes that he “had few real friends.” Yet, Holliday and Earp were loyal friends. Holliday’s “whole heart and soul were wrapped up in Wyatt Earp and he was always ready to stake his life in defense of any cause in which Wyatt was interested”; Masterson continues, “Damon did no more for Pythias that Holliday did for Wyatt Earp.”<sup>39</sup> The Earp-Holliday friendship was a staple of western cinema, including John Ford’s *My Darling Clementine* (1946), John Sturges’s *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1957), and George Cosmatos’s *Tombstone* (1993). In all of these films, we see the mythic nature of the Earp-Holliday relationship replayed. Holliday, an alcoholic degenerate whose only virtue is his facility with a gun, finds redemption by joining forces with Earp,

a reluctant lawman whose quest for vengeance would almost certainly fail but for Holliday's assistance.

One of the most interesting retellings of the Earp-Holliday friendship is Oakley Hall's 1958 Pulitzer-Prize-nominated novel *Warlock*. The novel is most notable for its left-leaning political critique of the western mythology,<sup>40</sup> but for my purposes the representation of male friendships is striking. In the novel, Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday are substituted with Clay Blaisedell, a lawman for hire, and Tom Morgan, a malignant gambler and gunman, who follows Blaisedell from town to town. Edward Dmytryk's 1959 adaptation of the novel simplifies it greatly, jettisoning most of the caustic political critique at the heart of the novel. The film leaves in place the dark codependence that Morgan (Anthony Quinn) feels for Blaisedell (Henry Fonda), which some critics have read as a veiled homosexual relationship.<sup>41</sup> In the film, Blaisedell arrives in town to restore law and order in the face of the villainous McQuown and his thuggish cowboys. Morgan comes to the town as well and often works to back Blaisedell's strategies for keeping peace. This largely symbiotic relationship sours when Blaisedell becomes involved with Jessie Marlowe (Dolores Michaels), a flaxen-haired woman who is part of the town's respectable elite. Blaisedell decides to stay in town and marry Jessie. This decision effectively ends his partnership with Morgan. The conflict between the two men comes to a head when Morgan goads Blaisedell into killing him, an act of self-sacrifice intended to secure Blaisedell's position in the town, but this plan backfires. Blaisedell goes into a rage, assaulting townspeople and burning a saloon to the ground. When Jessie tries to comfort her fiancé and talk sense to him, he replies, "I told him [Morgan] was nothing without me. Maybe I'm nothing without him." Blaisedell ultimately leaves town without Jessie. If *Warlock* is an "elegiac western" that mourns the passing of the "frontier," it also mourns the dissolution of the male partnership. Nearly every other film version of the Earp-Holliday relationship ends with Earp leaving the frontier to find his future wife in California and with Holliday left to die of consumption. The lawman and the

gunman go on their separate paths: one toward heterosexual domesticity and middle-class prosperity, and the other toward dissolution and sterile death. *Warlock*, on the contrary, imagines that the Blaisedell and Morgan (Earp and Holliday) cannot live without each other. The novel effectively queers the homosocial bonds between westerners.<sup>42</sup>

The 2005 Robert B. Parker novel *Appaloosa* owes a great deal to *Warlock*, though the two novels are dramatically different. *Warlock* is a sprawling novel that calls into question nearly every myth of the West, while *Appaloosa* is a brisk and loving homage to the western tradition. Ed Harris's 2008 film adaptation is a similarly faithful revival of the classic western. The film has been criticized for being too conventional,<sup>43</sup> though AO Scott points out that its simplicity makes it also a pleasing example of solid filmmaking.<sup>44</sup> Superficially, I agree with Scott that the film is admirably elegant and pleasurably conventional, but, at the same time, the film's focus on an intimate male friendship offers something more substantial, if quite subtle. Though elegiac in tone, *Appaloosa* lacks *Warlock's* hyper-revisionist pathological view of the central same-sex partnership. Rather *Appaloosa* mourns the inevitable end of its protagonists' association as tragic.

The two men at the center of *Appaloosa*, Virgil Cole (Ed Harris) and Everett Hitch (Vigo Mortensen), are gunmen hired to keep the peace in frontier towns when the normal police powers are unable or unwilling to do so. Cole and Hitch find the dusty town of Appaloosa under the thumb of Randall Bragg (Jeremy Irons), whose henchmen pillage the town with impunity. When we first meet the Cole and Hitch, they ride into town and meet with the aldermen, who plead for help. The aldermen are a feeble sight. One is portly, cowardly, and skittish; another is old, enfeebled, and probably drunk. We immediately see why they have been helpless to stop Bragg. Cole is seated, leaning back in his chair, while Hitch leans against a rail. Both men's clothes are well kept but dusty and worn from the trail. The *mise-en-scène* contrasts the gunmen's confident ease with the aldermen's anxious impotence. The gunmen make a simple ultimatum: they will protect the town

from Bragg and his men on the condition that Cole is given *carte blanche*. Hitch explains, “whatever Mr. Cole says is the law.” One of the aldermen objects, “You’re asking us, so to speak, to turn the town over to you.” Hitch replies, “As far as I can see you’re going to turn it over anyway... to Mr. Bragg.” The newly appointed lawmen then quickly move to deal with several of Bragg’s ruffian cowboys in an adjacent bar. Cole and Hitch, communicating only through a few spare gestures, leisurely take up position and, after warning the offending cowboys to leave, quickly and effortlessly kill them in a brief exchange of gunfire.

Throughout the film, Cole and Hitch demonstrate themselves to be clever strategists and deft gunman, and the camera lovingly gazes as they move about their world with a laconic confidence. They are men who can stand unwaveringly and patiently as violence rolls toward them. The relationship between the two men is the bedrock of the film but also of their success as lawmen. When Bragg and a large contingent of his men enter town, an alderman desperately asks Cole what they should do, but Cole without explanation remains seated in a saloon. He and Hitch sit silently and wait, betraying no anxiety. Bragg enters, followed by his men, and tries unsuccessfully to rattle the lawman. Cole and Hitch operate in perfect synchronicity. Hitch keeps his shotgun and pistol trained on Bragg’s men, leaving Cole free to stare down his adversary with aplomb. While Cole is clearly the boss, he credits Hitch with keeping him alive.<sup>45</sup> In Parker’s novel, the hierarchy between the two men is emphasized more than in the film, where the silent communication between them and their seamless teamwork appears to be an equitable partnership. In any case, Hitch is usually content to follow Cole’s lead, as though his and Cole’s wills were one and the same. Hitch literally finishes Cole’s sentences, when the latter’s vocabulary fails him. Ed Harris points to a precedent in the western tradition of depicting male friendships in this way: “Well, I think the relationship between Redford and Newman in *Butch Cassidy*, between Duvall and Tommy Lee in *Lonesome Dove*, between Randolph Scott and McCrea in *Ride the High Country*, even Holden and

Borgnine in *The Wild Bunch*, there's certain aspects of every one of those relationships that's part of these guys and a sense of—there's a comfortability [sic] that goes on. It's one of the reasons I think people do enjoy those films because it feels comfortable."<sup>46</sup> The contentment and seamless cooperation between the two men is a distilled example of a homosocial utopia, a fantasy of same-sex male relationships that are complete and lacking nothing.

This ideal circumstance is suddenly disrupted with the arrival of Allie French (Renee Zellweger), a piano player, with whom Cole quickly develops a romantic relationship. Harris, in another interview, observes how the entrance of Allie represents a conflict for the partnership:

You know, there's really no room for a woman.... In other words these are not domesticated men, necessarily. These are men who are traveling, who are traveling on horseback, in this case, itinerant lawmen, really. They don't really have a home. Their home is wherever they are. They've been traveling together for years. A certain bond has developed between the men in terms of trusting one another, relying on one another for their very survival. And so, where does a woman fit into that?<sup>47</sup>

The utopian completeness of Cole and Hitch's relationship is oppositional to heterosexual coupling. Almost immediately after her appearance Cole and Hitch's routine is disrupted. Cole suddenly cannot communicate clearly with Hitch—for example, when he frustratedly tries to extract information about Allie from Hitch. Later Allie embarrasses Cole by asking him about his sexual history, and the normally unflappable Cole flies into a rage and attacks a drunken miner with no real provocation. Allie punctures Cole's invulnerability and confidence, and she also undermines the homosocial harmony of his partnership.

The lawmen eventually apprehend Bragg and successfully prosecute him. All seems won, but, as Cole and Hitch escort Bragg to prison, two other hired guns abduct Allie and ransom her for Bragg. Allie is eventually recovered, but not before she is discovered frolicking in the nude with her captors. Allie repeatedly proves to be a liability proportionate to how Hitch is an asset. Bragg escapes and uses his political connections to secure a pardon. He returns to Appaloosa and prospers. With his newfound wealth, he exerts sway over the alderman, making Cole and Hitch's position in

the town precarious. Bragg also appears to be making time with Allie on the sly. Hitch tries to persuade Cole to leave, but he refuses to leave Allie, who is set on staying in Appaloosa. Hitch finally takes matters into his own hands: he calls Bragg out into the street and shoots him dead before riding out of town. In a brief voiceover, we hear Hitch explain, “I figured I’d saved Virgil’s career as a lawman and given him another chance with Allie... at least for the foreseeable future.” Hitch’s extra-judicial murder of Bragg, whom the Law had perversely absolved of murder, irrevocably dissolves the partnership at the center of the film. Hitch must leave town, having murdered its newly rich first citizen. The murder is a final act of total friendship, a sacrifice on behalf of Cole to preserve his domestic and social standing in town, which ironically comes at the cost of their friendship. The act mirrors Morgan’s self-sacrificial attempt to save Blaisedell in *Warlock*, though Morgan’s stratagem reads as pathetic and somewhat insane, and Hitch’s actions are framed as noble. The dissolution of the partnership is as inevitable as Cole’s compulsory union with Allie, forming a complete revolution of the straight circuit.

The intensely homosocial nature of the film was not lost on critics. A reviewer for *The Chicago Tribune* wrote the film is “less a western than a loping buddy picture,”<sup>48</sup> and AO Scott of *The New York Times* wrote that Cole and Hitch are “like a long-married couple.”<sup>49</sup> Kenneth Turan disparaged Zellweger’s performance as Allie and praised Harris and Mortensen, writing, “The two men collaborate so well, in fact, that the real love match of *Appaloosa* is between the two of them and no one else.”<sup>50</sup> Yet, few critics saw anything erotic in the men’s relationship, and, despite the film’s following so closely on the heels of *Brokeback Mountain*, few bothered to compare the two films. In fact, M. Faust in *Art Voice*, raised the comparison only to dismiss it, writing, “You might want to read some comparisons to *Brokeback Mountain* into [*Appaloosa*], but I’ll leave that for the English majors in the audience.”<sup>51</sup> The dearth of comparisons is an interesting form of silence that surrounds the film’s critical reception, but this silence mirrors the silence between Cole and Hitch

and the silence about same-sex desire in the western genre as a whole. Harris, in an interview, asserts that this silence is at the core of their partnership. He explains, “These two guys are comfortable with each other. They’ve been riding together for a dozen years and they are who they are and they’re not trying to be anything else. They like each other. They don’t like to talk about it, but there’s an unspoken deep appreciation for one another, you know?”<sup>52</sup> Perhaps Cole and Hitch do not need to speak, because they understand one another so well, or perhaps the nature of their mutual affection cannot quite be given words. Certainly Harris is not suggesting that Cole and Hitch share a love that dare not speak its name, but the silence that pervades their relationships indicates an unspeakable nature of their feelings—whatever the nature of those feelings is. Even when Hitch talks most plainly about the impending demise of their partnership, he never refers to this subject outright but speaks indirectly.<sup>53</sup>

Cole and Hitch’s unspoken bond, in the context of a western, is a fantasy of complete male closeness—not a lack of warmth and communication, but a plentitude of intimacy that renders spoken communication superfluous. The “comfort” between them, about which Harris waxes poetically, is a sort of prelapsarian attachment. The pleasure of this film may lie in the fantasy of male friendship that transcends language. If the epitome of heterosexual commitment, marriage, is predicated on an illocution, “I do,” Cole and Hitch’s relationship is exemplary because it has no need for promises, vows, or pretty words. The failure of heterosexual couples to successfully communicate is a trope of romantic comedies and sitcoms. In *Appaloosa*, Cole and Hitch’s laconic relationships is a utopian inversion of the confounding nature of opposite-sex communication. In most westerns, we may feel a tinge of regret as the hero turns from his homosocial bonds toward heterosexual marriage, but we experience the turn with relief, as it indicates a movement away from the danger to safe middle-class comfort. In *Appaloosa*, the loss of male partnership is heartbreaking. We recognize its inevitability—Cole will not give up Allie, Allie will not give up Appaloosa, and

Appaloosa belongs to Bragg—but the audience is primed to see the “breakup” in tragic terms, the loss of perfect friendship for an imperfect, perhaps doomed, marriage.<sup>54</sup>

Cole and Hitch’s unspoken, or unspeakable, affection occasionally takes on a queer valence in the film. For example, Cole and Allie are building a new house, but he is befuddled by her questions about furnishing it. He finally asks Hitch to visit Allie at the house, saying, “Well, go on down there, will you? Calm her down a little.” This exchange exemplifies how Hitch awkwardly but consistently is a third-wheel to Cole and Allie’s relationships. In at least four scenes throughout the film, Hitch sits at a table with the couple, eating and appearing as a member of the family. Hitch sometimes serves a go-between for Cole and Allie. When Hitch arrives at the incomplete house, Allie complains that Cole “doesn’t pay any attention to me.” After showing Hitch the house, she pulls him close and kisses him passionately. Hitch reciprocates at first and then holds her at arms length.<sup>55</sup> He tells her sternly, “Allie, you’re with Virgil. So am I.... We’re not with each other. We’re both with him.” Hitch’s laconic account of the love triangle offers no distinction between the nature of his commitment to Cole versus Allie’s. They are “both with him.” They are both in exclusive relationships with Cole and consequently cannot be sexually involved with each other. Hitch’s language elides the difference between his and Allie’s relationships with Cole.

*Appaloosa* is perhaps unique, or at least rare, in openly mourning the loss of a male partnership. The mournful contemplation of its loss is not suppressed. *Appaloosa* is a post-closet film where homosocial desire is pushed to the fore. *Appaloosa* does not overtly subvert gender. Yet, what goes unsaid between the men raises many questions and leaves them largely unanswered or, perhaps better said, defers answering. Yet, the unspoken “comfortability” between the men points squarely to a desire that is pervasive within the western genre. The fantasy of male partnership here transcends language and naming. This utopian relationship is free of the encumbrances that

“eastern” suburban men embrace as signifiers of success—the two-car garage, the mortgage, the nine-to-five job, the marriage, and the rearing of children.

My principle interest in *Appaloosa* is centered on the way that it brings to the surface homosocial desire, a desire that is always already present in the western but one that comes into sharper relief in this film. Male partnership, a staple of the western, is here reimagined as taciturn but deeply committed and as hyper-masculine but loving. It is valorized above straight marriage, even if the demise of the partnership is inevitable. In this way, *Appaloosa* presents something of a queer revision of male partnership, however muffled its expression is.

Yet, the film is so circumscribed by the meta-narrative of the genre that it cannot escape the inevitable imperialist, racist, and patriarchal aspects of the genre. Misogyny is easy enough to identify in *Appaloosa*. Allie is a stereotypically unfaithful woman. The superiority of Hitch’s resolute fidelity is only made clear in the juxtaposition with Allie. The men’s relationship is elevated by comparison with the heterosexual relationship, a theme found in some bromance films. Thus, one of the main impediments to praising these representations of homosocial bonds is the tendency to build male attachment through the denigration of women.<sup>56</sup> Thus, these fantasies stories—the western’s homosocial utopia, the bromance, and Biff Loman’s fantasy of working on a ranch—too often lead back to a rejection of women as stealing men’s virility and autonomy.

Race and violence are another problem for the film. Part of the insidious pleasure offered by the western—and the action film—is in seeing the “good guy” unleash violence on the “bad guy.” In the mythology of the classic western, the good guy resorts to violence only because he has no choice. The frontier becomes a fantasy space in which otherwise good men must behave like killers to protect the innocent. To its credit, *Appaloosa* repeatedly mediates on the relationship between legal violence and extra-legal violence, but these moments of reflection hardly counterbalance the fixation of Cole and Hitch’s prowess with the gun. Hitch’s final noble act of friendship is the illegal murder

of Bragg, a man who has secured a pardon through his ties to corrupt politicians. The legal system provides no official recourse, and Hitch must act outside the law to set the world aright.

Ideologically, the film lines up with the basic myth of the western. The frontier exists on the periphery of “civilization.” Consequently, it is a site where violence, even violence that transgresses the letter of the law, is necessary to reinstate law and order. The necessity of violence is, however, a fantasy that betrays a latent fascistic desire to exercise violence without regard to legal limitations. Notably this violence is exercised in the western almost exclusively by white men.

The relationship between power, violence, and the law is a conspicuous but minor theme in *Appaloosa*; it is nonetheless important to the present study. Cole and Hitch’s partnership is founded on the collaborative marshaling of violence. Homosocial violence in this context should give us pause. Homosocial power pertains to more than just the consolidation of power between men; rather, it also refers to the consolidation of power, the right to use violence, between white straight male citizens. Historically, “frontier justice,” extra-judicial murder, is structurally not different than lynching in the South. Indeed, “lynch law” is defended in Owen Wister’s *The Virginian*, though he insists that western lynching is different from Southern lynching.<sup>57</sup> Western films whitewash the way that extra-judicial killings of African-, Indian-, Chinese-, and Mexican-Americans were part and parcel of white racial hegemony throughout the United States, including the West. The power to use violence outside the bounds of the law but in the name of the law and order is a fantasy embedded in the western genre.<sup>58</sup> Fantasies of vigilante justice have largely become a reality in contemporary America. Lax gun and “stand your ground” laws effectively empower citizens to act as murderous vigilantes, as when George Zimmerman pursued and shot the unarmed Trayvon Martin because Zimmerman thought he looked “suspicious.” Likewise, we have been reminded of late that police are often able to kill suspects, specifically black suspects, with relatively little fear of being held accountable. In the wake of recent police shooting deaths of unarmed black men, it is difficult to

watch films like *Appaloosa* and not see a racist ideology lurking under the surface. The western fantasy is one in which white men shed blood in the name of establishing law and order.<sup>59</sup>

*Appaloosa* provides a particular window into the structure of male same-sex desire in the American western. The film in many ways follows the established patterns of the genre by ending with the embrace of heterosexual marriage and domesticity, but it frames this inevitable outcome in elegiac terms and as the rejection of a utopian homosocial relationship. Moreover, *Appaloosa* self-consciously sees Cole and Hitch's relationship in terms that parallel and mimic Cole and Allie's heterosexual relationship. Read through a post-*Brokeback* lens, the film does suggest something queer in the two men's relationship. Yet, the film also embraces the misogynistic and latently racist visions of "frontier justice" that offer a fantasy of white homosocial power.

### **The Homosocial Gaze: Desire and Identification in *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford***

Andrew Dominik's film *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, adapted from Ron Hansen's novel of the same name, is an unabashed art film. With a running time of two hours and forty minutes, striking cinematography, and an at times plodding narrative, the film departs from many of the conventions of the western film. According to Mark Salisbury, the director's cut was four-and-a-half-hours long, and the film went through a prolonged period of reedits.<sup>60</sup> Despite the celebrity appeal of its star Brad Pitt, along with a host of lesser stars, the film was a box office failure. With a budget of \$30 million, it only grossed \$3 million.<sup>61</sup> The studio hoped to make the film into a blockbuster with Pitt in the lead, but Dominik's vision never squared with the studio's. As Salisbury notes, "*Jesse James* is a cinematic cousin to *Pat Garrett and Billy The Kid*, *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* and *Heaven's Gate*, a long, deliberate, elegiac, '70s western."<sup>62</sup> Yet, as I will argue, *The Assassination of Jesse James* does share some common themes with the classic western, one of the chief being the

homosocial relationships between the male leads, even as it departs from the tradition by singularly focusing on the deadly and enigmatic attraction between the two men.

In the film, Jesse James, the famous outlaw, meets Robert “Bob” Ford. At first, James allows Bob to live with his family, and then sends him away. As the film slowly unwinds, James sinks into paranoia as Missouri Governor Thomas Crittenden plots to bring him to justice. Bob and his brother Charley are charged with bringing in James, dead or alive. Bob’s exact motivations remain unclear: fame, money, resentment at Jesse’s treatment, and fear of Jesse’s unpredictable violence. Bob shoots Jesse in the back of the head, and overnight becomes a celebrity, but his fame turns to infamy that haunts him in his remaining years. He is finally shot dead by an assassin.

*The Assassination of Jesse James* is part of a long line of films depicting the life and death of Jesse James. James, like some other outlaws at the end of the nineteenth century, was elevated to a heroic status by journalists and biographers. Robert Ford suffered in proportion to James’s posthumous success. Ford became the villain who betrayed his friend, killing him in a most cowardly manner, but initially pro-James propaganda attacked Governor Crittenden. Frank Triplet, in his biography *Jesse James: The Life, Times, and Treacherous Death of the Most Infamous Outlaw of All Time* (1882), paints Ford as a cowardly pawn in Crittenden’s plot. Triplet writes, “the brothers Ford, with their souls already steeped in rapine and in blood, were men of finer natures than Governor Crittenden,” whom Triplet pillories as unmanly and declares to have corrupted Missouri, making it an “assassin state.”<sup>63</sup> Robert Ford’s relatively diminutive villainy is also seen in Henry King’s *Jesse James* (1939), which Richard Slotkin writes was “the most influential of the outlaw Westerns” and “a critical and a commercial success” that quickly inspired a string of imitations.<sup>64</sup> Robert Ford is depicted as a cowardly murderer but is a minor villain next to the rapacious railroad company, against which the James brothers (Tyron Power and Henry Fonda) so valiantly fight. *Jesse James* built on the pre-existing folkloric tradition of celebrating outlaws as Robin-Hood figures.<sup>65</sup> This mythologizing

of James had little basis in reality but remained remarkably popular. The famous folk song “Jesse James,” which is sung in several of the film versions, including *The Assassination of Jesse James*, has the line, “He stole from the rich, and he gave to the poor.” Woody Guthrie reworked the song into his political anthem “Jesus Christ,” which imagines Jesus as a radical socialist who is murdered by the wealthy and powerful. Where the original song reads, “But the dirty little coward that shot Mr. Howard / Has laid poor Jesse in his grave,” Guthrie’s reads, “One dirty little coward called Judas Iscariot / Has laid Jesus Christ in his grave.” That Guthrie could map Judas’s betrayal of Jesus onto Ford’s betrayal of James is evidence of just how great Ford’s infamy was.

Before the *The Assassination of Jesse James* most films treat Ford as a cowardly assassin. One exception is Samuel Fuller’s *I Shot Jesse James* (1949). Fuller’s film focuses on Robert Ford, played by veteran western actor John Ireland, and imagines him in a sympathetic light. Ford desperately wants to marry his sweetheart Cynthy, but his association with the James Gang makes this impossible. His only way out is to kill James, but the shame and infamy that follow prevent him from building a life with Cynthy.<sup>66</sup> Some critics list *I Shot Jesse James* among early instances of homosexual relationships in westerns.<sup>67</sup> While there is some evidence for this reading, a more coherent reading of the film is that Ford must chose between his homosocial bond with fellow outlaw James and his heterosexual future with Cynthy. The heterosexual resolution certainly serves to dissipate the possible homoerotic desire between the two men and recuperate the film in heteronormative terms. *The Assassination of Jesse James*, in contrast, dwells on the deadly and vexed desire that draws Robert Ford to Jesse James.

*The Assassination of Jesse James* opens with a time-lapse shots of clouds traversing a Midwestern sky accompanied by a haunting score composed by Nick Cave and Warren Ellis. The music is a spare, dreamy, dirge-like ensemble of trilling bells, a throbbing celeste, and a piano that repeats simple phrases. A disembodied narrator says, “He was growing into middle age and was living then in a bungalow on Woodland Avenue. He installed himself in a rocking chair and smoked a cigar

down in the evenings as his wife wiped her pink hands on an apron and reported happily on their two children,” and we see Jesse James, played by Brad Pitt, sitting in a rocking chair. The narrator does not say his real name, but we know, as surely as we know it is Brad Pitt, that “he” is Jesse James. A montage shuffles together flashes of Jesse living under his alias, Thomas Howard. We see him playing with his children, encircled at one point by a blurry iris; we see him from behind crossing a crowded street and then almost in silhouette in a smoky poolroom and barbershop. The next few shots are closer and more intimate: a close-up of his hand with its missing ring finger, gliding over wheat stalks; a close-up and medium shot of him standing alone before the horizon at sunset. The last shots in the montage are of Jesse standing at night, watching a fire that stretches across the plain. Over the musical score and the visual montage, a lengthy narration is spoken:

His children knew his legs, the sting of his mustache against their cheeks. They didn't know how their father made his living or why they so often moved. They didn't even know their father's name. He was listed in the city directory as Thomas Howard, and he went everywhere unrecognized and lunched with Kansas City shopkeepers and merchants, calling himself a cattleman or a commodities investor, someone rich and leisured who had the common touch. He had two incompletely healed bullet holes in his chest and another in his thigh. He was missing the nub of his left middle finger and was cautious, lest that mutilation be seen. He also had a condition that was referred to as “granulated eyelids,” and it caused him to blink more than usual, as if he found creation slightly more than he could accept. Rooms seemed hotter when he was in them. Rains fell straighter. Clocks slowed. Sounds were amplified. He considered himself a Southern loyalist and guerrilla in a Civil War that never ended. He regretted neither his robberies, nor the 17 murders that he laid claim to. He had seen another summer under in Kansas City, Missouri, and on September 5th in the year 1881 he was 34 years old.

After this scene, the film abruptly shifts to a narrative story as Jesse and Frank James with their gang of unwashed outlaws wait to rob a train, among them the film’s protagonist Robert Ford (Casey Affleck).

The film’s opening sequence presents one of the contradictions of the film. While it is singularly focused on Pitt’s Jesse James, Affleck’s Robert Ford is unmistakably the film’s protagonist. Indeed, after Jesse’s death at the hands of Bob, the film continues for another twenty minutes with Bob’s story. Jesse’s absent presence haunts these remaining moments. The film’s title, as well,

presents this contradiction: Jesse James is the victim of the assassination, the object of violence, and Robert Ford is the active agent. Yet, the film is not titled *The Coward Robert Ford Assassinate Jesse James* but *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. Bob is the active agent who realizes the title's promised climax, but he is relegated to a subordinate clause in the title. The opening montage is, like so much of the film, *about* Jesse James, but Jesse is an object of fascination held at a distance and admired from afar. The narrator catalogues his biography and physical attributes as in a hagiography of a saint. He appears almost a messianic figure complete with sacred wounds, bullet holes that could pass for stigmata, and the otherworldly power to alter reality: slowing clocks and amplifying sounds. The sense of Jesse James as an awe-inspiring figure is augmented by Brad Pitt's celebrity aura. Pitt was at the time perhaps the most prominent male actor on the big screen.

The opening montage subjects Pitt/Jesse to a spectatorial scrutiny usually reserved for women actors. We might see in this objectification of the leading male an analogy with Laura Mulvey's analysis of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). For Mulvey the division between active/looking and passive/looked-at fall along male or female lines, respectively. That is, the active masculine point of view is the default position of film narratively and cinematographically, whereas the passive female is the object of the male gaze.<sup>68</sup> *The Assassination of Jesse James*, however, very much treats Pitt/Jesse as an object. The film also reframes the subject/object relation to operate between two men. Jesse James is an active character, having power over life and death. Yet, cinematographically, narratively, and psychologically he is often objectified. We see him and we hear about him, but rarely do we understand his point of view. Jesse remains shrouded in a mysterious cloud of erratic behavior, strategic dissimulation, and possibly mental illness. Even after his death, Jesse's body remains an object of spectatorial desire. The film recounts how Jesse's corpse was displayed in town, photographed, and preserved on ice. The narrator explains how a "photograph was taken of the renowned American bandit nestled in his bed of ice, and it was this shot that was most available in

sundries and apothecaries to be viewed in a stereoscope alongside the sphinx, the Taj Mahal, and the catacombs of Rome.” Even in death, when he is reduced to a pure object, his corpse exerts a magnetic power over spectators.

Steve Neale has argued that western films subject men to a fetishistic gaze similar to the kind women are subjected to in other cinema. Working from Laura Mulvey’s analysis of the male gaze, Neale examines Sergio Leone’s *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966) and notes how male actors are subject to similar spectatorial scrutiny. Neale’s essay corrects for Mulvey’s overly deterministic account of how the cinematic apparatus dictates the audience’s attachment of desire or identification to characters on screen. He writes, “identification is never simply a matter of men identifying with male figures on the screen and women identifying with female figures. Cinema draws on and involves many desires, many forms of desire. And desire itself is mobile, fluid, constantly transgressing identities, positions and roles. Identifications are multiple, fluid, at points even contradictory.”<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, Neale explains that Leone’s films preempt the homoerotic gaze by situating the images of men within the context of violence. He writes:

If we return to Leone’s shoot-outs, we can see that some elements of the fetishistic look as here described are present, others not. We are offered the spectacle of male bodies, but bodies unmarked as objects of erotic display. There is no trace of an acknowledgement or recognition of those bodies as displayed solely for the gaze of the spectator. They are on display, certainly, but there is no cultural or cinematic convention which would allow the male body to be presented in the way that Dietrich so often is in Sternberg’s films. We see male bodies stylized and fragmented by close-ups, but our look is not direct, it is heavily mediated by the looks of the characters involved. And those looks are marked not by desire, but by fear, or hatred, or aggression.<sup>70</sup>

Neale suggests that the cinematic apparatus must suppress the erotic mobility of the gaze. The capacity to look at men as an erotic objects is always available, but for Neale the film resists this possibility through various cinematic strategies. The tension within the climatic scene of *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* is fundamentally built upon the Hobbesian logic of Leone’s West in which violence is the only social currency. Inscribed in the editing, cinematography, and music is

impending violence, which arouses anxious suspense in the viewer. The suspended violence mitigates and suppresses the erotic pleasure of viewing, often sublimating it into sadomasochism.<sup>71</sup> In much the same way, Robert Ford's unmistakable affection for Jesse James is frustrated by Jesse's occasional cruelty and violence. In the scenes leading up to Jesse's death, the outlaw is alternately sadistic and generous with Bob Ford. At one point, he holds a knife to Bob's throat; a few scenes later, Jesse apologetically gives Bob a brand new pistol. Bob's homosocial desire for Jesse, vexed by his beloved's mercurial temperament and the persistent threat of unpredictable violence, is finally sublimated into murder. But unlike Leone's films, where violence may be said to dissipate the homoerotic gaze, *The Assassination of Jesse James* slows down its action. It lingers on the figure of Pitt/Jesse and fixates on Bob's attraction to Jesse, his hero and enemy.

When we first encounter Casey Affleck's Bob Ford, he is quite the opposite figure as Pitt's Jesse. Wandering among the James Gang members, he seems invisible. Affleck is short and baby-faced with a slight build. Affleck performs Bob as almost simple minded and childlike. He is frequently awkward and guileless. His voice cracks or is phlegmy and tremulous. He feebly tries to suppress tears when others mock him. In proud moments, he smirks unattractively, unable to hide his self-satisfaction. However, Bob's underdog status garners sympathy, especially because he is so often slighted. For example, Bob pleads his case to Frank James, asking to be the older man's "sidekick." Bob explains, "Folks take me for a nincompoop on account of the shabby first impression I make, whereas I think of myself as being just a rung down from the James brothers. I was hoping if I ran into you aside from those peckerwoods, I could show you how special I am. I honestly believe I'm destined for great things, Mr. James." Bob's appearance is, indeed, shabby: a rumpled coat, disheveled hair, and a tattered stovepipe hat. After Frank tries to shoo him away and dismisses him as nothing special, Bob replies in his tremulous voice, "Well, I'm sorry to hear you feel that way, as I put such stock in your opinions. As for me being a gunslinger, I've just got this

one granddaddy Paterson Colt and a borrowed belt to stick it in. But I also got an appetite for greater things. I hoped by joining up with you, it'd put me that much closer to getting them.” This is perhaps Bob’s character in a nutshell. By nature he seems a pathetic sort, but he strives against his low station by seeking association with great men. Bob’s vanity and hero worship seem to be among his central motives.

Jesse at times is willing to accept Bob’s hero worship but always jabs him with dismissive comments. By the end of the film, he keeps Bob and his brother around only to keep an eye on them, perhaps biding his time to murder them. In as much as *The Assassination of Jesse James* is a homosocial romance, wherein Bob pursues Jesse as his love interest, it is also a story of unrequited love. Along these lines, we may think of Bob’s murder of Jesse as punishment for rejection. At the same time, we may see the murder as an act of total possession. That is, Bob, having been denied reciprocal love from Jesse, is able to fully possess Jesse by destroying him. Bob’s murder of Jesse is a sort of ultimate possession of an unrequited love. In fact, killing Jesse forever binds Bob to Jesse in myth and history.

We can make even more sense of Bob and Jesse’s relationship if we read it through a queer theory lens. Judith Butler has argued that gender identity in the heterosexual subject is founded upon the disavowal of homosexual desire, which is sublimated into identification. Butler’s reading of the Oedipal complex bears this out. The son does not only desire his mother but also his father; he must disavow both. Yet, where desire for the mother can be redirected to an “appropriate” opposite-sex object (other women), the desire for the father cannot reattach to a same-sex object (another man), because of the proscription against homoerotic desire. Thus, the repression of the son’s desire for the father follows the pattern of melancholia, wherein the lost or disavowed love object (the father) is incorporated into the son’s ego. In other words, erotic desire for the father precedes identification with the father and normative identity formation.<sup>72</sup> Gender identity formation, however, is not a

discrete event isolated to childhood or the father-son dynamic. Men encounter numerous objects of identification throughout life. Like the father, these objects arouse a sort of desire in men that must be repressed. The forbidden object of desire is introjected into the psyche as an object of identification, but this process of repression is never completed but on-going. (See chapter four for an extended discussion of this theory of subject formation.) In *The Assassination of Jesse James*, Bob's homosocial desire *for* Jesse is sublimated not only into identification but also into the desire to displace and become Jesse James. Bob Mondello quite aptly characterizes Jesse and Bob's relationship as "Oedipal."<sup>73</sup> In murdering Jesse and refusing to mourn the loss, desire is repressed, transformed through melancholia into identification. Bob's fantasmatic self becomes fused with the myth of Jesse James, in effect taking the mantle from Jesse as the great and feared outlaw—or at least this is what Bob hopes will happen.

Bob's ambiguous fascination, attraction, and identification with Jesse are clear throughout the film. Bob keeps a box of James brothers' collectables under his bed and confesses to having read everything printed about the famous outlaws. Yet, Bob feels not merely a childlike admiration for the Jesse, he also imagines himself and Jesse to be connected. For example, Bob is goaded by his brother into telling Jesse about his childhood obsession with itemizing his similarities to the famous outlaw. Bob reluctantly explains,

Well, if you'll pardon my saying so, I guess it is interesting the many ways you and I overlap and whatnot. I mean, you begin with our daddies. Your daddy was a pastor at the New Hope Baptist Church, and my daddy was a pastor at the church in Excelsior Springs. You're the youngest of three James boys, and I'm the youngest of five Ford boys. Between Charley and me, there's another brother, Wilbur, with six letters in his name. And between Frank and you, is another brother Robert, also with six letters. And my Christian name is Robert, of course. You have blue eyes. I have blue eyes. You're five feet eight inches tall. I'm five feet eight inches tall. Me, I must have had a list as long as your nightshirt when I was 12, but I seem to have lost some curiosities over the years.

The febleness of some of Bob's parallels reflects the childlike and desperate attempt at identification with Jesse. Bob's attempt at identification, which desperately grasp at even the most

tenuous commonalities between the two men, speaks to the precarious nature of identification. The imaginary unity and coherence of the self, particularly the masculine self, is belied by the hodgepodge means by which the self is constituted, through various mechanisms of repression, identification, and disavowal. Bob's list of similarities with Jesse seems feeble only because it is so guilelessly forthright. Bob's list seems to function like a rebus puzzle, applying incoherent mechanisms of association, such as the number of letters in someone's name, to arrive at a coherent picture of similarity between himself and Jesse. But this incoherent and associative method of ego formation is precisely how all humans develop their sense of personal identity, though for most it is repressed and kept from public view. Bob's singular fixation on Jesse only highlights the feebleness of his attempt at identification, though this feebleness is common to all of us.

A more pointed scene about the "Oedipal" conflict comes earlier in the film, when Bob has been first allowed to stay with Jesse and his family. Jesse is taking a bath and Bob approaches him from the doorway. Bob playfully suggests that he got the drop on the unsuspecting Jesse, but Jesse reveals that he has a pistol hidden under towel. (The scene mirrors a similar scene from *I Shot Jesse James*.) Jesse says, "I can't figure it out. Do you wanna be like me, or do you wanna be me?" Some critics have complained about the film's ambiguity on this very question.<sup>74</sup> But it seems to me that the film is about the enigmatic ambivalence of Bob's desire. That the film does not explain away that ambivalence is part of its virtue.

We see faint signs of erotic desire in Bob, such as the above scene in which Bob gazes at Jesse while he bathes. In another scene, Bob reads to Jesse a newspaper description of the outlaw: "Jesse James, the youngest, has a face as smooth and innocent as a schoolgirl. The blue eyes, very clear and penetrating, are never at rest. His form is tall and graceful and capable of great endurance and great effort. Jesse is lighthearted, reckless, and devil-may-care. There's always a smile on his lips—" (Jesse, perhaps embarrassed and a bit irritated stops Bob there.) The description is a real

historical document, originally written by John Newman Edwards, one of James's early propagandists. The language of the document feminizes Jesse, describing his visage as "smooth and innocent as a schoolgirl," and meditating on his eyes, lips, and form in a manner that is surely erotic, however latently so. Bob says that he brought the text along to help him tell Jesse apart from his brother, but that Bob reads from this selection, out of all the Jesse James memorabilia he confesses to owning, is notable. He does not, for example, read a vivid tale of daring banditry or noble heroism but instead reads what amounts to a love letter in praise of Jesse's flesh.

The relationship between homoerotic desire and homosocial identification is most clearly seen in a scene that takes place the day before Bob murders Jesse. Jesse and his family, along with Charley, go to church, and as the narrator explains:

Bob remained at the cottage and slyly migrated from room to room. He walked into the master bedroom and inventoried the clothes on the hangers and hooks. He sipped from the water glass on the vanity. He smelled the talcum and lilacs on Jesse's pillowcase. His fingers skittered over his ribs to construe the scars where Jesse was twice shot. He manufactured a middle finger that was missing the top two knuckles. He imagined himself at thirty-four. He imagined himself in a coffin. He considered possibilities and everything wonderful that could come true.

The narrator's voice is accompanied by the melancholic grinding of cello. We see Bob move through Jesse's house as the narrator describes. In the last few shots, Bob lies on Jesse's bed and wears one of Jesse's shirts, too big for Bob. Bob reaches through the placket of his buttoned shirt to touch his ribs. Bob imagines himself as Jesse and caresses himself. Bob intimately and languidly experiences Jesse's physicality. The scene is sensuous. Here we see a way in which autoeroticism can function as a proxy for homoeroticism, a way of disavowing same-sex desire while still enjoying it. He imagines himself *as Jesse* in Jesse's bed. Bob explores and perhaps takes pleasure in his own body as though it were Jesse's body. The scene circumvents homophobic prohibitions by collapsing identification and desire, by channeling homoerotic desire through autoerotic desire. Bob goes so far as to imagine himself in the grave. The next day he will murder Jesse. Bob mourns Jesse even before his death,

drinking in the latent physical presence of Jesse—his smell, his leftover glass of water. In the course of this mourning, he incorporates the soon-to-be lost love object. Killing Jesse, on one level, suppresses the desire for Jesse and converts it into identification—following Judith Butler’s theory of melancholic incorporation. These fragmentary points of identifications with Jesse are but vain attempts to constitute a fantasmatic masculine whole. They foreshadow Bob’s ultimate failure to substitute himself for Jesse James. In the end, the only thing he will share with Jesse is a brutal death at the hands of an assassin.

If for the sake of argument we separate out erotic desire from identification, then there can be little controversy in the claim that identification is a key component of the classic western, which offered men and boys the opportunity to project themselves into the boots of the westerner. Other genres, particularly action adventure genres, offer a similar pleasure of identification with the protagonists, but the western has long cultivated a juvenile identification with older male “role models.” Davey Crocket is perhaps the biggest example of a western hero with whom boys (and girls) identified. Like Robert Ford who sought to emulate Jesse James, boys in the mid-1950s donned coonskin caps and reenacted the feats of the “King of the Wild Frontier.”<sup>75</sup> Often the figure of the young man who emulates the older western hero appears in the film itself. Westerns may feature a younger male alongside an older veteran westerner. John Wayne frequently played opposite younger actors, often supplicants whom he reluctantly accepted as sidekicks, such as Montgomery Clift in *Red River* (1948), Jeffrey Hunter in *The Searchers* (1956), Ricky Nelson in *Rio Bravo* (1959), and the group of boys in *The Cowboys* (1972). In each of these films, Wayne is a sort of paternal figure from whom the younger men must learn the hard lessons of the West. However, in some examples the relationship is more Oedipal. As in the case of *Red River*, where Clift’s character and Wayne’s nearly kill one another as they struggle for control of their cattle herd.

Homoeroticism plays a minor role in the hero worship of these films, but more overt homoeroticism can also be found in other western films. The elegiac western *Shane* (1960) provides an example of how complexly desire and identification can operate in a single film. Shane (Alan Ladd), a wandering gunman, is taken in by the homesteading farmer Joe Starrett (Van Heflin), his wife Marian (Jean Arthur), and their son Joey (Brandon De Wilde). When the family and the homesteaders come under attack by the cattle baron Rufus Ryker, Shane comes to their aid. *Shane* is a rather pat western story with a melodramatic feel and a big budget production. Part of the epic scale of the film is the way that each of the Starrett family are given a relationship to Shane. Joe finds an ally and comrade in Shane, while Marian is clearly attracted to him. Joey looks up to Shane for his prowess with a gun, which sets him apart from Joe, a largely peaceful farmer. These multiple relations are mirrored in the different gazes the characters direct at Shane, whose admirable physicality is the central spectacle of the film. For example, Joey and Marian watch admiring, excitedly, or fearfully as Joe and Shane labor to remove a stump from Joe's land or when they fight Ryker's men together. From a commercial point of view, the film attempts to appeal to the widest possible audience by including clear points of identification for grown men, young boys, and women. Yet, Steve Neale observes, these different affective responses—admiration and emulation, erotic desire, brotherly affection, and so forth—do not neatly attach to members of the audience based on their gender and sexuality, but they rather circulate in a complex swirl of intercut images.

We may go all the way back to the beginning of the genre and observe the erotic homosocial gaze in Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902), the archetypal western novel. The novel opens with its "tenderfoot" narrator watching from the window of a passenger train as a man tries to rope a horse. After many unsuccessful attempts, another cowboy tries his hand. The narrator writes that the cowboy "now climbed down with the undulations of a tiger, smooth and easy, as if his muscles flowed beneath his skin" (1).<sup>76</sup> The onlookers admire the second cowboy's effortless prowess with a

lasso. Later in the chapter the same cowboy, the eponymous Virginian, is seen talking to an older man, Uncle Hughey. Watching the two men talk, the narrator describes the Virginian in glowing terms:

Lounging there at ease against the wall was a slim young giant, more beautiful than pictures. His broad, soft hat was pushed back; a loose-knotted, dull-scarlet handkerchief sagged from his throat; and one casual thumb was hooked in the cartridge-belt that slanted across his hips. He had plainly come many miles from somewhere across the vast horizon, as the dust upon him showed. His boots were white with it. His overalls were gray with it. The weather-beaten bloom of his face shone through it duskily, as the ripe peaches look upon their trees in a dry season. But no dinginess of travel or shabbiness of attire could tarnish the splendor that radiated from his youth and strength. (2-3)

The pleasure and admiration of, not only the Virginian's western manliness, but also his beauty is repeated throughout the novel. The narrator operates almost as a Dr. Watson figure in the novel, a participant reduced to observer, a pure conduit through whom readers *of both genders* may see, hear, and be near the Virginian. The passage culminates with a brief comparison between Uncle Hughey and the Virginian. Hughey is a somewhat laughable older man, who is about to be married. The narrator writes, "The old man... was combed and curried to a finish, a bridegroom swept and garnished; but alas for age! Had I been the bride, I should have taken the giant, dust and all" (3). A few pages later, the narrator again sees the Virginian through the eyes of a woman, saying, "in his eye, in his face, in his step, in the whole man, there dominated a something potent to be felt, I should think, by man or woman" (6). The narrator, and implicitly the reader, assumes a gender ambiguous position: experiencing the dominant potency of the Virginian as both a "man or a woman"; a bride choosing between two men. Chris Packard writes of this passage, "The eagerly submissive narrator can easily imagine playing the woman's role in sex and marriage.... Later, when he learns about the Virginian's mind, he falls in love with him, and they become intimate comrades. As much as *The Virginian* is about a cowboy giving up his occupation to marry the schoolmarm, it is also about the increasingly intimate friendship between the narrator and the Virginian."<sup>77</sup> Over the course of the novel the narrator emulates the Virginian's western habits and becomes a passable

westerner himself. In effect, the eastern tenderfoot represses his homoerotic desire for the Virginian and sublimates it into identification, much as Butler tells us a young boy does with his father.

In *The Virginian*, homoerotic desire for the protagonist is suppressed and transformed into identification. The narrator, adhering to proscriptions against homosexual sex, does not mourn the loss of physical intimacy with the Virginian but melancholically introjects the westerner into his own fantasmatic self. *The Virginian* nevertheless displays in surprisingly unguarded ways the degree to which homoerotic desire is present in the American western from the very beginning. *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* effectively unmasks this latent desire and depicts what happens when the transformation of desire into identification fails. Robert Ford's tragedy is many fold, but he fails because he cannot internalize his beloved. Jesse James is a towering folk hero, more myth than reality. He cannot be assimilated through murderous betrayal, leaving Bob to walk the earth as a villain, a coward, and a Judas. If the western film is fundamentally a place wherein we may easily identify with the masculine hero, then *The Assassination of Jesse James* is doubly frustrating, because, first, it offers no clear "hero" and, second, it lays open the hero-worship complex of the western to scrutiny. Bob's failed assimilation of Jesse is analogous with a failure of the audience to find a similar identification with a hero. The western's function to provide a fantasy space in which to experience the omnipotent and unequivocal masculinity of the westerner is frustrated. In so doing, the film also exposes our own desperate desire for the genre to again and again provide us with just such a point of desire and identification. We want to see the westerner; we want to be the westerner. *The Assassination of Jesse James* upends the seamless mythology of masculinity in the western, exposing the homosocial desire that powers the genre and its mythology.

## Conclusion

In examining *City Slickers*, *Appaloosa*, and *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, I have demonstrated how the mythology of the western can be read through the lens of homosociality. *City Slickers* makes visible two aspects of homosociality pervasive in the western. First, the West operates as a sort of oasis, a homosocial utopia, which allows white men to recover their lost masculinity. This mythology was inherited from turn-of-the-century theories of the frontier, which envisioned the West as a place where eastern masculinity is reinvigorated. *City Slickers* negotiates the larger ideological anxiety about masculinity in a post-feminist America, as also seen in the contemporaneous Men's Movement. Second, Mitch's emulation of Curly also demonstrates how identification operates in western films as a strategy for constituting a fantasmatic masculine self. The loss of Curly is only briefly mourned. Mitch, an example of failed urban masculinity, transforms over the course of the film by introjecting aspects of Curly's western masculinity. These two elements, the homosocial utopia and identification with a senior westerner, are latent in the western genre but come more clearly into focus through *City Slickers's* self-conscious comedic engagement with the genre. *City Slickers* also demonstrates how the straight circuit operates to reconcile the potentially subversive elements of the western with hegemonic ideology. The film's conclusion, which returns the city slickers to their white-collar lives in New York, reinvests frontier masculinity into the social reproduction of the family and of capitalist labor. At the end of the film, when Mitch's wife tells him he should quit his job, he replies, "No, I'm not gonna quit my job. I'm just gonna do it better. I'm gonna do everything better." Mitch's homosocial quest narrative is fully reintegrated into his old life, changing nothing but his attitude toward the status quo. While the impulse to throw off heterosexual domesticity and white-collar employment may be at the heart of the western as fantasy, Mitch's return to his old life indicates that ultimately the western narrative can be reconciled with normative bourgeois domesticity.

*Appaloosa* and *The Assassination of Jesse James* similarly illuminate the underlying homosocial elements of the western, but their elegiac tone, like the long revisionist tradition that precedes them, turns the celebratory vision of masculinity and male companionship on its head. Where *City Slickers* blithely says goodbye to Curly and the West, *Appaloosa* deeply mourns the dissolution of partnership between Hitch and Cole, which the film imagines in a romantic, if austere platonic, manner. The film elevates the fantasy of western partnership between two lawmen to a homosocial utopia—a seamless, often wordless bond between two men, whose very lives depend upon their partnership. Yet, the film also perpetuates the fantasy of unbounded violence in the name of justice and leaves uninterrogated the racial nature of this fantasy. Likewise, the film's imagining of Allie is misogynistic and part of the larger trope of the faithless woman who comes between two loving men.

*The Assassination of Jesse James* falls more squarely into the category of an anti-western, self-consciously questioning archetypes of the genre. It effectively deconstructs the hero worship that is central to the classic western genre, and makes its titular main character into a distant and frightful object of ambiguous homosocial desire. The film allows for a dovetailing of Steve Neale's assertion that homoerotic desire is suppressed in the western through violence and Judith Butler's queer revision of the Oedipal complex, which imbricates identification and desire. We see Bob sublimating his ambiguously erotic desire for Jesse James into identification, and, at the same time, murder becomes the ultimate form of possession in which Bob attempts to introject Jesse's persona. Yet, Bob ultimately fails and by proxy his failure is our own. The mechanism for reconstituting the masculine through identification with the western hero collapses, leaving exposed its elemental homoeroticism.

The post-*Brokeback Mountain* era of western cinema has lacked open depiction of gay male sexuality, but *Appaloosa* and *The Assassination of Jesse James* are, intentionally or not, products of queer light that *Brokeback* has shone on the entire genre. In them, we see an overt interrogation of same-

sex male desire that has been present but latent in the genre. Much is left unexamined in these films, but both open up the genre to a new kind of analysis, adding to the queered re-reading of the genre that followed *Brokeback*. As such, we can place these films in the broader post-closet context of American culture, in which, among other things, male friendship is conspicuously open to queer-inflected readings.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Hot 100 Billboard.”

<sup>2</sup> The same year Corey Dargel released the album *Less Famous Than You*, which featured the song “Gay Cowboys” (quoted above). A few years later, Ron Zimmerman wrote a miniseries comic book *Rawhide Kid: Slap Leather* (2010), which turned the pre-existing gunman character, the Rawhide Kid, into an anachronistically flamboyant gay character. Marked by a puerile and rather homophobic sense of humor, *Slap Leather* picks the low hanging fruit of double entendres and gay stereotypes.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, “‘A Memory Sweet to Soldiers’ The Significance of Gender in the History of the ‘American West,’” 495.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.* and Johnson’s *Roaring Camp*.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson in her *Roaring Camp* and Packard in *Queer Cowboys*, for example, discuss the short fiction of Bret Harte. Harte’s story “Tennessee’s Partner” (1869) tells of the life-long friendship between a pair of gold prospectors living in a rough and tumble mining settlement. The men are so closely associated that the story’s title character is only known as “Tennessee’s partner.” The cohabitating domestic partnership between Tennessee and his partner ends with the latter’s death, but the two are reunited in death.

<sup>6</sup> See the 1995 documentary *The Celluloid Closet* and Sragow, “Gay Undercurrent Trickles Through Great ‘Red River.’”

<sup>7</sup> Lusted, *The Western*, 183.

<sup>8</sup> The inevitable demise of Jesse James or Billy the Kid in various retellings of their mythic deaths represents one of side of this binary choice, while the Ringo Kid (John Wayne) in *Stagecoach* (1939) represents the other alternative as an outlaw who rides away with his love interest, Dallas (Claire Trevor), to his ranch where he will live a “straight” life.

<sup>9</sup> *City Slickers*, was released a year after Kevin Costner’s *Dances with Wolves* and a year before Clint Eastwood’s *Unforgiven*. Costner and Eastwood’s films both won the Academy Award for Best Picture. Only one other western has ever won that award. *City Slickers* came onto the scene at an odd time for westerns. Hollywood had once produced hundreds of westerns a year, mostly B-movies but also “prestige” westerns, but by the 1970s the production of westerns had greatly declined. By the 1990s, the western was at best a novelty. Yet, in the span of three years, *Dances with Wolves* and

*Unforgiven* were financial and critical successes. *City Slickers* was also a financial and critical success. None of these westerns could be called conventional. *Dances with Wolves* was part of a long and problematic tradition of “pro-Indian” westerns, which arguably began with Delmer Daves’s *Broken Arrow* (1950). It meditated on the genocidal campaigns against Indians at the heart of westward expansion. *Unforgiven* similarly was the culmination of the revisionist and “dystopian” western tradition that systematically turned on its head the classic western’s conventional ideologies of justice and heroism. In it, the sadistic town sheriff Little Bill (Gene Hackman) gives lie to the mythology of the heroic frontier sheriff who “bringing law and order.” The comedic *City Slickers* makes for an odd bedfellow with these more prestigious and ostentatiously transgressive westerns.

<sup>10</sup> Mitch alludes to the 1972 film *Deliverance* and its infamous depiction of same-sex male rape.

<sup>11</sup> There is a woman present for part of the cattle drive, but she, along with two black men and a pair of overweight ice cream barons, leaves the drive after Curly’s death.

<sup>12</sup> Turner, “The Frontier in American History.”

<sup>13</sup> Richard Slotkin discusses at length how the mythic West was a rhetorical and symbolic touchstone for American imperialism in the twentieth century. The western—whether in print, on the radio, or on screen—existed through each stage of American international adventurism, beginning with the Spanish American War and continuing through to the Vietnam War. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 51–62.

<sup>14</sup> As Gail Bederman argues, this mythological deployment of the West, not only justified America’s global imperialism, but also offered a project through which men could revitalize their masculinity. Imperialism was “a prophylactic means of avoiding effeminacy and racial decadence.” Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 187; see also Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 51–62.

<sup>15</sup> See Roosevelt’s *The Strenuous Life*. In his famous title essay, he asserts a clear relationship between successful manliness and successful national power: “A life of slothful ease, a life of that peace which springs merely from lack either of desire or of power to strive after great things, is as little worthy of a nation as of an individual” (1). Roosevelt warns repeatedly of “over-civilized men” (4) and “cowards and weaklings” who would shrink from Roosevelt’s militaristic call (117-8). In his essay “The American Boy,” Roosevelt chides “effeminacy,” writing, “Forty or fifty years ago the writer on American morals was sure to deplore the effeminacy and luxury of young Americans who were born of rich parents. The boy who was well off then, especially in the big Eastern cities, lived too luxuriously, took to billiards as his chief innocent recreation, and felt small shame in his inability to take part in rough pastimes and field-sports.” He argues for athleticism and “the rough sports which call for pluck, endurance, and physical address” (73).

<sup>16</sup> See Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 173–187. See also my introduction regarding the fear of over-civilization and the shifting definitions of manliness versus masculinity in the late nineteenth century.

<sup>17</sup> Wister, author of the prototypical western novel *The Virginian* (1902), which he dedicated to Roosevelt, presented a similarly racist history of the West. In his essay “The Evolution of the

Cow-Poke,” Wister argues the Anglo-Americans conquest of North America was the inevitable consequence of their chivalric and Viking heritage. The will to conquest is in the very blood of Anglo-Americans, we are told, waiting to be revived by the right conditions. Wister rejects the notion that the frontier created the American character; rather it merely revived something long made dormant by stultifying post-industrial “civilization.” Wister writes, “Destiny tried her latest experiment upon the Saxon, and plucking him from the library, the haystack, and the gutter, set him upon his horse; then it was that, face to face with the eternal simplicity of death, his modern guise fell away and showed once again the medieval man. It was no new type, no product of the frontier, but just the original kernel of the nut with the shell broken.” Wister and Remington, “The Evolution of the Cow-Puncher,” 610.

<sup>18</sup> *The Magnificent Seven* provides one illuminating example. In the film, desperate Mexican villagers hire seven gunfighters for protection against a band of outlaws. The gunfighters, as civilization encroaches upon the American West, can no longer ply their trade and merely drift from place to place. In defending the defenseless villagers and restoring order, they become heroic, but in successfully besting the bandits they again make themselves obsolete. In the climatic final battle most of the seven gunmen die; only three remain. Chico, the youngest, has fallen in love with a young woman in the village and chooses to stay. The other two survivors Vin and Chris, on the other hand, mount their horses and ride off together. Chris remarks, “Only the farmers won. We lost. We’ll always lose.” Chico disavows the life of a gunman; he will marry and become part of the peaceful agricultural village. Vin and Chris, a homosocial couple, ride off into a bleak future.

<sup>19</sup> Kitses, “Authorship and Genre,” 57.

<sup>20</sup> This narrative structure resembles the “monomyth” structure of leaving home only to return, which is common in American cinema. See Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*. However, the western encodes this broad narrative structure with specific signifying elements.

<sup>21</sup> The city slickers’ discussion of their fathers relates to Bly’s notion that contemporary men were alienated from their fathers. The three men share their best and worst days. Phil’s best memory involves his father winking at him in recognition that he had grown into a man. Phil tempers this memory by noting that his father was “not the warmest of men,” and the meagerness of the wink as a gesture of approval is evidence that Phil and father were not close. Ed remembers standing up to his two-timing father on the day that his father left him and his mother. Mitch, on the other hand, fondly remembers going with his father to Yankee Stadium. While his memory is unmitigatedly positive, the fact that it is centered on sports supports the commonly held view that men (including fathers and sons) sublimate their emotions into sports, rather than talking openly about their feelings. The fact that each man’s best day has something to do with their fathers (and two have to do with “being a man” or becoming a man) also simply speaks to the Oedipal theme in the film, which imagines them men demonstrating their masculinity after the paternal figure, Curly, has died.

<sup>22</sup> Bly, *Iron John*, 146.

<sup>23</sup> See Gabriel, “Call of the Wildmen,” and Blake, “Mad Men.”

<sup>24</sup> As David Savran has persuasively argued, the Men’s Movement was part of a broader backlash against civil rights, gay rights, feminism, immigration, and other left-wing victories of earlier decades. This reactionary spirit was fueled in part by the hollowing out of America’s industrial

workforce, which left many blue-collar men with fewer economic options. The Men's Movement imagines men to be the victims of social forces outside their control, while ignoring the relative power that white men have compared to other social groups. They create a fantasy of male victimhood and offer homosocial rituals as remedies. Savran, *Taking It like a Man*, 206.

<sup>25</sup> Kitses, for example, writes, "Rather than an empty vessel breathed into by the film-maker, the genre is a vital structure through which flow a myriad of themes and concepts. As such the form can provide a director with a range of possible connections and the space in which to experiment, to shape and refine the kind of effects and meanings he is working towards." Kitses, "Authorship and Genre," 68.

<sup>26</sup> Peterson, "The Competing Tunes of *Johnny Guitar*: Liberalism, Sexuality, and Masquerade," 323. See also Lusted, *The Western*, 20-22.

<sup>27</sup> Packard, *Queer Cowboys*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> John Ford's *The Man who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) provides perhaps the best example of the twin paths of reconciliation and doom. In the film, John Wayne is the noble but self-centered Tom Doniphon, and James Stewart is the bookish lawyer Ransom Stoddard. Stoddard arrives to the frontier town with the hopes of practicing law, only to be viciously assaulted by a band of highwaymen led by the infamous Liberty Valance. The townspeople are terrorized by Valance, the sheriff is ineffectual, and only Doniphon is able to stand up to him. Whereas Stoddard is committed to bring law and education (civilization) to the frontier town, Doniphon is only interested in protecting himself and those he cares for. Doniphon and Stoddard are triangulated by both Valance and their mutual love interest Hallie (Vera Miles). Laura Mulvey, in her essay "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,'" identifies Doniphon as an example of the "narcissistic omnipotence," a character whose basic egoism parallels that of the villainous Liberty Valance, though it is tempered by "frontier ethics." Only Doniphon is powerful enough to oppose Valance and does so occasionally when it suits him. By contrast, Stoddard is impotent before Valance and seeks to use legal means to oppose him. Stoddard improves the community as a whole; he starts a school, puts up his shingle as a lawyer and resists Doniphon's insistence that frontier justice is the only way to deal with Valance. The film ends with Stoddard marrying Hallie and going on to become the state's senator, while Doniphon dies without ever marrying, an anachronism of the "Old West" whose time had long since past. The acceptance or refusal of marriage, as Mulvey argues in "Afterthoughts," corresponds to the hero's choice to accept social integration or retain extra-social liberty that corresponds with remaining outside civilization. She writes, "The tension between two points of attraction, the symbolic (social integration and marriage) and nostalgic narcissism, generates a common splitting of the Western hero into two.... Here two functions emerge, one celebrating integration into society through marriage, the other celebrating resistance to social demands and responsibility, above all those of marriage and family, the sphere represented by woman" (14). In "Masculinity as Spectacle," As Stephen Neale writes (extending Mulvey's analysis), Doniphon "incarnates the narcissistic function of the anachronistic social outsider" and Stoddard "the civilizing function of marriage, social integration and social responsibility" (283). The two men, in this way, can be mapped onto Kitses's antinomies with Stoddard representing "civilization" and Doniphon representing the "wilderness."

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 7–8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>33</sup> Savran, *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers*, 33–5.

<sup>34</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>39</sup> Masterson, *Famous Gunfighters of the Western Frontier*, 40. Masterson probably did not mean to connote anything queer with the reference to Damon and Pythias, a classical mythological pair who were sometimes used as a code for homosexuality at the turn of the twentieth century, but at the very least the reference attributes to Earp and Holliday bond of mythic proportions. For more on the connotations of Damon and Pythias in nineteenth century America see Martin, “Knights-Errant and Gothic Seducers,” 176–7; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 82–4.

<sup>40</sup> Hall’s novel is a sweeping work of revisionism full of moral ambiguity. In it, the bourgeois townspeople who hire Blaisedell are revealed to be feckless hypocrites. They have no compunction with Blaisedell killing in their name but ficklely change their opinion when his methods offend them.

<sup>41</sup> Lusted, *The Western*, 183. The fact that Morgan was a sociopathic killer leaves us to wonder exactly what was between Blaisedell and him. Indeed, this mystery perhaps gives more credence to the homosexual reading than any other, as sexual attraction might resolve the mystery. Still, we need not sexualize the relationship in order to see the scandal at the heart of the film.

<sup>42</sup> A similar psychological theme is played out in John Sturges’s *The Law and Jake Wade* (1958). In this film, Jake Wade (Robert Taylor), a former outlaw turned lawman, is confronted with the ghosts of his past. Jake’s old partner, Clint Hollister (Richard Widmark), kidnaps Jake’s fiancée Peggy (Patricia Owens). Clint then forces Jake to lead him and his gang to a stash of loot, the only remnant of Jake and Clint’s last score. Clint lets it be known that he will kill Jake no matter what but will only let Peggy live if Jake leads him to the loot. Like Tom Morgan in *Warlock*, Clint cannot seem to live without his old partner. His insistence on killing Jake on face appears to be simple retribution for betrayal. However, Clint treats Jake with a curious combination of intimacy and hate. One of Clint’s gang members, Otero, offers an explanation for Clint’s fixation on Jake, saying, “The trouble is, Jake, Clint always like you better than anyone he ever met.” Jake replies simply, “Yeah, I know.” Jake sneers as he says this, which suggests that he is disgusted by Clint’s attachment to him, perhaps detecting something queer in it. In any case, Clint’s attachment to Jake appears “unnatural,” and his intention to kill Jake mirrors the murder ballad with its aim to destroy the love object that will not reciprocate. Thus, just as murderous heterosexual love is common within the American folk music canon, a homosocial, or possibly homosexual, version is discernable within the western film tradition.

---

<sup>43</sup> Koehler, "Review."

<sup>44</sup> Scott, "Ed Harris Directs and Stars in an Old-Fashioned Western."

<sup>45</sup> Cole comments to Hitch that Jack Bell, the former town Marshal who Bragg murdered, had died because he was over confident and hadn't taken the time to think about Bragg's character. Hitch replies, "Guess that'd be one reason you're here and Jack Bell isn't." Cole says, "Well, that'd be one reason. You'd be another."

<sup>46</sup> Billington, "Toronto Interview: Appaloosa Writer, Director, and Star Ed Harris."

<sup>47</sup> Faust, "Interview with Actor-Director Ed Harris."

<sup>48</sup> Phillips, "'Appaloosa.'"

<sup>49</sup> Scott, "Ed Harris Directs and Stars in an Old-Fashioned Western."

<sup>50</sup> Turan, "Brothers in Arms, Foes in Matters of the Heart."

<sup>51</sup> Faust, "Interview with Actor-Director Ed Harris."

<sup>52</sup> Billington, "Toronto Interview: Appaloosa Writer, Director, and Star Ed Harris."

<sup>53</sup> The men have this conversation after Bragg has secured his hold over the town. Hitch slowly works up to the topic, and the conversation proceeds as follows:

Hitch: We got hired. We can get fired.

Cole: Me and Alley got a house here. I'm not leaving.

Hitch: What are you going to stay as?

Cole: Ain't come to that yet.

Hitch: Might just make some sense to move on. (*Vigil shakes his head.*) Talked this over with Allie? (*Cole nods.*) She don't wanna leave either? (*Cole shakes his head.*)

Hitch: I got some things to say, Cole. (pause) I stay here, I won't be able to make a living.

Cole: I know.

Hitch: I got something else to say.

Cole: She might leave me.

Hitch: Yeah. You saw how it was with Ring Shelton.

Cole: I ain't leaving her.

Both men smile at each other and then are quiet for a moment. Hitch shakes his head a little, then says “All right.... All right.” This is something of a breakup scene, but the men never once refer explicitly to their partnership.

<sup>54</sup> The film strongly suggests that Allie cannot stay faithful to Cole. She is said to strategically go with the most powerful man, and Cole will not forever remain the most powerful man in Appaloosa, even after Bragg’s death.

<sup>55</sup> Although Cole’s commitment to Allie leads to the dissolution of his partnership with Hitch, the trust between the two men is unaffected by the heterosexual relationship. Allie accuses Hitch of being the aggressor in their encounter. “He tried to put his hands on me when I showed him our house,” she tells Cole. Hitch replies, “No, Virgil. I did not.” Cole accepts Hitch’s account without question, saying, “No, Allie. Hitch didn't do that.” Allie, incensed, asks, “You believe him over me?” Cole replies, “That's correct.”

<sup>56</sup> The film, however, does offer some explanation of Allie’s behavior that mitigates somewhat my misogyny reading. Hitch tells Virgil: “I think she wants to be with the boss stallion.” Virgil says, “There's only one stallion in a herd.” “At a time,” Hitch retorts. The explanation is filled out more by Hitch's lover, the prostitute Katie, gives. “Out here, love's pretty hard for a woman. Mostly it's the men worry about love.... She just knows he's the top hand, and she'll stay with him till he ain't.”

<sup>57</sup> In Wister’s novel, the Virginian’s benefactor Judge Henry offers a defense of the practice of lynching in the West. He offers a half-hearted condemnation of lynching in the South as “semi-barbarous,” while asserting that lynching in Wyoming is a necessarily extra-judicial tactic for preserving the law. Because the existing legal system fails to properly prosecute and convict rustlers, taking the law into one’s own hands is necessary and guaranteed by the social contract. The Judge explains, “Call this primitive, if you will. But so far from being a *defiance* of the law, [lynching] is an *assertion* of it—the fundamental assertion of self governing men, upon whom our whole social fabric is based.” Wister, *The Virginian*, 254–5.

<sup>58</sup> The white versus Indian violence of the western is but the most flagrant manifestation of how the western operates to validate histories of violence, particularly racially coded violence, but the western is arguably cut from the same cloth as films like *Dirty Harry* (1971) and *Death Wish* (1974). However, it isn’t a coincidence that their stars Clint Eastwood and Charles Bronson, respectively, had been western stars. These films imagine the landscape of urban American in essentially the same light as the frontier West, where law and order cease to function and just violence had to be exercised in an extra judicial manner. *Dirty Harry* and *Death Wish* are premised on the failure of post-war American liberalism, including the Warren-era Supreme Court and the Great Society.

<sup>59</sup> In this way, westerns appear to underwrite the pervasive fantasy of fascistic violence common to adult action adventure media. Fox’s television series *24* (2001-10), for example, was infamous for depicting torture as a necessary tool to fight terrorism. More recently, in the Netflix/Marvel’s series *Daredevil* (2015-present), Daredevil, AKA Matt Murdock, is a superhero vigilante defending New York’s Hell’s Kitchen from a vast criminal conspiracy. Police collusion with organized crime has rendered the justice system unable to respond to the threat. Murdock

recognizes the moral problems with his vigilantism but invariably continues his fight against the criminal underworld, employing brutal violence.

<sup>60</sup> Salisbury, “Andrew Dominik: Interview.”

<sup>61</sup> “The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford.”

<sup>62</sup> Salisbury, “Andrew Dominik: Interview.”

<sup>63</sup> Triplett, *Jesse James*, 279.

<sup>64</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 295.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 293–303.

<sup>66</sup> When Ford visits Cynthy, she embraces him amorously and confesses an unwavering love, but refuses to marry a man “on the run.” She says, “Oh, Bob, when you’re free, I’ll marry you.” As with other westerns, the dichotomy between “settling down” and its concomitant heterosexual domesticity is mutually exclusive with being “on the run” with a homosocial partner. However, the contradiction between heterosexual domesticity and homosocial banditry is heightened in *I Shot Jesse James*. In order to be with Cynthy, Ford must not only abandon his life of crime with Jesse but murder him. Cynthy offers to arrange a meeting with the county prosecuting attorney, in which Bob can negotiate surrender, but the prosecutor only offers a reduced sentence of twenty years. Subsequently, then finds out that the governor has offered amnesty and a \$10,000 reward to any member of the gang who turns in Jesse, dead or alive. Ford knows that Jesse will never be taken alive. Thus, Ford must kill Jesse in order to be with Cynthy. Jesse’s murder marks the end of the film’s first act. The remainder of the film chronicles its tragic consequences. Ford is a pariah. Gunmen take potshots as him on the street. Worst of all Cynthy cannot forgive him for killing Jesse. Over the course of the film, Cynthy falls in love with a gentleman prospector, Kelly.

<sup>67</sup> Lusted, *The Western*, 183–4. To be sure, moments in the film suggest more than mere friendship between James and Ford. After the opening robbery scene, James mends Ford’s gunshot wound. He reaches inside Ford’s shirt and pressed a handkerchief to Ford’s chest. The two men are pressed tightly together in an intimate medium shot that shows only the two of them. Likewise, in a later scene, while Jesse takes a bath, he entreats Ford to wash his back. Ford stares at James’s naked back, gun drawn, contemplating shooting his friend. James says, “Well, Bob, go ahead. What are you waiting for? There’s my back.” Fuller has fun directing this scene, making James’s invitation for a back washing an invitation to be shot in the back. The play between carrying physical intimacy and *penetrating* violence also suggest something erotic. Bob is ultimately killed in a faceoff with Kelly. As he dies in Cynthy’s arms, he confesses, “I’m sorry for what I done to Jess. I loved him.” Fuller was a particularly subversive studio director, as his later films demonstrate, for example *Shock Corridor* (1963). His early films are striking for their subtle play with the limits of studio codes. In *Pickup on South Street* (1953), a pickpocketing is turned into an erotic encounter with a woman’s purse standing in for her vagina. Likewise, in *I Shot Jesse James*, Fuller seems to insert a playful homoerotic scene between Ford and Kelley, his romantic rival.

<sup>68</sup> Mulvey, Laura, “Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema.”

---

<sup>69</sup> Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle," 278.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 285

<sup>71</sup> Paul Willemen argues that the films of Anthony Mann offer a complex and even contradictory pleasure in looking at the male figure. The elaborate apparatus of Mann's films, Willemen writes, "pivoted on the look at the male figure: the male 'in context,' as it were. The viewer's experience is predicated on the pleasure of seeing the male 'exist' (that is, walk, move, ride, fight) in or through cityscapes, landscapes or, more abstractly, history." Though the gaze in these films is marked by a "fundamentally homosexual voyeurism," it is as with Neale's analysis of Leone, "almost always repressed." Willemen, "Anthony Mann: Looking at the Male," 211; see also Lusted, *The Western*, 30-1, 150.

<sup>72</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 78-86; see also Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification."

<sup>73</sup> Mondello, "In the Wild West, Death Becomes an Outlaw Icon."

<sup>74</sup> Stevens, "You Can Give a Movie a Long Title."

<sup>75</sup> The Davy Crocket crazy of the mid-1950s is perhaps the most striking evidence of how Cold War American children, especially boys, latched onto the image of a western hero as something to be imitated. Precipitating event leading to this craze was ABC airing a trilogy of Davy Crocket made-for-TV movies (1954-5), starring Fess Parker in the title role. The films were a massive success for ABC and Disney, who produced them, but more impressive was how youngsters bought \$300 million worth of Crocket merchandise after the films aired. The most popular merchandise was the signature coonskin cap. See Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television*, 183; King, "The Recycled Hero: Walt Disney's Davy Crockett." In wearing coonskin caps American young boys were imitating and identification with Crocket. Theodore Roosevelt would have approved of suburban boys emulating the folksy, rugged, and honest Crocket, whose western virtues Americans continuously worried such "feminized" boys lacked.

<sup>76</sup> Wister, *The Virginian*.

<sup>77</sup> Packard, *Queer Cowboys*, 44.

**Chapter Three**  
**Think Like a Man:**  
**Bachelor Parties, Intoxication, and Ritual Homosociality**

**Introduction**

I have demonstrated in this dissertation that, with regard to homosociality and masculinity, the relationships between subversion and normativity is often less clearly binary than we might imagine. The “straight circuit” framework is intended to foreground how “deviation” from the norms of bourgeois heterosexual domesticity may at once subvert and shore up normalcy. For example, the westerner’s flight from domesticity and “civilization” may appear to threaten the social order of the Anglo-American middle class; it may even threaten to breach the proscription against homoerotic desire. However, once the western hero defeats his adversary and marries the eastern woman he is reconciled to the normative social order. The westerner’s deviation from bourgeois norms serves to vindicate hetero-masculinity within middle class domesticity. Mitch in *City Slickers* is able to reassume his place as a bourgeois husband because he has proved his mettle in the crucible of the West. In this chapter, I will consider the bachelor party as a similar homosocial fantasy. The bachelor party is imagined as transgressive, but, like the western, it shores up hegemonic norms of masculinity, patriarchy, and domesticity.

The bachelor party, as evoked in American popular culture, is a paradoxical homosocial ritual. On the one hand, it is subordinate to the wedding, the quintessential heteronormative ritual. On the other hand, the bachelor party ritually transgresses the norms of bourgeois propriety. Lois Brady, writing for *The New York Times*, encapsulated this notion: “For men, bachelor parties have always been about escape—from the women in their lives, sobriety, political correctness, even consciousness. Typically a night of debauchery, the traditional bachelor party offered one last visit to the underworld before entrance into the married world.”<sup>1</sup> The bachelor party is a homosocial escape from domesticity and normative civility, but this escape is only temporary and must be reconciled

with faithful matrimony and bourgeois propriety. In this sense, the bachelor party is not oppositional to marriage; rather, the two are cyclically connected. Thus, the bachelor party and wedding rituals form a sort of straight circuit.

Yet, to whatever extent the bachelor party and the wedding are ceremonially bound together, they are also in tension. The representation of this tension contains veiled ideological negotiations about the nature of male homosocial power in relation to women's standing as political agents, sexual subjects, and romantic partners. In 1998 Jane Gross, writing in *The New York Times*, asserted that men increasingly organized their bachelor party in order to avoid arousing anger or distrust from their romantic partners. We might, for brevities sake, call this the post-feminist bachelor party. Gross notes the case of Dan Furlong and his group of friends who opted to play paintball for his bachelor party. Gross writes, "They are part of a small but growing legion of men who are shunning the traditional bachelor party, a bacchanal with strippers, in favor of more politically correct, if no less masculine, events." Gross frames the trend as a conciliatory move to respect (or perhaps placate) "modern, sophisticated women" who will not put up with "liquor and lap dancing."

Post-feminist or not, Gross is quick to note how the liquor and lap dancing have been replaced by paintball and similarly "macho" activities. She quotes various academics who argue that activities like paintball satisfy the same basic need for homosocial camaraderie that strippers do:

Activities like paintball or other team sports are "aggressive coalitionary behavior," said Richard Wrangham, a Harvard University anthropologist, "an evolutionary necessity for the male of the species," who must learn to hunt and wage war. Such behavior, which involves "aiming and chasing," is inherently pleasurable to men, according to Steven Pinker, a psychologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. And its "sheer physicality is one of the last refuges of maleness," said Pepper Schwartz, a sociologist at the University of Washington. "Doing this kind of guy thing," she said, "is a way of saying 'I love this woman, but I'm still one of us.'"<sup>2</sup>

Written in the late 1990s, the article brings together various strands. It emphasizes genetic-biological determinism to account for men's choices. These primitive impulses to tribal warfare are positioned as consolation prizes in the face of a rising class of newly powerful, sophisticated, and modern

women. Buried within this story, and particularly the academic discourses invoked therein, is a sense that men are being reshaped by women in ways that run counter to their primitive, and perhaps essential, instincts. Around the same time the article was written, the Men's Movement and Men's Rights Movement invoked similar biological, evolutionary, or mythopoetic needs for "male bonding." "Male bonding" was a term that came to vogue in the 1970s after the publication of anthropologist Lionel Tiger's *Men in Groups*. Influenced by Tiger, Men's Movement writers argued that men had a primitive, hardwired need to ritually socialize in all-male groups. Tiger even predicts that feminism's challenge to male-dominated spaces (the white-collar office, for example) might have deleterious and even violent consequences.<sup>3</sup> Tiger's pseudo-scientific assertions lent credence to the gut-level perception of many men that women were causing damage by eroding the homosocial preserves long maintained by tradition. In the 1990s, we saw an emerging discourse that imagined men as being "oppressed" by women and in need of regular doses of male bonding to reconnect with primitive masculinity. As I will argue, this basic discourse is discernable in the bachelor party narrative. The bachelor party is an antidote to the over-civilization of men, who need to express their uncivilized homosocial behavior in ritualistic form. As I will further argue, however, this discourse demonstrably serves as a camouflage for misogyny.

The main thesis of this dissertation is an ambivalently optimistic one: I believe popular culture is beginning to shift in its representations of gender and sexuality around male friendship in a way that is ultimately positive, reflecting the gradually emergent anti-homophobic and longer-standing post-feminist culture of the twenty-first century. However, this chapter has a much more pessimistic outlook. Most of the texts considered in this chapter do not represent, in my assessment, the larger progressive direction of American popular culture. In many of these texts progressive threads appear: the faintly anti-classism of the 1984 *Bachelor Party* or the very real, if rather faint, anti-homophobic character of the 2011 *The Bachelor Party*. Yet ultimately, most of these films have the

same Achilles heel: they imagine a fantasy space defined by homosociality, which by its very nature leads to misogyny and often homophobia.

It is worth noting that many bachelor parties are not in the narrowest sense of the word homosocial, given that so many bachelor parties may involve prostitutes and erotic dancers. The strip club is one of the most common destinations for a bachelor party. Thus, the bachelor party is a homosocial ritual that is homosocial only to the extent that it excludes a certain class of women, “respectable women”—wives and girlfriends. “Loose” or promiscuous women (who, viewed through a different lens, might also be considered sexually empowered) can be admitted into the bachelor party in so far as she comports with the fantasy desires of the men. This is the larger point: the bachelor party is a fantasy of unrestricted freedom and power, and “respectable women” are inconsistent with that freedom. The mythology of the bachelor party tells us that marriage represents the surrender of bachelorhood’s power and freedom. As the main character in the 1953 *The Bachelor Party* observes, the “philosophy” of the bachelor party is that it is “the poor groom’s last night before he goes into the electric chair.”<sup>4</sup> The myth that marriage is a loss of male power fuels the fantasy of the bachelor party as an experience of unlimited freedom and power. Power over women, particularly over sex workers, is basic to this fantasy. “Easy women” satisfy the fantasy of objectified and pliant female bodies, which are the inverse of the bride, who exercises the power to metaphorically castrate the groom and shackle him to domesticity. Paradoxically, the marriage and the bride are idealized goals that represent the fulfillment of masculine maturity; yet, they also represent a loss of freedom and unfettered masculinity. The bachelor party serves to vindicate the male participants basic freedom and virility and their capacity to transgress normalcy.

### **Domesticated Drinking and Its Discontents: a Brief History**

This chapter focuses on late twentieth and twenty-first century representations of bachelor parties, and I will argue that the bachelor party is a symbolic fantasy that contains contradictory

notions of masculinity, homosociality, and intoxication. First, however, I want to examine the way that these contradictory attitudes were already present in nineteenth century America. Alcohol operates as a cultural signifier that carries similar double meanings, coded as both supporting and degrading American masculinity.<sup>5</sup> In nineteenth-century US narrative and visual culture, the excessive consumption of alcohol was imagined at once (a) as a pathological, largely homosocial behavior that eroded the core virtues of manhood and (b) as the embodiment of essential and primitive masculinity.

Temperance propaganda throughout the nineteenth century demonstrates how often alcohol was construed as a pathological homosocial activity. Temperance literature in all of its forms (lithographs, pamphlets, poems, hymns, novels, and so forth) tells the story of the drunkard's decline, following a four or five-act structure, in which the drunkard falls from grace and is redeemed. Elaine Parsons details the basic narrative structure:

There are six key aspects of the classic nineteenth-century drunkard narrative. First, the drinker, before his first drink, is a particularly promising young man. Second, the drinker falls largely or entirely because of external influences. Third, if the story blames the drinker for contributing to his own fall, his weakness is a desire either for excitement or to please his ill-chosen friends. Fourth, after he begins to drink, the desire to drink overcomes all of his other motivations. Fifth, he loses his control over his family, his economic life, and/or his own body. Sixth, if the drinker is redeemed, it is through a powerful external influence.<sup>6</sup>

This genre, the “drunkard’s progress” or “the drunkard’s pilgrimage,” is present in mid-nineteenth century lithographic temperance tracts.<sup>7</sup> In the theatre, temperance plays were part of the larger genre of “moral-reform melodrama,” characterized by sentimental storylines that aimed to, not only educate the audience, but more importantly reform their affective sensibilities.<sup>8</sup> William H. Smith’s *The Drunkard, or the Fallen Saved* (1944) was one of the most successful temperance melodramas.<sup>9</sup> *The Drunkard* follows the drunkard narrative closely. In it, Edward Middleton, a promising but undisciplined young man, falls prey to the temptations of alcohol. In the final act, while on the verge of suicide, a temperance preacher restores Middleton to his senses by telling of his own alcoholic fall

and recovery. More often than not, it is the influence of other men that causes the drunkards fall and makes possible his recovery. As Parsons notes, “ill-chosen friends” are often responsible for the protagonist’s fall. In Smith’s *Drunkard*, Middleton is manipulated into drunkenness by the scheming Lawyer Cribbs, an Iago-like figure who has designs on Middleton’s property and beautiful young wife.<sup>10</sup> Temperance drama highlights the homosocial nature of nineteenth century drinking cultures.<sup>11</sup> As the social space of America became more segregated along gender lines in the nineteenth century, with domestic spaces being coded as feminine and the public sphere being coded as masculine, the saloon inevitably became a singularly masculine space.<sup>12</sup> In Temperance and Prohibition literature homosocial drinking culture (which was centered on the saloon) represented a basic threat to not only men and families, but to the Republic itself.

Nevertheless, from the late nineteenth century and through the period following Prohibition, alcohol and the saloon were contested sites for articulating masculinity, especially in relationship to the power of women to regulate male behavior through intra-family influence, social norms, or political action. The history of the saloon explains this double coding. Saloons were essential social, political, and economic centers in cities and villages. Murdock writes of the nineteenth century saloon, “In a world lacking cheap restaurants, public rest rooms, libraries, meeting halls, even check-cashing facilities, the saloon served as an oasis. Saloon keepers could make available or easily locate pornography..., prostitutes, gambling, narcotics, and either union organizers or strike breakers.”<sup>13</sup> Murdock’s account makes clear the utilitarian function of the saloon, particularly for working class men. Basic aspects of community and commerce were conducted in the saloon, but so too was vice. The saloon allowed men to gather together, find solidarity, and achieve common goals—even as it allowed them to share degrading habits that threatened to ruin them. For good or for ill, the saloon “was a symbol of masculinity emancipate,” in the words of one magazine in 1931.<sup>14</sup>

Jack London's memoir *John Barleycorn* (1913) displays the contradictory idea of the saloon at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> London's memoir excoriates the saloon as the single greatest threat to American men. The book is explicitly Prohibition propaganda. London lists off the men who died or were otherwise ruined by alcoholism (101-2) and notes the deleterious affects of alcohol on his own mind (155). He argues that most men are not naturally prone to alcoholism; rather the saloon's monopoly on public male socialization had created a culture of alcoholism (205). London's social determinism, characteristic of many naturalist authors of the era,<sup>16</sup> dovetails with the larger discourse about alcohol in the period, which increasingly saw alcohol as a pervasive social illness rather than a moral failing of the individual. Under this view, exhorting of men to moderation or abstinence was futile; the only solution was the total prohibition of alcohol.<sup>17</sup> Prohibition was in effect an attack on an entire apparatus of male sociality and its inextricable relationship with alcohol. London argues, as many Suffragists would, that only women could save men from themselves. He writes, "The women are the true conservators of the race. The men are the wastrels, the adventure-lovers and gamblers, and in the end it is by their women that they are saved" (203). Prohibition and Suffrage coalesced to challenge homosociality. Suffrage challenged patriarchal politics in the form of universal male suffrage and the exclusion of women from the public sphere, while Prohibition challenged the homosocial leisure space of the saloon.<sup>18</sup> As D'Emilio and Freedman write, "The attack on the saloon had symbolic meaning as well, for the saloon represented the innermost sanctuary of the male public sphere from which women were excluded. The antithesis of the home, the saloon fostered gambling, obscenity, and prostitution, all of which threatened women's moral purity."<sup>19</sup>

Despite London's ostensive advocacy for Suffrage and Prohibition, *John Barleycorn* offers a nostalgic and loving portrait of the saloon. It was the very symbol of masculinity unbound by both the femininity of the domestic home and the drudgery of industrial labor. He writes, "A newsboy on

the streets, a sailor, a miner, a wanderer in far lands, always where men came together to exchange ideas, to laugh and boast and dare, to relax, to forget the dull toil of tiresome nights and days, always they came together over alcohol. The saloon was the place of congregation” (3). The saloon is a dialectically opposite space to the feminized domestic sphere that constrains men. London continues, “As a youth, by way of the saloon I had escaped from the narrowness of woman’s influence into the wide free world of men. All ways led to the saloon. The thousand roads of romance and adventure drew together in the saloon, and thence led out and on over the world.” The saloon was a portal out of the domestic world and into the homosocial world, which would lead London to the sea and adventure.<sup>20</sup> In addition to escaping “woman’s influence,” the saloon allowed London to escape the drudgery of industrial labor by opening up more exciting professional opportunities, such a petty piracy and working on ships. The saloon and the hearty men he caroused with there were the key to escaping feminine influence and emasculating industrial work.<sup>21</sup>

It is worth pausing here to consider how London reflects a significant cultural shift in the normative definitions of maleness. Gail Bederman in *Manliness & Civilization* observes how for much of the nineteenth century the notion of “manliness”—with its attendant virtues of self-restraint and moderation of passions—had been prized. At the end of the century, however, the Victorian model of an ideal man looked more and more “effeminate” to contemporaries, who worried that white middle-class men had become “overly civilized.”<sup>22</sup> These men were more and more drawn to “rough working-class masculinity,” which in the nineteenth century “had celebrated institutions and values antithetical to middle-class Victorian manliness—institutions like saloons, music halls and prize fights; values like physical prowess, pugnacity, and sexuality.”<sup>23</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century men were presumed to be more aggressive and competitive than women. These traits were essential to advancement in a capitalist economy. However, middle- and upper-class men and those who sought social advancement aspired to *manliness*. Manliness meant being gentlemanly and well-

mannered and moderating one's passions and urges. In all likelihood, "gentlemen" were probably just as given to "vice" as their working-class counterparts, and gentlemanly comportment had more to do with cloaking such activities from the public eye. At the end of the century, middle-class men would begin to embrace *masculinity*, which referred to physical vigor, strength, and sexual virility. Some even came to believe that masculinity was defined by a "primitive" or "savage" quality.<sup>24</sup>

London's memoir, thus, provides us with a window into one of the central contradictions of how drinking cultures and gender were viewed in the era leading up to Prohibition. The saloon is at once an existential threat to *manhood* and the purest expression of *masculinity*. As Murdock explains, "it appears as if all of nineteenth-century culture promoted alcohol consumption as essentially masculine. Yet masculinity also demanded financial success, emotional stability, and restraint—traits that drinking would obviously impair. Profound cultural ambivalence thus existed on the subject of drink."<sup>25</sup> This contradictory positioning of intoxication and homosociality will recur in the below discussion of bachelor parties.

At the turn of the twentieth century, American public culture was slowly becoming more heterosocial. Suffrage, Prohibition, the Great Depression, and two world wars hastened this process, causing remarkable shifts in gender norms. Yet, even before these dramatic historical events, industrialization, urbanization, and the emergence of the New Woman had already begun to transform the gender dynamics of public spaces. The all-male saloon would ultimately be a casualty of these changes. As D'Emilio and Freedman write, "by the First World War, the saloon was becoming marked as the province of older men, an aging institution deserted by the young."<sup>26</sup> Even as public spaces became more heterosocial, drinking culture became more and more "domesticated," as Murdock observes. He notes that even in the nineteenth century middle- and upper-class women drank and sanctioned moderate drinking in the home, especially at formal social gatherings.<sup>27</sup> Before and during Prohibition, alcohol would gain greater sanction within heterosocial spaces, like the

home, where women could serve as models for moderate consumption and as regulators of male consumption.<sup>28</sup> Before prohibition, by law or convention, most alcohol was drunk “on premises,” in taverns, saloons, social clubs, and similarly all-male public spaces; after Prohibition, social conventions and state laws encouraged a reversal in which alcohol was consumed at home.<sup>29</sup>

While many younger men embraced the presence of women in public spaces, there were numerous naysayers, who bemoaned the loss of the homosocial saloon and the rise of the heterosocial bar. As Rotundo observes, “Men had endorsed women’s moral stewardship as long as it did not extend to their public sources of power and pleasure, but they began to balk when women attacked taverns, lodges, and brothels. This threat helped to set off the male reexamination of civilized morality and primitive manliness.”<sup>30</sup> Attempts to keep women out of bars, including legal exclusions, were common even after Prohibition.<sup>31</sup> Yet, women had entered the barroom and their presence would grow over the course of the twentieth century, even as many men protested the encroachment on what was once a homosocial space.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, the sexual revolution and Baby Boomer youth culture (a successor to the 1920s youth culture) further solidified heterosociality as a characteristic of public space and public drinking. While homosocial drinking, particularly at working-class neighborhood bars, would never go away, it was usually opposed to the lively heterosexual possibilities of the mixed-sex bar and the more respectable middle-class practice of drinking at home under the watchful eye of one’s spouse.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Bachelor Party as Morality Tale**

In 1953, *Goodyear TV Playhouse* broadcast the “teleplay” *The Bachelor Party* on NBC, directed by Delbert Mann and written by Paddy Chayefsky, the academy award-winning writer. Part of the so-called Golden Age of television drama, *Goodyear TV Playhouse* broadcast prestigious live performances, including adaptation from novels and the stage and original scripts. The teleplay or

telefilm was a hybrid genre that combined live theatre and cinema for the television medium.<sup>34</sup> Mann and Chayefsky went on to adapt *The Bachelor Party* into a feature film in 1957.<sup>35</sup> *The Bachelor Party* is a significant early example of the bachelor party as a narrative trope. As I will demonstrate, the film establishes many precedents for the subsequent examples.

*The Bachelor Party* takes place in one day, as a group of co-workers throw a party for the groom-to-be Arnold. Charlie, the protagonist, is a lower-middle class bookkeeper who just discovered his wife Helen's pregnancy. Charlie takes the news poorly. A new child he fears will dash even his most modest dreams: going back to school, going on vacation, or buying a new car. He says rather callously to Helen, "Right now, it just seems that I got a ball and chain hanging from every arm" (232).<sup>36</sup> He expresses the sentiment more baldly to his co-worker Kenneth, explaining,

It seems to me I got one really crummy life ahead of me. It just seems like I go to my job every day, and I come home, and we eat dinner, and then we go see Helen's mother and father or my mother and father. Or my cousin Julie and her husband. And now we got this kid coming. This is what the rest of my life is going to be like. I'm going to be a book-keeper for seventy-two bucks a week the rest of my life. I don't know. (237)

At the office, Charlie and his colleagues kvetch about their lower-middle class lives and family responsibilities. Then Eddie, the only bachelor in the office, arrives and proceeds to make one call after another to his girlfriends. Though they had been reluctant to attend the bachelor party, after listening to Eddie's telephone calls jealously, the men all agree to join the party. Ideologically, *The Bachelor Party* sees these middle-class American men as victims or prisoners. At the time, popular writings and some social scientists lent credence to this perception of middle-class men. For example, the collection of essays *The Decline of the American Male* (1958), which cites social scientists to support its claims, argues for this dreary picture of men. The authors bemoan how American men work too hard, are conformists, and are "dominated" by women, particularly their all-powerful wives.<sup>37</sup> The risible notion that women were oppressing men in the late 1950s is presented with little irony in these articles, written only five years before Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).

These articles are clearly speaking only of middle-class white men. They ignore the power such men have relative to working class men and women—to say nothing of people of color, LGBTQ peoples, and other marginalized Americans, who lacked basic political freedoms or access to white collar employment. In this way, *The Bachelor Party* forms a bridge between two eras: the turn of the century (exemplified by Jack London’s memoir) when public discourse anxiously attempted to articulate the concept of virile primitive masculinity as a buttress against effeminizing civilization, and the later twentieth century when the Men’s Movement would articulate the same paranoid vision of white heterosexual men as the victims of feminism and post-civil rights policies.

However, *The Bachelor Party* does not ultimately advance a total critique of mid-century middle-class marriage. As the film progresses and the men drink more, Arnold begins to confess that he is uncertain about his impending marriage and, finally, in a drunken stupor calls his fiancée and breaks off his engagement. Charlie is still feeling sorry for himself, and, after a few drinks, rallies with Eddie to continue the night of drinking, saying “Let’s get drunk or something! You’re supposed to be the big lover, Eddie! Where’s all the women?!” (258) However, in the final act, Charlie realizes how seedy and pointless Eddie’s bachelor life is. He hauls the nearly passed out Arnold back to his fiancée and convinces him to talk things out with her. Charlie tells him,

Tell her everything you’re scared about. Everybody’s scared, Arnold. Everybody’s got things in them they’re ashamed of. That’s what a wife’s for. To make you feel you don’t have to be ashamed of yourself. Then she tells you what makes her feel miserable.... Then, that’s your job. It’s your job to make her feel she’s not as bad as everybody makes her think she is. That’s what marriage is, Arnold. It’s a job. You work at it. (265)

Charlie, taking his own advice, returns to his home with a renewed appreciation for his marriage. Though it offers a dreary view of marriage (marriage is “a job”), the teleplay ends by endorsing marital fidelity above philandering bachelorhood.<sup>38</sup>

The main point of commonality between *The Bachelor Party* and the subsequent examples I will examine is the narrative structure. The bachelor party as a homosocial ritual, with its attendant

traditions of transgressing social norms, brings to the surface latent conflicts and forces a confrontation with these conflicts. At some level, the bachelor party threatens to disrupt the marriage: the groom gets cold feet, the groom's fidelity is tested, or the bachelor party nearly sabotages the wedding itself. The men engage in a series of transgressive activities, the nature of which grow more outlandish with each decade: drunkenness, drug use, a stag-film viewing, prostitutes, brazen violations of the law, and even homicide in the most extreme examples. Usually, the story ends happily, and the groom is restored to his rightful place beside his bride. In this regard, the bachelor party story follows the classic comedic narrative established by Shakespeare, whose comedies go through a period of total disruption that threatens to leave everything in disarray but ultimately resolve with order restored and problems solved. Thus, despite its veneer of scandal and transgression, the bachelor party narrative tends to reinforce basically conservative values. Mann and Chayefsky's *The Bachelor Party* overcomes male anxieties about being "tied down" and renews Charlie's commitment to his family.

### **Snobs Versus Slobs: *Bachelor Party* and the Illusion of Subversion**

Moving forward a couple of decades, Neal Israel's film *Bachelor Party* (1984) offers a strikingly different take on the subject than Mann and Chayefsky's *The Bachelor Party*. If the latter was a melancholic contemplation of middle-class men's quite desperation, the former is a raunchy, zany comedy. Israel's *Bachelor Party* is indicative of numerous changes to American cinema in the intervening decades. After decades of censorship, the demise of the Production Codes had liberated American cinema, though by the 1980s the new found liberty had grown stale and exposed breasts had become an almost habitual aspect of films aimed at adult audiences. "Sex comedies" and other zany comedies of the 1980s, most of which focused on a group of crude white men engaging in one series of hijinks after another, were defined by a couple of directors and actors. John Landis directed

*Animal House* (1978), the prototype for the anarchic, drunken sex comedy. *Animal House* was co-written by Harold Ramis, who also co-wrote *Meatballs* (1979), *Caddyshack* (1980), *Stripes* (1981), *Ghostbusters* (1984), and *Back to School* (1986). Ivan Reitman directed *Meatballs*, *Stripes*, and *Ghostbusters*; films that fused the madcap nature of the sex comedy with an action adventure film story. *Meatballs* set the template for *Porky's* (1981), perhaps the most famous and successful summer-camp sex comedy. The most recent bachelor party films, which depend on carnivalesque transgression, grew out of this broader shift toward lowbrow, raunchy comedy. The protagonists in these films are wisecracking ne'er-do-wells and slobs. For example, Chevy Chase, Bill Murray, and John Belushi played the sorts of characters who were simply invulnerable to the criticism of their "betters." In some ways, these characters are "slobs" who are so comfortable with their status that insults have lost their sting. The characters might be blue-collar schlubs, lazy white-collar jerks, or shifty con artists, but they were unlikely heroes whose most common attributes were their smartass comebacks, crassness, and effortless antagonism toward authority. Bill Murray's roles in *Ghostbusters* (1984) and *Stripes* (1981) are examples of ignoble men driven by their libidos and compulsion to thumb their noses at authority.

The "snobs versus slobs" formula was essential to 1980s comedy. For example, Rodney Dangerfield repeatedly played a boorish nouveau riche clashing with well-bred elitists in, for example, *Caddyshack* (1980) and *Back to School* (1986). Dangerfield's characters were ignorant, rude, and sexist, but these qualities only burnished their rags-to-riches ethos and distinguished them from the classist prejudice of their antagonists. Dangerfield is in many ways the prototype for Donald Trump—a regressive, ignorant, sexist lout whose money gives him the liberty to do what he pleases. The average working- and middle-class man could identify with the zany antics of the slob more than they could with the stogy, scolding blue-bloods. Elements of the carnivalesque are present in this formula. The slob usually comes out on top, inverting the power hierarchy. In both *Caddyshack*

and *Back to School*, Dangerfield's characters are rich. His status as a slob is not a critique of class as such. Indeed, the character's upward mobility is a vindication of meritocratic capitalism, and these films' implicit ideology runs counter to a critique of class and capitalism. They manifest Regan-era blue-collar conservatism, with its attendant anti-intellectualism and suspicion of highbrow aesthetics. The films revel in low-brow comedy that flies in the face of "high art." Along the same lines, these films offer a fantasy of white men who are able to transgress social norms and even laws without getting into real trouble. For example, Chevy Chase in *Spies Like Us* (1985) and Billy Murray in *Ghostbusters* (1984) play relatively privileged, college-educated men whose careers languish because of their lazy, conniving, and even fraudulent ways. Yet, both characters are instrumental in saving the world. Both characters are romantically successful, despite being sexist womanizers; both are professionally successful largely because they rely on the expertise of their geeky colleagues. Their sexism, bad-manners, relative ignorance, laziness, and lack of professionalism, far from being impediments to their success, are charming and admirable, in part because they validate a sort of white male privilege and an entitlement to success that is independent of hard work. If hard work is not a prerequisite of success, neither are propriety or good manners. Despite the inevitability of the white male protagonist's success, he is figured as an underdog because of his struggle against entrenched snobs.

The protagonist of *Bachelor Party* fits neatly into this mold. Rick Gassko, played by Tom Hanks, is a good-natured, wisecracking school bus driver, who is newly engaged to Debbie Thompson. When he tells his male friends about the impending marriage, they one and all protest the announcement but resign themselves to it. His buddy Rudy says, "Look, Rick, I'd rather be dead, but if this is what you want, good luck, man." The group agrees to throw a blowout bachelor party, in Rudy's words, "with chicks and guns and fire trucks and hookers and drugs and booze." Rick's crew is a mixed bunch. Jay is a handsome ladies man and a department store photographer; Gary is a

short bespectacled concert-ticket broker who lives with his mother; Brad is a suicidal pill-popper. Rudy is the most drunken, aggressive, and lascivious of the bunch. Rick's brother, Stan, is a successful doctor; he shares the practice with his wife, Tina, a short, heavy-set, and assertive woman. Stan is as dismayed to hear about the wedding as the rest of the guys. He exclaims, "I can't understand you getting married. Do you have any idea what you're giving up? Any idea? Any inkling? Everything! Wild parties, running around like a maniac, women every night. Nakedness. Gone! I miss that so much, Ricky."

Rick comes across as strangely mature standing next to his drunken and hyper-sexist friends. He calmly and affably rolls with the punches and jumps from one prank to another. Even Rick's buddies seem the lesser of two evils when pitted against Debbie's snobbish, waspy family. His fiancée's wealthy family disapprove of him and would prefer Debbie marry her ex-boyfriend Cole, a tall blond sociopathic wasp. Early in the film, Debbie's father sits Rick down and gives him a talking to, explaining that in his opinion Rick is "an immature asshole, which is fine, except that you're marrying my daughter, and I'm afraid that my grandchildren are going to be little assholes." The father proceeds to list Rick's flaws: "First, you're a slob. You dress like a bum. Second, you're unmotivated. You have no self-esteem, no thought about the future. You're inconsiderate. You're insensitive. You're insincere.... And you're irresponsible. A show-off. You're vulgar. You're inappropriate. You're unrefined. You're obnoxious." Rick sits through the speech glibly nodding with ironic attentiveness and proceeds at every turn to prove his father-in-law-to-be correct, making smartass comments throughout a family dinner.

Debbie's father and her ex-boyfriend Cole scheme to breakup Rick and Debbie, but Rick and his buddies turn the tables on the snobs one after another. Cole is captured and hung from a hotel window naked but for a bed sheet. Debbie's father is similarly shanghaied, bounded to a bed in bondage gear, and photographed with a bevy of hookers attending to him. In both of these cases,

relatively anonymous women are instruments of revenge. Cole is captured with the help of Tracey, a woman whose only attributes are her attractiveness and sexual pliability. When women are the victims of these “pranks,” sex continues to be the overriding theme. For example, Cole redirects a pair of hookers, hired for Rick’s party, to Debbie’s shower. The prostitutes enter the prim shower and quickly begin performing a sex show together, wielding a vibrator and a whip. The sex workers drop out of frame, continuing their performance, the nature of which can only be inferred by the horrified reactions of the waspy women looking on. While Rick and his buddies do not engineer this event, it is in keeping with the punishment of the snobs through sex themed “pranks.” Likewise, it continues the theme of women, particularly prostitutes, as instruments of this revenge.

After the encounter with the hookers, Debbie, her friends, and her mother go to a Chippendales strip club, deciding that what is good for the goose is good for the gander. Rick and his buddies find out about the strip club and engineer another “prank.” They pay a male stripper to present a tray of food to the women including a hotdog in which the stripper’s penis has been surreptitiously placed. Debbie’s mother is the unlucky victim of this stunt. The men do not explicitly present the plan as a punishment for the women going out to see nude men, but there is an air of malicious punishment in the plan. Moreover is not a harmless prank but a kind of sexual assault, designed to humiliate the women. Though the women came to club to see male bodies, the “prank” transforms the male body into an instrument of humiliation. The “prank” reverses the women’s attempt to assume the spectatorial privileged of gazing at hunky male bodies, and it reaffirms the asymmetrical nature of male and female sexual privilege. The “prank” is funny to the men in no small part because it is an exercise of male power over women. No matter how commodified the phallus becomes in a Chippendales club, and no matter how much a given social context objectifies the male body, the penis can immediately be reclaimed as a source of power to humiliate women.

The underlying slight of hand of the film is that it presents Rich and his band of slobs as rebels fighting the good fight against the snobs and their attempts to spoil good fun. The slob-versus-snobs trope is a pseudo-rebellion that characterizes the ideological climate of the period. In popular culture and political rhetoric we see Regan-era white male persecution complex, which later in the 1990s would be reshaped into the Men's Rights Movement, with its fantasy of male persecution and victimhood. In *Bachelor Party*, homosocial pseudo-rebellion shores up male liberties and "rights" against women and their social betters. This reactionary "rebellion," which foreshadows the Tea Party politics of our own decade, passes off the retrenchment of patriarchal power as an act of rebellion and heroism, all under the guise of being "just a comedy."

Though the film prizes the men's liberty, there are really two limits placed on their behavior in the film. First, the sexual excesses of the evening, which include bestiality (a donkey show), is still bounded by homophobia. Gary, Rick's nerdy friend, has a sexual encounter with a woman, who turns out to be "trans." Given the essentially heterosexist nature of the storyline, I simply refer to her as "trans," even though she is a stereotypical "trannie," a projection of homophobic anxiety and mockery, having nothing to do with real human beings who identify as transgender. She has no real subjectivity and exists only to mar Gary's heterosexuality. When Gary sees the woman, their eyes meet across the dance floor and they glide toward the bedroom, an orchestral score accompanying them. The film enacts a parody of a heterosexual romantic encounter. Gary realizes that the woman is trans, when he sees her urinating standing up. The sight gag intends to transform the woman into a horrid perversion of gender. Gary immediately wales with horror, runs into the shower, and desperately washes his body. Given the unflinching nature of homophobia in the 1980s and the relentless use of queer characters as punch lines, this scene is unremarkable, however shocking by today's standards. The humanized depiction of trans peoples has only in the past half decade begun to take root, and the "trannie" remained a staple punch line in juvenile popular culture well into the

2010s.<sup>39</sup> I draw attention to this scene to highlight how, in a film whose central theme is transgression, queer sex is a bridge too far. Queerness is perhaps *the* single proscribed behavior at the bachelor party.

If homophobia defines one boundary of permissible behavior at the party, monogamy defines the other boundary—though where homophobia is absolute, monogamy is more attenuated. Rick promises Debbie that he won't "screw around." Amidst all of the illicit activities of the party—drunkenness, all manner of drug use, rampant vandalism, a live band, strippers, hookers, a dead donkey, and bestiality—Debbie only cares that Rick has not slept with another woman. Once he has proven this to her satisfaction, Debbie seems content to stay at the party and "get naked" with Rick. The only ethical concern of the film is Rick's fidelity. The exploitation of sex workers by all of the other men, the senseless destruction of property, and sexually assaulting Debbie's mother with a disguised penis—all of these transgressions are forgiven because Rick has remained true to his word.

Rick's friends repeatedly encourage him to break his vow. Perhaps the central conflict of the film is between his pledge to heterosexual fidelity and the demand of homosocial sexual revelry. For much of the film, homosocial bounds are mediated through the sexual exploitation of women. One scene brings home the homosocial nature of sex in the film. In the middle of the party, Jay tells Rick that Tracey, an old heartthrob of Rick's from high school, is waiting for him in the hotel bedroom. Rick, looking quite vexed by this news, stammers for a second and then says, "How can I... how can I turn this down?" As Rick heads toward the bedroom, Jay declares through clenched teeth, "That's the old Rick!" In the room, Tracey enters from the balcony through diaphanous curtains in a negligée, which she allows to fall from her shoulder, as a dreamy harp plays. She has a model-esque figure, and her only words are "Rick, take me please." Tracey lacks any subjectivity as a character. While she is not a prostitute—indeed, she is the girl who got away—her unrealistic total sexual availability gives her essentially the same status as the prostitutes. Her only purpose is to provide

Rick with a sexual opportunity he cannot refuse. After Tracey offers herself to Rick and while he is debating what to do, a series of other character's heads are superimposed atop Tracey's body. (The fact that Tracey's head is so easily obliterated further evidences her lack of subjectivity.) First, Debbie's head appears on Tracey's shoulders and reminds Rick of his promise to be faithful, and then a nun appears, similarly entreating him. At the same time, a group of middle school boys (the students Rick drives to and from school) appear around him yelling and imploring him to "Do it!" Finally, Rick's brother Stan's head appears on Tracey's body and demands, "What? Are you nuts? Look at my tits! They're perfect." Rick backs out and exits the room. Jay is waiting for him with anticipation. At first Rick brags about his sexual performance and then breaks down, telling the truth: "Nothing happened in there, all right? I know how much this meant to you, but I couldn't do it, OK?" Rick is clearly tempted by Tracey in her own right, but what compels him to nearly break his vow is the vicarious pleasure the sexual encounter would give Jay. The fact that Rick imagines a group of little boys cheering him on speaks to the adolescent nature of heterosexual sex as mediated through homosocial talk. The refusal of Tracey, a "gift" arranged by Jay, is a failure to fully satisfy the homosocial expectations of the party. However, through this act of maturity and fidelity Rick is demonstrated to be a mature adult surrounded by adolescent men.

Rick remains relatively sober, drug free, and chaste through the evening, but he enables the debauchery of his comrades in arms, including the infidelity of his married brother. Here too the film performs something of a slight of hand. Rick, despite his impish devil may care ways, is a "good guy," who is faithful to his fiancée. At the end of the day, he more or less adheres to a bourgeois morality, but he is also a "good guy" because he enables his friends' continuous violation of those norms. The contradiction between proper middle-class civility and licentious masculine freedom are reconciled in this slight of hand. Debbie is an "ideal" romantic partner because she places only one prohibition on Rick's behavior and is otherwise unperturbed by his juvenile antics and his friends'

debauched excesses. Thus, *Bachelor Party* manages to reconcile male privilege with heterosexual monogamy. The fantasy of homosocial debauchery and domestic morality coexist through Debbie's permissiveness and Rick's modest capacity to keep a single promise.

*Bachelor Party* presents the veneer of rebellion and subversion, but the film is essentially conservative, particularly in how it maintains male privilege, while retaining Rick as a model of bourgeois sexual morality. However, could we not say that *Bachelor Party* and similar films are subversive because they deploy a carnivalesque subversion of social norms? Certainly *Bachelor Party*—with its reveling in bestiality, drug use, drunkenness, and licentiousness and with its inversions of certain socio-economic hierarchies—presents a carnivalesque face that at the very least transgresses middle-class bourgeoisie social norms. *Bachelor Party* and other films considered in this chapter bear at least a superficial resemblance to Mikhail Bakhtin's description of François Rabelais's literary oeuvre. Bakhtin explains that, in Rabelais' writing, the materiality of the human body “with its food, drink, defecation and sexual life, play a predominant role.”<sup>40</sup> Certainly films like *Bachelor Party* center on alcohol and sex. Vomiting and scatological humor are common. The role of vomit and feces is important to Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque, because the grotesque body is categorically different from the “classical body,” which is wholly self-contained. As Bakhtin writes, “the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgressing its own limits.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, it is important to distinguish Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque, which emphasizes a sort of ontological openness, from our common usage of ‘grotesque,’ meaning disgusting or ugly. Bakhtin's emphasizes the collectivist experience of carnivalesque, which he positions against the bourgeois individual self.<sup>42</sup> In other words, the carnivalesque is not liberationist, in the liberal humanist sense, but something that radically desubjectifies the self, violating the boundaries of the classical body. While the drunken revelry of *Bachelor Party* may lead some to characterize it as carnivalesque, the film demonstrably

exhibits few of the most important aspects of the carnivalesque. The subjective identities and bodies of the men at the center of the film retain their integrity, autonomy, and solidity—with perhaps the exception of Gary. He effectively represents an abject failed masculinity, the exception that proves the rule. Rick and his buddies, despite imbibing drugs and alcohol, continue to exercise not only control of themselves but of others. Sexually available women, a seemingly endless supply, are at their disposal, and they consistently turn the tables on their socio-economic betters through a series of elaborate schemes. The men may engage in excess but their bodies do not become grotesque in the radical sense that Bakhtin means. Far from being subverting it, *Bachelor Party* validates hetero-masculine subjectivity as nearly omnipotent and unfettered by outside influence. As we will see, later versions of the bachelor party narrative, where the male body loses its integrity, differ in this respect.

### **The Carnavalesque and the Recuperation of Masculine Power: *The Hangover***

Todd Phillips' *The Hangover* movies (2009-13) present more plausible examples of the carnivalesque than *Bachelor Party*. In these films, the men's bodies are violently attacked, dismembered, gunshot, drugged, pierced, tattooed, burned, and tasered; the men vomit and bleed. One character engages in queer sex. They participate in anti-social behavior: stealing a tiger, a police car, and a monkey; start a riot in Bangkok; and kidnap a Buddhist monk and small-time crime boss. Some scholars have already applied Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque to these films, arguing that *The Hangover* transgresses "normative heterosexual relationships" and "liberates" the male body.<sup>43</sup> It seems incontrovertible that these films transgress the normative boundaries of social propriety and even hetero-masculinity, and from this fact we could infer, *prima facie*, that the films subvert normativity through a carnivalesque strategy. However, as I will argue, despite the films' genuinely transgressive nature and despite their grotesque violation of the male body, they ultimately recuperate hetero-masculine power, rather than subvert it. This is not to say that the texts are

monolithic and ideologically univocal. Indeed, the films do play with sexuality and gender norms in interesting ways, but taken as a whole the films mostly neutralize this complexity by creating denouements that affirm hetero-masculine power. The transgression is temporary, and once it passes, the characters are able to shore up their masculinity and power vis-à-vis women and authority figures. As with *Bachelor Party*, *The Hangover* imagines a group of white men acting largely with impunity, escaping the legal, moral, and financial consequences of their actions. Moreover, the first two films end with a wedding. Most of the men fall into the arms of their loving spouses or brides. So, however much the films disrupt the normal, they also affirm heterosexual domesticity. Thus, the films offer a fantasy in which white straight men act transgressively, but their transgressions are mysteriously compatible with martial bliss.<sup>44</sup>

*The Hangover* and *The Hangover Part II* have essentially identical plots.<sup>45</sup> After an epic, drug-induced pre-wedding bender, three men—the uptight dentist Stu (Ed Helms), the handsome devil-may-care Phil (Bradley Cooper), and the portly, bearded wildcard Alan (Zach Galigianakis)—must retrace their steps to track down a lost friend before a wedding. In the first film, the men go to Las Vegas with the groom-to-be Doug (Justin Bartha) for a bachelor party.<sup>46</sup> Alan secretly drugs everyone, including himself. The next morning, Stu, Phil, and Alan awake in their hotel room with no memory of the preceding night and are unable to find Doug. The rest of the film is an epic quest to recover Doug and return to Los Angeles in time for the wedding. Each stage of the adventure uncovers yet another shocking episode from the previous night. In the second *Hangover* film, Stu is the groom, and the wedding takes place at an enchanting seaside resort in Thailand. Stu is engaged to a beautiful Thai-American, Lauren (Jamie Chung). As in the first film, Phil, Stu, and Alan again wake up in a hotel room with no memory of the previous night. This time, however, they are in a seedy Bangkok hotel room, and the lost companion is Teddy (Mason Lee), Lauren’s precocious

college-aged brother. Otherwise, the film proceeds more or less along the same lines as the previous film: the three main characters retrace their steps from one shocking event to another.

The way in which transgression of norms leads to a recuperation of hetero-masculine power in this film can most clearly be seen with the character of Stu. While the film is fundamentally an ensemble comedy, Stu is arguably the film's protagonist, as he undergoes the most substantial change and development. When we first meet Stu, he appears to be the classic straight man. He is uptight, skittish, and sober minded. In both films, Stu is under the thumb of a bully figure. In the first film, his live-in girlfriend Melissa (Rachael Harris) bosses him around, cheats on him, and displays little affection toward him. Nevertheless, Stu submits passively to Melissa's demands and plans to propose to her. In the second film, the bully is Stu's stern father-in-law-to-be, Fohn (Nirut Sirichanya). In a toast at the rehearsal dinner, Fohn expresses contempt for Stu. He explains that when he first met Stu he was unimpressed: "He seemed unattractive. He lacked intelligence and imagination. He was missing the spark you look for in a man." Fohn then compares Stu to *khao*, a bland "soft white rice in lukewarm water." In some respects, Fohn appears to be correct about Stu, evidenced if only by the fact that Stu awkwardly endures Fohn's insults and offers no objection.

Stu's submissive and button-down personality diverges sharply from his behavior during his drug-induced rampage with Doug, Phil, and Alan. Stu is actually the most transgressive of the revelers. In the first *Hangover* film, Stu marries an escort and pulls out his own tooth. In the second film, he gets a massive face tattoo, and we also discover that Stu had sex with a transgender erotic dancer, Kimmy (played by transgender actor Yasmin Lee). The scene makes quite a to-do about the fact that Kimmy anally penetrated Stu, and the unveiling of Kimmy's penis functions as a shocking punch line. Stu reacts with horror, falling out of his chair, and is on the verge of tears when Kimmy reveals that she ejaculated inside him. It is hard to read the scene in any other way than transphobic and homophobic. Stu's reaction is not entirely out of step with his general hysteria, but sex with a

transgender sex worker is clearly a particularly horrifying notion. Yasmin Lee's performance offers some degree of dignity to the character of Kimmy. If only because the actor is transgender, the performance is an improvement over the "trannie" caricature, as in *Bachelor Party*.

Stu is horrified by his actions as he discovers them one after the other the following day, and he becomes hysterical with fear of their consequences, but the harrowing experience of retracing his steps and recovering his lost companions leaves Stu newly courageous and able to stand up to his bully. In the first film, he confronts Melissa about her controlling manner and breaks up with her. In the second film, he stands up to Fohn, who tries to cancel the wedding. In *The Hangover Part II*, Stu very nearly gives up on making it to his wedding, because, he decides, there is a "demon" inside of him that waits to come out and destroy his life.<sup>47</sup> Yet, Stu comes to accept this side of himself. When he finally defies Fohn, he challenges the perception that he is a soft and insipid man. Stu says, "I wish I was a boring dentist, who had a boring life and boring friends, but I don't and I'm not. I'm actually part of this weird wolf pack." He goes on to explain, "The point is, this demon takes me to some pretty weird places. We lost Teddy for two days in Bangkok, but that same demon took us to hell and back to find him. We took on Bangkok and we won. Now that's pretty fuckin' cool if you ask me! I love your daughter, and I'm gonna marry her."

Thus, as with earlier examples discussed in this chapter, what threatens hetero-masculinity paradoxically becomes the thing that revivifies it. In the *Hangover* movies, Stu's wild, irresponsible, and dangerous behavior—which threatens to destroy his whole life—ultimately serves to empower him to reclaim his masculine privilege and his new wife. Stu gets to have his cake and eat it too. The debauched homosocial ritual of the bachelor party, intensified by drugs, restores Stu's masculinity. Here we see the straight circuit at work: the homosocial ritual of re-masculinization is a necessary appositional phenomenon to the heterosexual ritual of the wedding. While the bachelor party gone wrong appears to threaten the wedding, in the end, it proves to be necessary to setting the wedding

aright. Without the perilous quest to find Teddy, Stu would have entered the marriage emasculated by his father-in-law. Similarly, in the first film, he would have married Melissa and been emasculated by his wife.

The carnivalesque aspects of the films paradoxically transgress normative boundaries but ultimately do not subvert normativity. The desubjectification of the men—their loss of self-control, rationality, and bodily autonomy—rather than undermining their masculinity seems to re-solidify it. In the first film, Stu anxiously pleads, “Why can’t we remember a goddamn thing from last night?” Phil, ever the impetuous rake, says, “Because we obviously had a great fucking time. Why don’t you just stop worrying for one minute? Be proud of yourself.” The film seems to vindicate this sentiment: Stu should be proud of himself. As with *John Barleycorn*, the desubjectifying effects of intoxication threaten to undo the male subject even as they affirm masculinity and its distinctness from femininity. Even Stu’s sexual experience with Kimmy is reconsolidated into his newly codified masculine power.<sup>48</sup> The stigma of queer sex becomes somewhat attenuated at the end of the film. When he confronts Fohn, Stu declares, “I got a dark side! There’s a demon in me!” Alan, mishearing Stu, chimes in, “It’s true, he has semen in him.” Alan’s gaff is quickly passed over as a throwaway comic line, but Stu’s reclamation of masculine authority is conflated with his transgression of sexual norms. However ironically presented, this sexual transgression gets folded into the series of transgressions that are transfigured into evidence in favor of, not contrary to, Stu’s masculinity.<sup>49</sup>

In pointing out the incoherencies of these films, I do not mean to attempt a rehabilitation of the films for queer and feminist critics and scholars, but merely to point out how incoherent the films’ imbedded ideologies are. Both films deserve a great deal of criticism for a range of politically inexcusable elements. The taken-for-granted exploitation of women, particularly exotic dancers and sex workers, is most notable. In the first film, Stu marries a bubbly escort, Jade (Heather Graham), during the bender, and the closing credit montage shows a series of still photos of the men reveling

with exotic dancers and sex workers. *The Hangover Part II* is blithely indifferent to the degrading conditions of sex workers, including transgender sex workers, in Thailand. The film has even less to say about Thailand's long history of human trafficking and sexual exploitation of children, which have been reported on for decades.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, although the seedy underbelly of Bangkok is hardly painted as an ideal travel destination, there is a neo-colonial quality to how a group of Americans run riot through the city, partaking in the sex trade along the way, without suffering any consequences.

Like *Bachelor Party*, the *Hangover* films posit these protagonists' inebriated exploits as exceptionally transgressive. Alcohol and drugs liberate the homosocial group from the "chains" of domestic heterosexuality and, especially for Stu, the internalized social norms that inhibit the full expression of their vigorous masculinity. More accurately, however, the film exhibits a merely exaggerated version of white middle-class male privilege. In Las Vegas and Nevada strips clubs, brothels, gambling, and public drinking are legal activities. Vice is commodified in Las Vegas, "America's playground." Indeed, the film was a marketing success for the Caesars Palace hotel, which other hotels have sought to emulate.<sup>51</sup> What appears as a fantasy of subversive debauchery is in fact an advertisement for the prepackaged "experience" consumerism of Sin City. But even the men's illegal activities are tolerated to varying degrees. We see a fantasy of white male privilege enacted throughout the film. In most of the United States, public intoxication, drug use, and prostitution are illegal activities that are enforced inconsistently based on race, class, and other factors. To be sure, many of the activities the men engage in they would never be able to get away with in reality (stealing a police cruiser or firing a gun on the streets of Las Vegas). So, the film offers a fantastic vision of uninhibited freedom, but it is nevertheless merely an exaggerated version of the degree of freedom white middle-class men have relative to other identity groups in America.<sup>52</sup>

If we return to the notion of the carnivalesque, we arrive at another paradoxical outcome of this film. Part of what qualifies the *Hangover* films as carnivalesque is the fact that the film violates

the main character's bodily autonomy. Looking specifically at Stu, in the first film he pulls out his own tooth during the bender; in the second film, his face is tattooed and he is anally penetrated by Kimmy, but, importantly, Stu does all of these things voluntarily while under the influence of alcohol and drugs. If we consider this as an instance of what David Savran calls "reflexive sadomasochism," "a condition in which the ego is ingeniously split between a sadistic (or masculinized) half and a masochistic (or feminized) half so that the subject, torturing himself, can prove himself a man."<sup>53</sup> Stu certainly seems to meet this description. He actually articulates his divided consciousness when he refers to his "demon." The demon sabotages Stu's life plans, attacks his body with painful and humiliating disfigurements and violates his sense of bodily autonomy and heterosexual identity. We might read these events as radically carnivalesque for violating Stu's psychic and somatic autonomy, and we might read the masochistic feminization of the male body as a subversive element in the film. However, Savran argues against reading white male sadomasochism as a subversion of the patriarchal power. Rather, Savran argues, the appearance of sadomasochism within popular culture parallels the discourse of white male victimhood in right-wing politics and the Men's Rights Movement. This discourse imagines white men in a feminized and minoritized position, subject to abuse and unfairness, but paradoxically empowers such men to attack social welfare policies, racial equality policies, feminism, and other progressive causes as corroding white men's rights.<sup>54</sup> While Savran was addressing the specific cultural moment of the 1990s,<sup>55</sup> we recently had a particularly arresting example of how discourses of white male victimhood had manifest in contemporary America with the Isla Vista mass shooting in 2014. The shooter was an online participant in various Men's Rights online forums and posted self-pitying videos online where he complained about how women did not like "nice guys" like him.<sup>56</sup> The logic of reflexive sadomasochism is what allows men to occupy contradictory positions. He can be both the feminized victim and the tough guy who endures punishment. In literal instances of sadomasochism, such as

Stu's extracting his own tooth, the male can be both the assailant and the victim, simultaneously assuming the powerful aggressive position and the passive weak position. He can even "take on the roles simultaneously of humanitarian and of casualty of feminism and affirmative action,"<sup>57</sup> as when Stu passively submits to Melissa's hen pecking.

If we map this onto the straight circuit, we can see how reflexive sadomasochism fits into the heterosexual-homosocial loop. Stu in his relationship with Melissa is a submissive "whipped" male, a nice guy whose niceness is being exploited by his shrewish and unfaithful girlfriend. Representing one vicious extreme of the straight circuit, Stu's relationship with Melissa represents the dangerous outcome of heterosexual domesticity without the periodic corrective influence of homosociality. Stu's drunken alter ego takes the dominant position and attacks the effeminized Stu. Stu occupied several contradictory positions simultaneously as he passes through the straight circuit: victim and attacker, nice guy and drunken rake, doormat and rebel. Thus, Stu, a white heterosexual middle-class dentist, is presented as a man oppressed by his wife-to-be, whose only salvation is a night of acting out a fantasy of complete liberty, a fantasy which actually reflects the relative degree of privileged he enjoys as a white heterosexual middle-class American man. In the end, Stu gets to have it all: he is a feminized victim and a potent man; he is a rebel and a bourgeois; and he is a quiet everyman and a "bad ass" who breaks all the rules.

Here we can also see a connection to Jack London's *John Barleycorn*. London's memoir imagines the saloon as paradoxically central to masculinity but also destructive to masculinity. The saloon was the site wherein men could be men in turn of the century America; yet, the saloon and rampant alcohol consumption posed a fundamental threat to men's physical health and psychological autonomy. Similarly, in the *Hangover* movies, the bachelor party, a homosocial ritual of drinking, threatens to ruin the men but ultimately serves to solidify their masculinity and privilege. In the films, the episodic cycling through the homosocial rituals stabilizes the heteronormative system.

### **Beyond Straight White Men: Bachelor Parties, Men of Color, Gay Men of Color, and Women**

Because this dissertation is focused on “dominant” narratives of masculinity and male friendship, most of the texts considered herein depict friendships between white straight men. The relative popularity or cultural prestige accorded to the above examples is in many ways a measure of the white straight male hegemony in American narrative culture.<sup>58</sup> Still there are numerous other examples of bachelor and bachelorette party narratives that focus on men of color, including queer men of color, and women. Tim Story’s film *Think Like a Man Too* (2014), Donald Welch’s play/film *The Bachelor Party* (2011), and Patrik-Ian Polk’s film *Noah’s Ark: Jumping the Broom* (2008) all focus on social groups primarily made up of black men. These films and plays are characterized by small budgets and relatively small niche markets. *Think Like A Man Too* was, for example, a profitable film but was only forty-ninth in domestic gross.<sup>59</sup> They address themselves to a more politicized consideration of identity, which differentiate them from the previously considered texts. *The Hangover* films and Israel’s *Bachelor Party* are apolitical, in the sense that they leave uninterrogated the white straight masculinities of their lead characters. Mann and Chayefsky’s *The Bachelor Party* is concerned singularly with the white middle-class in a way that naturalized whiteness as the default cultural point of view. The films and play considered in this section demonstrate a challenge to unmarked white straight masculinity and imagine black masculinity in complex ways. However, *Think Like a Man Too* and *The Bachelor Party* also retain some of the misogynistic elements that were present in the earlier texts.

Tim Story’s film *Think Like a Man Too* is an intriguing example of a bachelor party film that explodes many of the narrow conceptions of the genre. To begin with, the film is actually about a bachelor party and a bachelorette party. A sequel to the 2012 *Think Like a Man*, *Think Like a Man Too* introduces six couples who arrive in Las Vegas for the wedding of Michael (Terrence J) and

Candace (Regina Hall). Each couple is wrestling with a personal conflict—anxieties over impending parenthood, a spouse’s philandering past, competing career paths, and so forth. At the beginning of the film’s second act, the men and women split up for separate parties, each of which leads to progressively wilder behavior, until the couples both end up at the same strip club. A brawl erupts after the Michael sees a male stripper giving Candace a lap dance, and everyone in the wedding party ends up in jail, which causes them to miss the scheduled wedding time. After a wild and drunken night, all of the couples’ conflicts are resolved. The wedding is rescheduled, one couple becomes engaged, and another couple embraces the prospect of having a child.

The film is multiracial: most of the characters are African American, and there are three white characters. For lack of a better word, the film imagines a post-racial vision of America, wherein a group of upper-middle-class, mixed-race friends (and one mixed race couple) can spend a lavish night in Sin City. Still, the film does not efface race or racial difference. One white character, the boring and portly Bennett (Gary Owen), mutters ridiculous questions that reflect his ignorance about black culture. The film’s gender politics are less utopian. It is a heterosexual, not heterosocial, film. Except for the relationships between straight couples, the men and women spend little time together. The film deserves praise for enacting a modicum of equality between the romantic partners. In *The Hangover* we only see the bride and bridesmaids in flashes. *Think Like a Man Too*, by contrast, represents both points of view in the couples’ conflicts, and the women create nearly as much havoc as the men do.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, as with other bachelor party texts, *Think Like a Man Too* repeatedly imagines masculinity and male friendship in a narrow way that often entails latent misogyny. The bachelor party is represented as a fantasy ritual that restores masculinity on the eve of the groom’s loss of masculine freedom. Significantly, the narrator, Cedric (Kevin Hart) arrives in Las Vegas without his wife, Gail (Wendy Williams), whom he imagines as a dragon lady. Gail appears in the film only

briefly, as Cedric ignores her calls. Gail is the epitome of a nagging wife who continually prevents Cedric from having fun. Cedric demonstrates rather casual sexism. For example, when he prepares to dive into the pool at Caesar's Palace, which is full of women in bikinis, Cedric says to his friends, "I'm about to get in the water with some titties." Cedric, characteristic of Kevin Hart's other roles, is a bombastic clown, who desperately seeks respect. Consequently, Cedric's hostility to his wife and flamboyant sexism is as exaggerated as everything else he does, but other men display similar heterosexist inclinations characteristic of the bachelor party genre. For example, when the men discuss their plans for the bachelor party, they observe how long it has been since they all spent time together, noting their various other commitments: work, relationships, weddings, and kids. Cedric chimes in: "Fellas, that's why we need to embrace this moment, because for one blissful night, gentlemen, we are free from all of our obligations... from all of our responsibilities... We're free from our women." The men heartily agree. When Michael, the groom, expresses a desire to have a low-key bachelor party, Zeke (Romany Malco) derisively asks him, "Did you remember to wax your vagina for the weekend? Think like a man! Just for five minutes." When Michael protests, Cedric says, "You're not acting like a man. You got the rest of your life to follow this woman around a grocery store." Thus, the film, despite its relatively inclusive character, reinscribes the fantasy that middle-class men are dominated by their wives and beset by their familial obligations, and that the bachelor party is a deserved night of freedom. Moreover, they articulate their need for freedom and their concomitant notion of masculinity in misogynistic and implicitly homophobic terms. Freedom from women and a temporary night of unrestrained partying are a necessary respite from domesticity.

We see a similar dynamic in Donald Welch's *The Bachelor Party* (2011), a film adaptation of his play by the same name. The film is a recording of a live performance of the play, with a few filmic devices inserted. The play takes place in one night, as Lance (Lamman Rucker) celebrates with his

friends before marrying his fiancée Michelle (Essence Atkins). As the play proceeds, various conflicts come to the surface between the mostly black men. Chris (Donn Swaby), in from Paris, is a closeted gay man, and another, Akeem (Keith Burke), menacingly expresses his suspicion that Chris is gay. When Chris does come out to Lance at the end of the play, Lance accepts him and declares that Chris is “family” no matter what. In a separate conflict, Reny (Christian Keyes) nearly comes to blows with Trey (Ginuwine), when Trey makes a series of racist comments about Reny’s Puerto Rican family. Mike (Brandon Fobbs), Michelle’s brother, prefers to date white women and offers racist and classist justifications for this preference. There are other conflicts, but, even if we consider only a handful of these conflicts, *The Bachelor Party* can be fundamentally differentiated from the previously considered bachelor and bachelorette party films because of its politicization of the relationships between the male characters. *The Bachelor Party* is clearly intended as a commercially entertaining theatre experience, but it regularly highlights “social issues” and the men’s relationships are explicitly mediated by racism, intra-racism, homophobia, and ableism.<sup>61</sup> Although all of the films considered in this chapter have *implicit* political commitments, most, especially those centered on white men, tend to suppress their political commitments, but *The Bachelor Party* makes its politics explicit. Having said this, as reviewer Travis Holder observed of the original stage production, one of the play’s main drawbacks is that it attempts to stuff too many conflicts and storylines into ninety minutes.<sup>62</sup>

*The Bachelor Party*, however, still participates in the misogyny characteristic of the bachelor party genre. First, *The Bachelor Party* carelessly features an erotic dancer. Trey hires La-La (Caryn Ward) to perform for the men. For three full minutes (which feels uncomfortably longer) La-La gyrates in a revealing leather corset. The men fling cash at her and grope her, as she dances and grinds on them. The audience laughs at La-La’s highly athletic performance and the men’s bug-eyed response and continuous catcalling. La-La is depicted as “low-class” and a petty thief. In this way

her relatively abject position as a stripper is naturalized, an inevitable consequence of who she is. More subtly than La-La, however, Michelle becomes the target of misogyny in the film. Akeem displays complete contempt for Michelle, accusing her of emasculating Lance and of “breaking up the family,” referring to the all-male group of friends. Later, Lance calls off the wedding when he discovers that Michelle used to work as a “dancer.” The next morning the men reassemble at the apartment. Nearly all is forgiven, as the men, particularly Lance, repeatedly asserts that the men are a family no matter what. The group provisionally ostracizes Akeem, for vengefully spiking Lance’s drink. Lance is a recovering alcoholic, but he seems convinced that he will come to forgive Akeem.<sup>63</sup> Lance is much less certain about the possibility of reconciling with Michelle, but this question appears secondary to the unwavering commitment to the homosocial male group. The film’s engagement with racism, intra-racism, homophobia, and ableism within the context of black male friendship is laudable, as are the brotherly bonds between the men, but their family-like bonds come at the expense of the women in the film: the collective objectification of La-La and Lance’s hypocritical rejection of Michelle for being a dancer. Narratively, the wedding seems to be merely the occasion for exploring the relationships between the men, with Michelle appearing briefly in two scenes. She certainly is not figured as shrew, the way Melissa is in *The Hangover*, but *The Bachelor Party* privileges male relationships over women. It revels in the exploitation of a woman from lower social classes and punishing women who violate gender norms.

Patrik-Ian Polk’s film *Noah’s Arc: Jumping the Broom* (2008) reworks the bachelor party trope in a completely new way. The film narrates the weekend in which a group of black gay men gather at a Martha’s Vineyard summer home for the wedding of Noah Nichols (Darryl Stephens) and Wade Robinson (Jensen Atwood). *Jumping the Broom* is based on the LOGO series *Noah’s Arc* (2005-06) and serves as a cinematic coda for the series. Like *The Bachelor Party* the film features numerous intragroup conflicts. The promiscuous Ricky (Christian Vincent) brings along Brandon (Gary LeRoi

Gray), a college student, but Ricky loses interest and begins cruising for another hookup. Ricky also confronts Noah about their unresolved romantic feelings. Brandon shows a more than academic interest in his professor Chance (Doug Spearman), even as Chance and his husband Eddie (Jonathan Julian) question the sustainability of their marriage. Alex (Rodney Chester) frantically tries to complete the wedding arrangements and sort out his conflicted feelings about his own marriage. As with *The Bachelor Party*, the plot is a bit over stuffed as love triangles proliferate. Like the television series out of which it grew, the film also deals with the politics of gay black men's lives. For example, Brandon calls his mother to tell her that he is gay. When she reacts badly, Brandon worries that he may not even be allowed to go home. Noah comforts him promising that Brandon will always have a place to stay "because now you're part of our family." The notion of "family" expressed here is similar to that offered by Welch's *The Bachelor Party*, but the family in *Jumping the Broom* is explicitly an alternative family designed to compensate for the loss of the normative family that cannot accept gay men.

Same-sex unions would seem to be incompatible with the sex-segregated ritual of a bachelor party, but two separate bachelor parties form in the middle of the film. Noah's core group of friends—Alex, Ricky, and Chance—stay at the summerhouse and drink. Wade, Eddie, and Brandon form another party at a local bar. This division actually recreates male-female segregation based on masculine and feminine gender-performance. The relatively "masculine" performing men—Wade, Eddie, and Brandon—go to the bar, while the relatively "feminine" men remain at the summer home. While the segregation superficially duplicates the bachelor party's gender segregation, the film actually uses it as an occasion to interrogate the challenges of gender performance for black gay men. The men at the bar opine about being attracted to or in relationships with relatively feminine men. The scene becomes a bit academic<sup>64</sup> as they deconstruct the very notion of what it means to be a "real man."<sup>65</sup> At the same time, the men back at the summerhouse become quite drunk. Noah calls

Wade's mother, only to find out that she does not know that Wade is gay, let alone that he is getting married to Noah. The influence of alcohol allows other repressed conflicts to come to surface: there are stolen kisses, infidelities, arguments, and recriminations. Paradoxically, these transgressions and blowups, however, allow the couples to renegotiate their relationships anew. The couples end the weekend stronger than they began it.

*Think Like a Man Too*, *The Bachelor Party*, and *Noah's Arc: Jumping the Broom* all reenact the basic structure of the bachelor party genre: a wild intoxicated evening leads to the disclosure and confrontation of suppressed conflicts, which once raised are able to rectify and thereby ensure that the couples can go forward with their lives. Yet, each to varying degrees presents a more progressive engagement with race, gender, and sexual identity than the white dominated instances considered previously. Misogyny and homophobia are still present in *Think Like a Man Too* in how the film represents the homosocial discourse between the male characters, even though the film includes the women's viewpoints. Welch's *The Bachelor Party*, on the other hand, privileges male camaraderie and fails to include a fully fleshed out woman. However, the play manages to express an inclusive, if anxious, attitude toward gay men. *Noah's Arc: Jumping the Broom* only briefly presents what might be called parallel bachelor parties, and the two parties reenact the segregation of gender. Still, the conversation about gender performance deconstructs the very segregation it enacts. Taken together, these three texts offer a rewriting of the bachelor party genre, which normally serves to vindicate white straight male power and privilege, even where they fail to fully interrogate their assumptions about gender and sexuality.

In addition to men of color and gay men, there are notable examples of women-centered films that incorporate elements of the bachelor party narrative. Paul Feig's *Bridesmaids* (2011), for example, was a hit comedy that incorporated zany gross-out humor, which had been the bread and butter of male dominated comedies. Notably *Bridesmaids* was directed by Paul Feig and produced by

Judd Apatow, two men who garnered critical acclaim working together on the cult television series *Freaks and Geeks* (1999-2000), which was centered on a smart young woman in high school. Yet, Apatow is most famous for his bromance films. *Bridesmaids* is similar to other women-centered projects he has produced, such as Lena Dunham's series *Girls* and Amy Schumer's film *Trainwreck*. The projects are significant, I would argue, because they allow women (as actors, writers, and show runners) to venture into territory traditionally reserved for men: explicit and crass discussions of sex, raunchy comedy, carnivalesque bodily functions, and antisocial behavior. *Sex and the City*, *The L Word*, *2 Broke Girls*, *Girls*, *Orange is the New Black*, *Broad City*, *Garfunkel and Oates*, and *Idiot'sitter* similarly violate norms of feminine behavior with raunchy and explicit drama and comedy.

*Bridesmaids* follows the basic formula of the bachelor party narrative, even though the actual bachelorette party never happens, because the main character Annie (Kristen Wiig) gets the whole party thrown off of their plane to Las Vegas. Yet, Annie's drug-induced delirium and the chaos that ensues on the plane—like the scene in which the bride and bridesmaids collectively lose control of their bowels from food poisoning—are cut from the same carnivalesque cloth as *The Hangover*. Like the bachelor party films, Annie's ridiculous misadventures lead to difficult confrontations with long-simmering conflicts and issues, ultimately leading to a happy resolution.

We can see a similar example in Leslye Headland's stage play *Bachelorette* (2010) and her 2012 film adaptation of the same name.<sup>66</sup> The film follows three friends—Regan (Kirsten Dunst), Gena (Lizzy Caplan), and Katie (Isla Fisher)—who have a rowdy adventurous night before their high school friend Becky's (Rebel Wilson) wedding. The three main characters secretly resent Becky, a heavysset girl, for being the first to get married. In particular, type-A career woman Regan can barely repress her bitterness. Gena and Katie are party girls, but Gena has a cynical and caustic wit, which is only sharpened by her penchant for cocaine; Katie is slow-witted and a sloppy drunk. The three women try to throw Becky an impromptu bachelorette party with a male stripper, but the party

comes to an abrupt halt when the stripper insults Becky. Regan, Gena, and Katie are left to drink, snort cocaine, and complain. They accidentally damage the wedding dress, and they begin a nightlong quest to repair and clean it before the morning. The adventure leads them on a series of sidetracks. Gena has a prolonged run-in with her high school boyfriend Clyde (Adam Scott). They argue and reminisce over their breakup. Clyde ends up proposing to Gena at the end of the film. Katie spends much of the night with the boringly handsome nice guy Joe (Kyle Bornheimer). She confesses to having attempted suicide, though she downplays it: “It was an accident. I really party too hard.” Katie and Joe’s night ends badly. Katie takes too much Xanax but is revived in time for the wedding, where she and Joe are reconciled. Regan, after having sex with the rakish Trevor in the bathroom of a strip club, has a heart to heart conversation with Becky, recollecting how they mutually supported one another in high school.

*Bachelorette* bares a substantial resemblance to *The Hangover*. Both films draw humor from the bacchanalian adventures of same-sex friends; both rely heavily on coarse humor; both feature strip clubs, drugs, and alcohol. However, the films are otherwise quite different. *Bachelorette* is a decidedly more acerbic and grim film than *The Hangover*. The comedy in *Bachelorette* is bleaker.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless the more important difference for the purposes of this chapter between *Bachelorette* and *The Hangover* is the narrative relationship between the drug and alcohol fueled bender and homosociality. In *The Hangover*, the men are never separated throughout the film, and Stu’s character development is the result of his re-masculinization as part of the homosocial adventure. In *Bachelorette*, the trio of protagonists separate and experience their individual climatic moments of self-realization independently. Gena and Katie’s storylines find resolution through their respective love interests. In one sense, *Bachelorette* seems to lose whatever feminist credentials it may have by hinging two of the three characters happiness on heterosexual coupling, but Regan and Becky reconcile. They have a sincere heart-to-heart about their eating disorders and mutual support they provided one another

throughout high school. In this regard, the film is fundamentally different than the blithe comedy of *The Hangover*. Even where the women characters find resolution through heterosexual coupling, they are only able to do so by becoming honest and vulnerable about their deep-seated problems and personal traumas. *The Hangover* films are centrally about the reclamation of masculine power through the experiences of homosocial adventure. *Bachelorette* is about acknowledging psychological vulnerability and pain and the need for emotional support and love.

## Conclusion

The bachelor party as narrative trope provides an acute example of the contradictory way American culture views masculinity, intoxication, and homosocial camaraderie. At the turn of the twentieth century, the saloon embodied the good and ill caused by drinking and male camaraderie outside the constraints of women's supervision. White masculinity was at once threatened and substantiated by excessive drink. Jack London saw in homosocial carousing the symbol of masculine freedom, even as he saw the saloon as the ultimate threat to manhood. If the saloon was a homosocial space of intoxication, an aberrant space in which the rules of middle class conduct were suspended, the bachelor party is an intoxicated homosocial ritual, which reanimates primal heteromascularity and satisfies the primal hunter-gatherer need for "male bonding." Examples of the bachelor party narrative demonstrate varying degrees of male victimhood narratives, in which white men are imagined as oppressed—oppressed by their female romantic partners, by their socio-economic betters, or by their middle-class responsibilities. The stag party then becomes a carnivalesque ritual that disrupts or even inverts the normative social order. Ultimately, however, these social disruptions serve only to reinstate normalcy: husbands return to their wives and weddings go forward. Where change actually occurs, it usually results in the shoring up of white male power. Sex workers are available for male exploitation; shrewish women are either cowed or

rejected. Occasionally, working class slobs best their higher-class antagonists, inverting class relations, but these victories hardly subvert the most obdurate social hierarchies. Sexist and boorish white straight louts usually triumph at the expense of women, and their success only reifies the relative degree of freedom white men have to break the law and otherwise transgress social norms. By definition the bachelor party is an exceptional circumstance, which exists for a short period of time, and its transgressions are contained. In this way we see how it differs from the later bromance films and television series, where male same-sex affection is imagined as a life-long relationship. Thus, while this dissertation takes a guardedly optimistic view of how American narrative culture had begun to reimagine male friendship, the bachelor party as explicitly homosocial ritual (much like homosocial institutions, such as fraternities and fraternal lodges) appears trapped in clichés of sexism, homophobia, and latent racial privilege.

Bachelor party narratives that include men of color demonstrate some progressive engagement with race, gender, sexuality, and other issues, though most retain elements of misogyny in their conception of hetero-masculinity. Conditions improve when women or gay men are included. The inclusion of gender, race, and sexual difference not surprisingly engenders self-reflective considerations of identity positions.

Where the primary characters are white straight men, the bachelor party story is almost inevitably prone to the pitfalls I have noted. Nevertheless, in concluding, let me point to some evidence for optimism, however small. To make this argument, I have to take a digression outside my defined area of American popular culture to look at an Irish film, John Butler's *The Stag* (released in the United States as *The Bachelor Weekend*, 2014). The film begins as the wedding of Fionnán (Hugh O'Connor) and Ruth (Amy Huberman) approaches. Fionnán is an uncharacteristic groom. He is avidly involved in the smallest details of wedding planning. The wedding coordinator is taken aback by Fionnán, whom she calls "metrosexual." Ruth, perhaps in part as a heterosexist reaction to

the wedding planner's accusation and in part to simply get Fionnán out of her hair, pleads with the best man Davin (Andrew Scott) to take the groom on a stag, or bachelor party. Davin arranges for a "walking holiday" (hiking), but the groom refuses, "Yeah! No. No way. No stags. Sorry.... I don't enjoy being in exclusively male company for long periods. There's something forced about it. And false. All that banter. I just—I mean, under what other circumstances would we five ever agree to be in a tent in the shitting rain in mid-November, all for the sake of some needless ritual?" Fionnán relents eventually. He and Davin invite along their fiends Simon (Brian Gleeson) and "the Kevins," a same-sex couple, "Little Kevin" (Michael Legge), Fionnán's bother, and "Big Kevin" (Andrew Bennett), all of whom are white Irishmen. From the start this stag is both post-feminist and post-closet: the inclusion of the Kevins certainly is *prima facie* evidence, but the other men are hardly models of normative masculinity. Fionnán is almost "effeminate"; Davin is a tightly wound academic with a perpetually broken heart; and Simon is a skittish tech nerd, whose company is on the rocks. Moreover, the men self-consciously reject the clichés of strip clubs and pub crawls. The walking-holiday stag eschews stereotypically masculine bachelor party, even the relatively tame but still macho examples discussed by Jane Gross, such as paintball.

Alas, the easygoing weekend is disrupted when Ruth insists that the men invite along her brother, a hyper-masculine loudmouth who goes almost exclusively by the nickname The Machine (Peter McDonald). Try as they might to ditch him, Fionnán and his friends cannot escape The Machine, who immediately scoffs at the hiking plan. The Machine makes offhanded homophobic comments, tries to bully the other men into a "traditional" stag, and pillories the other men with barbs directed at their lack of normative masculinity. He also serves as a wildcard figure, whose behavior forces the men into ridiculous and even perilous situations. He throws Davin's compass into a lake, accidentally sets their tent on fire, and leads the men running naked through the woods where they get lost without their clothes or camping gear. As with most bachelor party films, these

misadventures cause the men to confront latent conflicts. For example, Davin confesses that he is still in love with Ruth, Fionnán's fiancée. The two men wrestle ineffectually and Fionnán manages to punch Davin in the face. Eventually, both men get over their anger, and Davin offers a loving toast at the wedding reception. Similarly, Fionnán must confront his homophobic father, who has declared that he will not attend the wedding if Big Kevin is there. At the end of the weekend, Fionnán uncompromisingly tells his father that both Kevins will be at the wedding. At the wedding, his father makes a welcoming overture to Big Kevin. Even *The Machine* is transformed by the weekend trip. The other men convince him that he must formally apologize to and beg forgiveness from his wife for his stupid drunken behavior. *The Machine's* transformation is particularly important, as it contrasts with the masculine empowerment that Stu experiences in the *Hangover* movies. Where Stu must "man up," confront his bullies, and assert his hetero-masculine status, *The Machine* must humble himself and take responsibility for his drunken antics. The moment where the men attempt to address *The Machine's* rift with his wife is also fundamentally different than previous examples we have seen. First, rather than becoming aggressively drunk, they take MDMA (the pure form of the drug ecstasy). One of them comments that the drug "connects people to their softer, more feminine side." After taking the drug, Davin begins crying while singing an Irish love ballad, which everyone but Fionnán recognizes as an expression of his hidden love for Ruth. *The Machine* says that he feels like a blanket and offers to lie on top of Davin. *The Machine* confesses his financial trouble and that his wife has thrown him out of their house. Davin, who has up to this point displayed nothing but distaste for *The Machine*, even agrees to role-play with him as *The Machine's* wife. *The Machine* looks into Davin's eyes and tries to break through his hyper-masculine bravado in order to muster a genuine apology. Thus, where alcohol and other drugs tend to fuel more and more aggressively masculine behavior in most other bachelor party movies, MDMA allows the men to be genuinely vulnerable and, in their words, "feminine." The men do not end the

weekend more stereotypically masculine and able to assert their male prerogatives, but rather must confront their failures and vulnerabilities. The Machine admits his failings to his wife and seeks forgiveness; Simon openly confronts his failures in business, which he had been keeping secret; and Davin admits to his jealousy over Ruth. Fionnán comes closest to asserting his prerogative in confronting his father, but he does so in the name of same-sex romantic love, not to elevate his own personal power or masculinity.

It may be the case that Irish independent cinema, more than its American counterparts, is better able to produce a genuinely post-closet and post-feminist bachelor party film that interrogate white straight masculinity. Perhaps the economics or culture of filmmaking or the particular audience tastes of Ireland explain this difference. However, I will beg my reader's indulgence to consider one last example that hints at an American alternative. Alexander Payne's critically acclaimed indie movie *Sideways* (2004) hardly fits into the genre of bachelor party movies. The protagonist Miles (Paul Giamatti) takes his best friend Jack (Thomas Haden Church) to California's wine country for the weekend before Jack's wedding. While the trip is a sort of bachelor weekend, the absence of an extended friend group, with the request cast of types (the wildcard, the nice guy, the rogue, the straight man, etc.) sets *Sideways* apart and places it into the buddy film category. Likewise, perhaps in part because it is adapted from a novel, the comedic tone of *Sideways* is mostly dry, though it allows for a few shocking sight gags. Miles is a genuinely pathetic figure: a failed novelist and disgruntled high school teacher, who pines for his recently remarried ex-wife and has a habit of drinking too much and falling into grim depression. Jack, a washed up actor, similarly lacks the devilish charm of the rouges we have seen thus far (e.g., Phil in *The Hangover*). Miles's plans for the weekend include drinking wine, eating at nice restaurants, and playing golf, but Jack is downright menacing when he impatiently declares his intentions: "I'm going to get my nut on this trip, Miles, and you are not gonna fuck it up for me with all of your depression and anxiety and neg-head

downer shit.... And I am serious. Do not fuck with me, Miles. I am going to get laid before I get married on Saturday.” Jack proves to be ungrateful, a liar, mildly delusional, and narcissistic. Miles cannot quite fathom why they are even friends, except that they were college roommates. Thus, rather than cement the homosocial bounds between the two men and vindicate hetero-masculine privilege, the bachelor weekend leaves the two men alienated, and the film itself effectively satirizes Jack’s grime and repulsive philandering—and indeed the entire licentious bachelor weekend trope.

Neither *The Stag* or *Sideways* fit neatly into the American bachelor party genre. The former is decidedly Irish in its character and setting, and the latter dispenses with most of the conventions of the genre. Yet, both comedies provide examples of how the bachelor weekend as a trope in narrative culture can be reimagined to critique and interrogate white straight masculinity and homosocial bonds in a post-feminist and post-closet culture. They are, however, the exceptions that seem to prove the rule.

---

<sup>1</sup> Brady, “The Last Hurrah.”

<sup>2</sup> Gross, “Male Bonding, but No Strippers.”

<sup>3</sup> Tiger, *Men in Groups*. We can see the “socio-biological” essentialist argument for male bonding in latent in Jack London’s discussion of the saloon, which I will discuss below. London compares the homosocial space of the saloon to ritual spaces of “primitive” men, as if such spaces are necessary to an essential aspect of primitive masculinity, as opposed to “civilized” masculinity. London, *John Barleycorn*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Chayefsky, *The Bachelor Party*.

<sup>5</sup> The bachelor party texts I will consider later in this chapter often deal as much with drug use as alcohol, and I am concerned with intoxication as much as alcohol per se. However, alcohol is

---

present in most of the texts considered herein and forms a clearer line of connection with texts from before the mid-twentieth century.

<sup>6</sup> Parsons, *Manhood Lost*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> In one series, entitled *The Bible and Temperance*, a bachelor friend, William White, persuades his married friend, Henry Brown, “to go out with him and make a merry night of it.” Brown and his family are ruined by drink, but he is restored when he overhears a minister reading to his wife from the bible. A lithograph series entitled *The Progress of Intemperance* follows a similar trajectory of an upstanding man tempted into drunkenness, but this narrative ends more tragically with a “ruined family” and the protagonist set upon by highwaymen. N. Currier (firm), *The Bible and Temperance* and *The Progress of Intemperance*.

<sup>8</sup> McConachie, “American Theatre in Context,” 162.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, *The Drunkard, or The Fallen Saved*. The play is delightfully parodied in *The Old Fashioned Way* (1934, starring W.C. Fields) as a cookie-cutter sentimental melodrama, where the villain wears black.

<sup>10</sup> Likewise, in lithographic temperance tracts the seduction of alcohol is homosocial in nature. *The Progress of Intemperance* begins with a plate entitled “The Invitation to Drink,” in which a well-dressed middle-class man is persuaded by a group of disheveled inebriates to join them in the tavern. In *The Bible and Temperance*, Brown’s single friend White lures Brown out for a night on the town. N. Currier (firm), *The Bible and Temperance* and *The Progress of Intemperance*.

<sup>11</sup> Through the nineteenth century public drinking became more homosocial, leisurely, and associated with the saloon. As Claybaugh notes, “Throughout the seventeenth century and much of the eighteenth, drinking was frequent and alcohol was abundant.” Claybaugh, “Temperance,” 1153. Alcohol was omnipresent, including in the work place. Yet, as distilled alcohol, as opposed to fermented beer or cider, become cheap and abundant, alcohol, once drunk as part of the regular workday, was removed to the post-work leisure space of the saloon. Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 75.

<sup>13</sup> Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>15</sup> London, *John Barleycorn*.

<sup>16</sup> Mitchell, “Naturalism and Languages of Determinism,” 524–45.

<sup>17</sup> Parsons, *Manhood Lost*, 54–6.

<sup>18</sup> As Murdock explains, “For the women who spoke in favor of prohibition and of suffrage were not describing simply a saloon-free America but were arguing for elimination of the entire

---

masculine culture that made institutions such as the saloon possible.” Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 41.

<sup>19</sup> D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 152.

<sup>20</sup> London reiterates this point about the saloon as portal to adventure later in the memoir: “I wanted to go to sea. I wanted to get away from monotony and the commonplace. I was in the flower of my adolescence, a thrill with romance and adventure, dreaming of wild life in the wild man-world. Little I guessed how all the warp and woof of that man-world was entangled with alcohol” (27).

<sup>21</sup> London’s rhetoric soars when he discusses his time with the “oyster pirates,” poachers who stole from privately owned oyster farms, whom London describes as “adventurers who refused to be slaves to petty routine, who flouted restrictions and the law, who carried their lives and their liberty in their hands” (39). He contrasts the “bohemianism” of the oyster pirates with his previous employment “sitting at my machine, in the stifling, shut-in air, repeating, endlessly repeating, at top speed, my series of mechanical motions.” (Cf. 117-21, for the infernal description of London’s time as a “fireman,” shoveling coal into a furnace.) Piracy was the very stuff of boyhood fantasy. Like the cowboy, prospector, or gunman of the “western frontier” or seaman from Melville’s nautical stories and novels, London becomes an adventurer in his own backyard by joining up with petty thieves. Rejecting the narrowness of domesticity and the emasculating repetition of industrial wage labor, piracy offered danger and adventures, proof of a particular brand of male virtue, which would otherwise be wise. London gained access to all of this through the saloon.

<sup>22</sup> Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 222–46.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 18, 22–3. Cf. Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 22-5, 222–46.

<sup>25</sup> Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 15. Parsons similarly observes “many Americans saw the saloon as both confirming and threatening manhood. The very qualities that marked the saloon as a quintessentially manly space—the rawness of the exchanges among its patrons and its homosociality—simultaneously threatened manhood.” Parsons, *Manhood Lost*, 58. Rotundo also notes this same paradox:

In some all-male settings, the pressure to drink was so strong that liquor consumption became a badge of manhood. Ironically, then, the flaws of character that led to failure came either from an excess of manhood or a deficiency of it: in a symbolic system that identified the aggressive passions as male, an unusually strong desire to drink or otherwise debauch oneself was both masculine and a hindrance to success. On the other hand, the traits associated with habitual drinking—passivity, submissiveness, and a want of energy and self-assertion—were marks of insufficient manhood and a hindrance to success. Being a man, then, meant more than suppressing “female” qualities and encouraging “male” ones. It also meant strict control of some “male” impulses and encouragement of others. A man who failed at this task paid a high price, which a nineteenth-century newspaper described with unsparring

---

candor: “If we have not the will to avoid contempt, misery and disgrace, we deserve neither relief nor compassion.” Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 180.

<sup>26</sup> D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 198.

<sup>27</sup> Even some “drys,” or Prohibition advocates, saw their class’s mode of moderate alcohol consumption as categorically different from “drinking.” Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 66.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 107–9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 172. In effect, alcohol became a routine part of many middle class homes, and male drinking became more “feminized,” even as women’s drinking became more masculinized (*Ibid.*, 170). The domestication of drink would continue into the mid-twentieth century: “By the mid-1960s, two-thirds of all alcohol was drunk in homes and private clubs rather than restaurants, public bars, or night clubs.” *Ibid.*, 165. Cf. Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar*, 236. The domestication of drinking was perhaps the most effective assault on the homosocial rituals and institutions of nineteenth century drinking culture. In the post-war era, geography would also play a role in the demise of the all-male drinking establishment. As Stephen Bryers explains, “the neighborhood bar came under pressure from Americans changing lifestyles, especially the growth of suburbs, which frequently has no place for taverns.” Bryers, “Saloons and Taverns (United States),” 624.

<sup>30</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 253.

<sup>31</sup> “Women’s presence in the barroom would remain contentious for the next forty years. Some of the better bars and hotels instituted men-only policies,” writes Christine Sismondo, and some states and municipal authorities, as well as unions, would ban women from working in bars. Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar*, 240.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Don Marquis writing in 1935 specifically lamented the new “open” quality of the bar and the loss of the cloistered saloon—precisely what reformers found suspicious about these all male spaces, their capacity to provide cover for vice, was what Marquise mourned. Women, however, posed the greatest existential threat to the old order. He writes,

The last barrier is down; the citadel has been stormed and taken. There is no longer any escape, no harbor of refuge, no haven, no sanctuary, no hiding place, no hole or corner, no burrow nor catacomb, no nook amongst the ruins of civilization, where the hounded male may seek his fellow and strut his stuff, safe from the atmosphere and presence of femininity. A man might as well do his drinking at home, with his wife and daughters; and there never was any fun in that.

In Marquis’s writing what ruins the bar is not simply the presence of women but the observation of the maternal and spousal gaze which renders men’s actions subject to their appraisal. Again and again we run into an incoherent figuring of women as both the moral conscience of men, without whom men would be doomed to uncivilized brutishness, and as the nagging kill-joys, who rob men of their fundamental right to be homosociality independent of that civilizing influence. Marquis, “Her Foot Is on the Brass Rail.”

---

<sup>33</sup> De facto sex segregated drinking spaces remained part of the American landscape throughout the twentieth century but would become less common, especially as lawsuits brought by women's rights organizations challenged public laws and private gender restricts. Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar*, 246–7. Cf. Davis, "Men's Clubs," 299–301.

<sup>34</sup> In the same year, *Goodyear's* sister program *The Philco Television Playhouse*, produced *Marty*, another collaboration by Mann and Chayefsky. *Marty* was perhaps the most celebrated of the Golden Age teleplays. It was subsequently adapted into an Academy Award winning feature film in 1955.

<sup>35</sup> For more on the production history of *The Bachelor Party* see "The Bachelor Party (1957)." Kerbel, "The Golden Age of TV Drama," 12–15.

<sup>36</sup> Chayefsky, *The Bachelor Party*.

<sup>37</sup> Attwood, Leonard, and Moskin, *The Decline of the American Male*.

<sup>38</sup> The feature film adaptation courted more scandal than the telefilm and, in this regard, has more in common with the carnivalesque films that succeeded it. In the film, the bachelor party roams more freely through the city streets. The men watch a stag film, and Charlie very nearly commits adultery with a beatnik woman he meets in Greenwich Village. The groom, who admits to being a virgin, is taken to a prostitute, but he backs out at the last minute. The film even addresses abortion in fairly explicit terms. See "The Bachelor Party (1957)."

<sup>39</sup> See for example chapter one and the discussion of *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, which features a "trannie" stereotype. See also below the discussion of the transgender stripper in *The Hangover 2*.

<sup>40</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 18.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–26.

<sup>43</sup> Harbidge, "Redefining Screwball and Reappropriating Liminal Spaces," 5-16.

<sup>44</sup> This argument could also be framed within the larger critique of the theory of the carnivalesque. To whatever extent the bachelor party, or specific representations of it, fit the carnivalesque framework, there are independent reasons to be cautious about seeing it as "subversive" or genuinely "transgressive." As Stallybrass and White explain, scholars have long critiqued the notion that the carnival and carnivalesque events can be genuinely subversive because the carnival is by definition circumscribed temporally and by the auspices under which it operates. The carnival is a sanctioned, however ambiguously, and it is bounded by its relationship to Lent. Analogously, the bachelor party is circumscribed by its relationship to the wedding ceremony. At the risk of being overly simplistic, rituals by their nature are conservative in that they play a prescribed role in the unchanging cycle of social norms. Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 13–18.

---

<sup>45</sup> *The Hangover Part III* does not contain any representations of a bachelor party and, thus, is left out of the main discussion of this paper. However, I will briefly observe here that the third film ends with the final unattached member of the “wolf pack,” Alan, getting married to a woman he meets half way through the film.

<sup>46</sup> Doug, the groom, is absent from half the film and is little more than a McGuffin. Thus, I do not count him among the main characters.

<sup>47</sup> Stu is terrified of his latent demon, which emerges when he is blackout intoxicated and threatens to ruin his life. He fears Teddy is lost and that his wedding will be canceled. Stu is willing to give up at one point, explaining, “Look at what I’ve done, Phil. What I do. I have a weakness for prostitutes. All kinds, apparently. I have a demon in me!... Teddy’s gone, but I can still save Lauren. Just let her live her life without me.... [I’m] gonna stay here in Bangkok. I think I belong here.”

<sup>48</sup> The basic idea I am exploring here—how the desubjectifying effects of intoxication can actually lead to a reconsolidation of the patriarchal subject—is heavily indebted to David Savran’s analysis of reflexive sadomasochism in *Taking It Like a Man*, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

<sup>49</sup> Here we may also connect this phenomenon to Jane Ward’s observation that homosexual sex between straight white men can remarkably be qualified so as to dissipate any threat to their identity claim of straightness. See the brief discussion of Ward’s book *Not Gay* in the introduction.

<sup>50</sup> Adams, “Thailand: Human Rights Watch Letter on UN Human Rights Council Candidacy”; U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, “2008 Human Rights Report: Thailand.”

<sup>51</sup> Lawrence, “‘Hangover’ Movies Have Been a PR Bonanza for Caesars, Vegas”; Verrier, “Las Vegas Is Placing Its Bets on Hollywood.”

<sup>52</sup> It is worth noting how often the victims of the men’s drunken adventure are people of color. Leslie Chow (Ken Jeong), an effeminate Asian-American criminal, is kidnaped by the men in the first film and locked in the trunk of a car. In the second film, he appears to die from a drug overdose, is left in an ice machine, and then is arrested. “Black Doug” (Mike Epps), an African-American drug dealer, is kidnaped by Chow in the first film. In the second film, Lauren’s sister, Teddy (Mason Lee), loses his finger and is left for a day in a broken elevator. Teddy is a gifted cello player, but he inexplicably seems happy about what has happened to him, even though it will prevent him from playing the cello again. The men kidnap a Thai Buddhist monk; they also start a riot in a crowded Bangkok street market and shoot up a strip club.

<sup>53</sup> Savran, *Taking It like a Man*, 33.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 204–5.

<sup>55</sup> Savran writes that reflexive sadomasochism “has been produced in response to five historical events: the reemergence of the feminist movement; the loss of the Vietnam War; the limited success of the civil rights movement in effecting a redress of gross historical inequities through affirmative action legislation; the rise of the lesbian and gay movements; and, perhaps most

---

important, the end of the post–World War II economic boom and a resultant and steady decline in the income of white working- and lower-middle-class men.” *Taking It Like a Man*, 190-1.

<sup>56</sup> Dewey, “Inside the ‘Manosphere’ That Inspired Santa Barbara Shooter Elliot Rodger”; Blake, “Mad Men.”

<sup>57</sup> Savran, *Taking It like a Man*, 195.

<sup>58</sup> Mann and Chayefsky’s *The Bachelor Party* is part of the prestigious Golden Age telefilm canon and was successful enough to be adapted into a feature film. Israel’s *Bachelor Party* was not a hit, but its domestic gross put it in the top twenty films of 1984. See “1984 Domestic Grosses.” Phillips’ *The Hangover* was a smash hit that spawned two sequels. Jack London remains one of the most prominent writers of the turn of the century, and *John Barleycorn* remains in print.

<sup>59</sup> “2014 Domestic Grosses.”

<sup>60</sup> The bridesmaids even create an itinerary for the bachelorette party, entitled “Candace’s Rite of Passage,” which lists off acts such as, “Flash your breasts from a moving vehicle,” “Do multiple shots,” and “Get a lap dance.”

<sup>61</sup> Sometimes the play raises social issues in a ham-handed manner. For example, Reny talks about his sister who has Down’s syndrome. The weighty issues crops up suddenly because Trey makes an ableist comment about her. Reny has a far too earnest speech about his sister in which he reveals that she was raped. Then just as suddenly the play moves on from this topic, which is not revisited through the rest of the play.

<sup>62</sup> Holder, “Bachelor Party.”

<sup>63</sup> He tells Reny, who is still mad about Trey’s comments about his sister and his family, “Dude, in time, all this is gonna just kind of washout. I mean, Akeem’s got his demons, we know that, and Trey is Trey, but, Reny, I know for a fact that there’s nothing Trey wouldn’t do for you, man—and you for him.” Again, the transgressions of the men will inevitably be forgiven, confirming the solidarity of the homosocial group, even as similar transgressions will not be forgiven for the women in the play.

<sup>64</sup> For example, Brandon remarks, as if quoting from his gender studies textbook, “But what about the whole top-bottom thing? Isn’t that kind of limiting? Kind of like a parody of heterosexual relationships?”

<sup>65</sup> Brandon bristles at the heteronormative notions of masculinity in his age group. He tells Wade, “It’s like all the guys my age are so negative about anything that’s different, and if you’re not walking around in a wife-beater with your pants hanging off your ass, then...” Wade interjects, “Then you’re not a real man.” Brandon continues, “Exactly! We’re all supposed to be 50 Cent or Terrell Owens, and, if you don’t fit that mold, you don’t even deserve to exist.” Wade replies, “You know what, man, it’s like this. It takes a lot more courage to be yourself, when who you happen to be is somebody that a lot of ignorant mother fuckers got a problem with. But don’t get it twisted. Noah, he’s ten times braver than I’ll ever be.” The final line firmly deconstructs the heteronormative hierarchy of masculine over feminine masculinities.

---

<sup>66</sup> For more about the original off-Broadway play see Isherwood, “A Bride’s Best Friends for Never.”

<sup>67</sup> This becomes clear with a simple comparison of the two films’ respective casts: Stu’s dysfunctional relationship with Melissa is pathetically funny, whereas Gena’s drug habit is genuinely frightening; Phil’s ironic and bemused distance places him above the fray, whereas Regan frantically attempts to hold it together; Alan’s deadpan weirdness (which occasionally takes on an eerie psychotic quality) is always played for comic effect, whereas Katie’s vapid scatterbrained comments elicit grim laughter, especially as we see how genuinely self-destructive she is.

**Chapter Four**  
**A Tenderness Which was Uncommon:**  
**Melancholy, Male Friendship, and Narratives of Maturity**

**Introduction**

In 1965 literary critic Leslie Fiedler published his now-infamous essay “The New Mutants” in *The Partisan Review*. The essay lambasted the New Left and counterculture, particularly the Berkeley Free Speech Movement. Fiedler’s essay is particularly notable for my purposes because of how it accuses the youth movement of being a “revolt against masculinity” and the demands of maturity.<sup>1</sup> He writes that what student activists

...were protesting in large part, I have come to believe, was the very notion of man which the universities sought to impose upon them: that bourgeois-Protestant version of Humanism, with its view of man as justified by rationality, work, duty, vocation, maturity, success; and its concomitant understanding of childhood and adolescence as a temporarily privileged time of preparation for assuming those burdens. The new irrationalists, however, are prepared to advocate prolonging adolescence to the grave, and are ready to dispense with school as an outlived excuse for leisure.<sup>2</sup>

Not coincidentally, Fiedler’s critique is rife with homophobic languages and disparagement of the “feminized” and “antimale” counterculture man, who attacks “the bourgeois family” and marriage.<sup>3</sup> It is not hard to see in Fiedler’s sentiments a reflection of the broader national divide that marked the 1960s. The countercultural imagined itself the antithesis of bourgeois conformity, and critics saw it as an aberrant betrayal of bedrock social norms. Equally interesting, however, is how the article intertwines normative masculinity, heterosexuality, maturity, and responsibility. Becoming a man is a total process that converts the adolescent boy into a man. Adolescence, a period marked by a lack of responsibility, is transfigured into adulthood, wherein a man takes on the “burdens” of work, marriage, and social reproduction. For Fiedler, “beatniks or hipsters, layabouts and drop-outs” had refused adult manhood. They threatened to prolong “adolescence to the grave” and blur the boundaries between the genders, upsetting the fundamental tenants of social sustainability.

A recurring theme in this dissertation has been the relationships between narratives of masculinity and maturity. Specifically, I have noted how hetero-masculine development entails disavowing, or deprioritizing, same-sex relationships in favor of heterosexual coupling. Another related theme is how this heteronormative progression is inextricably bound up with the larger project of social reproduction. The “straight circuit” provides a model for how hetero-masculine development is “scripted” to run through cyclical patterns. In many ways these scripts help to explain why the ideologies of masculinity are so contradictory. Within narrative culture we see how these contradictory aspects are held together by “chrononormative” stages of development, which allow young white men to behave in ways that are ostensibly contrary to the image of the responsible mature male. White middle-class heterosexual men had, and largely continue to have, a particular degree of liberty associated with their adolescence. Not only does their relative financial privilege allow for a longer period of “emerging adulthood,” particularly in college, but they typically are allowed greater leeway in their transgressive behaviors. For example, white men are less likely to be prosecuted for drug possession and other crimes than African-American men, even as research suggests that black and white men have roughly equivalent rates of drug use.<sup>4</sup> White middle-class men may engage in aberrant behavior with significantly less fear of legal consequences. Jane Ward has persuasively argued that “straight” white men can even “draw on the resources of white privilege... to both normalize and exceptionalize” homosexual acts, in a way that black men cannot.<sup>5</sup> Fiedler’s article describes a similar set of expectations for white college-age men. Early adulthood is, in his estimation, a period in which some latitude is given to these men (implicitly white middle-class men). A reciprocal obligation is created for these men: having enjoyed the liberties of early adulthood, they must in turn take up the mantle of adulthood with all of its burdens and responsibilities. Failure to do so threatens the most basic social structures of American culture. The threat is not merely to the institution of marriage or economic productivity but also to the basic

norms of sex and gender. When young men “grow up,” becoming hetero-masculine subjects, they disavow childish things and accept the pain that accompanies that loss.

In this chapter, I will consider narratives of masculine maturity as one mode of heteronormative enculturation, which structure the representations of male friendships in adolescence. The unifying theme of the texts I will consider is that the stories contain (a) the death of a best friend and (b) some sort of allusion to homosexual sex or homoerotic desire on the part of the protagonist, which is never confirmed or is expressed in only a veiled manner. Building on the work of Eric Tribunella, I argue that a pervasive script shapes these narratives; the script demands that young men disavow their affection for same-sex partners in favor of heterosexual bonds and bourgeois maturity. This transition marks a movement from adolescent homosocial irresponsibility to adulthood, which entails economic productivity and sexual reproduction. Often this narrative is structured by the death of a best friend, a same-sex love object whose death provides a traumatic occasion of the *reorientation* of the young man. Successfully coping with the trauma entails this reorientation from adolescent homosociality (and perhaps homoeroticism) to “chromonormative” orientation. Chromonormative orientation means that these young men dispense with their dreamy adolescent homosocial world and face cold hard adult reality. I will examine how this narrative of normalization through trauma succeeds or fails in two mid-century texts: John Knowles’ *A Separate Peace* (1959) and Tennessee Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). Then I will examine how Stephen Chbosky’s *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999), a more recent example, attempts to rewrite this narrative by offering a “bisexual” romance, in which the “straight” male protagonist navigates his adolescent trauma and the loss of a best friend through a triangulated relationship with a gay man and straight woman. The effect of which is to constitute a post-closet narrative of male maturity, which does not require the ritual sacrifice of the homosocial/erotic partner, but rather makes the homosocial/erotic partner an essential feature of surviving trauma and transitioning to adulthood.

### *A Separate Peace: Male Maturity and the Disavowal of Queer Desire*

John Knowles coming-of-age novel *A Separate Peace* (1959) provides one of the most interesting fictional accounts of male friendship of mid-twentieth century. The novel recounts the experiences of Gene, the studious and hardworking narrator, and his best friend, the athletic and charismatic Phineas, or Finny at their fictional boarding school, Devon. Their friendship takes a dark turn when Gene comes to believe that he and Finny are locked in perpetual competition. The dark rivalry turns out to be a mirage. Gene must work hard to excel academically, while Finny's athletic superiority is effortless and natural. Far from being in competition with Gene, Finny is in a league of his own. His pride wounded, Gene causes Finny to fall from a tree and shatter his leg, ending his athletic domination. Over the remainder of the novel, Gene struggles with guilt, but the two become ever closer, until Finny dies suddenly as a result of a second break in his leg.

*A Separate Peace* has been a staple of the American young-adult (YA) cannon and was widely assigned to middle and high school students at least into the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the novel is notable for what some reading communities have characterized as “its ‘underlying theme’ of homosexuality.”<sup>7</sup> It has been banned in some localities on grounds that it “encourages homosexuality.”<sup>8</sup> James McGavran, in his article “Fear’s Echo and Unhinged Joy: Crossing Homosocial Boundaries in *A Separate Peace*,” exhaustively catalogues—almost to the point of absurdity—the textual evidence for a queer reading of Knowles’s novel.<sup>9</sup> How then does a novel replete with homoerotic subtext become a staple of adolescent literary education at a time when nearly any mention of LGBTQ peoples was controversial even in some of America’s most liberal cities.<sup>10</sup> Or, to frame the question in the opposite way, how could a classic coming-of-age novel suddenly be perceived as, not only depicting homoeroticism, but encouraging homosexuality?

The explanation for this is at least partly historical. As cultural representations of gay identities became more common in the later twentieth century, it became harder to ignore the role of sexuality in the novel. At the same time, I would argue that part of the reason why *A Separate Peace* had slipped under the radar is that it actually enacts a heteronormative narrative that is designed to accommodate homoerotic desire. That is, the novel allows for the latent expression of homoerotic desire but then purges that desire by killing off the erotic object. The latent manifestation of homoeroticism between Gene and Finny is purged in keeping with the Western tradition of narrative catharsis (literally in the original Greek, *katharsis* meaning purgation), in which a threatening thing is allowed to manifest and threaten the social order only to be removed, allowing for the restoration of social order.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, in *A Separate Peace* this purgation is enacted in a particular manner. Finny dies but he does not disappear. Rather, he is integrated into Gene's fantasmatic self. Gene notes, reflecting on Finny's funeral, "I did not cry even when I stood watching him being lowered into his family's straight-laced burial ground outside of Boston. I could not escape a feeling that this was my own funeral, and you do not cry in that case" (194). While the erotic possibilities of Finny's physical body are erased by his death, Gene fantasmatically incorporates Finny's body into his own. Earlier in the novel, even before Finny's death, Gene experiences a loss of self: "I lost part of myself to him then, and a soaring sense of freedom revealed that this must have been my purpose from the first: to become a part of Phineas" (85). This act of internalization and identification removes the threat of homoeroticism by eliminating the other same-sex term from the erotic equation, but this process also internalizes homoeroticism, transfiguring it into autoeroticism. The erotic pleasure afforded by Finny's body—and the attendant threat of queer desire—becomes structured into the fantasmatic constitution of Gene's hetero-masculine self.

Eric Tribunella in his *Melancholia and Maturation: The Use of Trauma in American Children's Literature* uses Knowles' novel as a prime example of a particular pattern in YA fiction which imagines trauma, particularly experiences of death and "irrevocable loss," as an important part of the maturation process. He writes,

...American children's literature turns time and again to that which is traumatic as a way of provoking or ensuring the development of children. The striking recurrence of this pattern suggests that children's literature, and indeed American culture, relies on the contrived traumatization of children—both protagonists and readers—as a way of representing and promoting the process of becoming a mature adult. It is as if loss generates the escape velocity of youth.<sup>12</sup>

Tribunella examines various examples of the trauma-as-maturation pattern in YA literature. *A Separate Peace* demonstrates how traumatic loss can force *heteronormative* maturation. The death of a same-sex male partner eliminates the possibility of physical intimacy and preserves the "innocence" of the bond, while forcing the protagonist into the difficult process of displacing residual homoerotic desire in favor of heterosexual normalcy.<sup>13</sup> Tribunella explains that "the surviving boy uses the loss of a queer friend to achieve certain developmental accomplishments that signal maturity," and "teachers have been encouraged to make use of the novels themselves, either explicitly or by implication, to instruct students in a number of lessons regarding proper adult gender, sexuality, and ethical conduct." All of this operates "to construct productive adult citizens."<sup>14</sup> In *A Separate Peace* the intimacy between Gene and Finny needs to manifest before it can be repressed and reconfigured as identification.

Tribunella draws heavily on Judith Butler's elaboration of the Oedipal complex and the idea of melancholic gender identification. The traditional Freudian understanding of the Oedipal complex imagines that the incest taboo interdicts the male child's desire for his mother, forcing decathexis from the mother and the redirection of his libidinal cathexis to other female objects outside the family. In this way, the Oedipal complex is a kind of mourning. Following the loss of the mother as an erotic object, the male child must redirect his desires to an appropriate love object.

Judith Butler has argued that a similar process must occur between father and son. The polymorphously perverse child feels not only erotic affection for the mother but for the father, and this desire too must be repressed. The repression of this desire, however, cannot follow the pattern of mourning, as this would entail finding a substitute same-sex love object, violating the proscription against homosexual desire. The loss of the father is not mourned; rather it is repressed through a process that resembles melancholia. In melancholia, the subject *identifies* with the lost love object and directs sadistic feelings toward the self.<sup>15</sup> Butler argues that the process of repressing desire for the father in male children results in an internalization, or introjection, of the father as lost love object, integrating the father into the child's ego. The repression of infantile homoeroticism and the constitution of the masculine fantasmatic body are symbiotic goals united through the melancholia process.<sup>16</sup> Gender identity in the putatively heterosexual subject is founded upon a melancholic incorporation of the lost same-sex object of desire. Psychic introjection of lost love objects undergirds the constitution of the masculine self. Importantly this lost love object cannot be grieved as such but must be renounced, and homosexual desire must be compulsively and repeatedly renounced.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the melancholic renunciation of same-sex desire can be enacted throughout the life of the young adult, and, indeed, young men are expected to renounce their homosocial bonds in favor of heterosexual bonds in order to mature and develop into biologically and economically reproductive adults.

Tribunella applies this analysis to YA literature, but he sees *A Separate Peace* as one of the clearest examples. Gene refuses to mourn Finny's loss; he instead internalizes Finny. He does not cry at the funeral, for example, because it feels like his own funeral, having introjected Finny into his own ego. Tribunella writes, "If masculinity is achieved through a heterosexuality predicated on the renunciation of the homosexual attachment, then same-sex desire serves as the necessary possibility that allows for its renunciation. A heterosexual man thus becomes the man he 'never' loved and

‘never’ grieved, and his masculinity is founded upon the refusal to acknowledge this love and its incorporation as an identification within his ego.”<sup>18</sup> Paradoxically, homosexual desire is a precondition for the constitution of the hetero-masculine self.

The exact nature of Gene’s desire toward Finny is unclear, necessarily so because the desire can only be expressed in latent terms, in a sort of psychological plausible deniability. Gene’s identification with Finny—his admiration for his charisma and affability and his awe for Finny’s physical ideality—amounts to a desire to possess Finny’s body. The desire to possess is equivocal between intimate physical possession and the possession that comes from identification, which introjects the love object. Identification is grounded in a pleasure taken in Finny’s body as an object; it is also grounded in the most literal sense of “attraction,” the desire to be near. The distinction between identification and erotic desire is largely collapsed in the process of heterosexual masculine identity formation, because the body of the love object is internalized or introjected into the subject’s own body. The development of Gene as a hetero-masculine subject depends on first being attracted to Finny. The loss of Finny and the refusal to grieve him, allows Gene to introject Finny as part of his ego, to fully possess him without the risk of erotic implications. In this way, the novel plays out one version of the straight circuit: the movement *through* homosocial (bordering on homoerotic) desire as a youth before returning to heterosexual maturity and the bourgeois domestic future it entails.

We can see the countervailing impulses in the novel’s brooding nostalgia. Gene’s recollection of the adolescent homosocial world of Devon oscillates between fear and joy. In the opening chapter, Gene, speaking as the adult narrator who is revisiting Devon, discovers preserved “like stale air in an unopened room” the pervasive fear “which had surrounded and filled those days,” but he also is reminded of “unhinged, uncontrollable joy which had been [fear’s] accompaniment and opposite face” (10). As is perhaps integral to the memoir genre, *A Separate Peace* is replete with a

deep nostalgia that is at once painful and elated. Beyond the heady theorization of psychoanalysis, we can recognize a rather commonplace fact: that growing up and growing older are inherently marked by loss. Yet, Knowles' novel, with all of its gauzy recollections of the school in slightly dreamy terms, is also infused with utter dread. The dread reflects Gene's guilt over his friend's death but also the deep homophobic anxiety that festers in Gene's psyche.

Devon, conjured through the lens of Gene's anxious nostalgia, feels in many ways like an Eden about to be shattered by original sin. Finny's charisma and imagination has the power to transform Devon into an alternative universe, where the violent horrors of the Second World War are denied. Infinitely distant from Devon and yet touching every part of it, the war is perhaps the dialectical opposite of Finny's Devon. Finny, in what at times seems almost like a mad delusion, refuses to believe that the war is real. He dismisses it as a conspiracy by "old fat men" to keep young people "in their place" (115). Finny's denial amounts to a doomed Oedipal battle with grownups and reality itself. Gene observed at the end of the novel that Finny had

a way of sizing up the world with erratic and entirely personal reservations, letting its rocklike facts sift through and be accepted only a little at a time, only as much as he could assimilate without a sense of chaos and loss.... He possessed an extra vigor, a heightened confidence in himself, a serene capacity for affection which saved him. Nothing as he was growing up at home, nothing at Devon, nothing even about the war has broken his harmonious and natural unity. So at last I had. (202-1)

Finny's willful ignorance of the facts allowed him to create a homosocial utopia that rejected the bloody fact of the war and, as important, to turn a blind eye to Gene's culpability in his fall from the tree. Finny's death forecloses homoerotic desire but also destroys the beautiful delusions that Finny conjured into existence, thrusting Gene into a brutal confrontation with reality. Indeed, Finny's death follows the mock trial organized by their schoolmate Brinker. Brinker insists on getting "all the facts" about Finny's fall (177). Brinker initiates the trial to bring Finny face to face with the reality of his disability and implicitly the realities of the world around him (160-1). The crushing

blow of reality, coming face to face with Gene's culpability, kills Finny in body and in spirit—and with him goes the alternate reality he had created.

Finny's infectious fantasy, which escapes the realities of the war, also permeates Gene's recollections of Devon itself. Devon feels eternal, a sublime infinity that is unchanging. For example, at one point Finny asks Gene if he agrees with him about the war, and Gene, before stating his agreement, observes how Devon's campus has a timeless quality.

We walked along through the shining afternoon to the river. "I don't really believe we bombed Central Europe, do you?" said Finny thoughtfully. The dormitories we passed were massive and almost anonymous behind their thick layers of ivy, big, old-looking leaves you would have thought stayed there winter and summer, permanent hanging gardens in New Hampshire. Between the buildings, elms curved so high that you ceased to remember their height until you looked above the familiar trunks and the lowest umbrellas of leaves and took in the lofty complex they held high above, branches and branches of branches, a world of branches with an infinity of leaves. They too seemed permanent and never-changing, an untouched, unreachable world high in space, like the ornamental towers and spires of a great church, too high to be enjoyed, too high for anything, great and remote and never useful. "No, I don't think I believe it either," I answered. (29)

In this moment of reverie, Gene acknowledges the illusion at work in his perceptions. One "would have thought" that the leaves were perennial, acknowledges that they are seasonal. Still, Devon through Finny's incantatory power becomes a "permanent and never-changing, an untouched, unreachable world." The circumscribed world of the boarding school is eternal and thereby untouched by the horrors of war or even the demand that the boys will inevitably have to go to war once they graduate. The string of adjectives—permanent, never-changing, untouched, unreachable—themselves slow the passage down, as if the language itself seeks to hold onto the moment and make it eternal by deferring the end of the sentence. Similarly, the phrases "branches and branches of branches, a world of branches" seems to double back on itself in a loop. The nostalgic energy of the passage is, however, marred by the inescapable knowledge that Finny and Gene are living in a dream world that must come to an end as surely as adolescence must come to an end.

The destruction of an illusion and the confrontation with reality is the only logical conclusion to the novel. Implicit in the traumatic logic of YA fiction, as observed by Tribunella, is the reconciliation of childlike idealism with the hard facts of the world, and moreover the curtailment of adolescent homosocial joy. Both represent necessary stages in the normative development toward adulthood, but both represent terrible losses, which can never quite be mourned by the normative male subject. The ecstatic joy of the novel is always tied to Finny, who represents a prelapsarian generosity and homosocial purity. Gene notes Finny's "flow of simple, unregulated friendliness" and "such flows were one of Finny's reasons for living" (22). The original sin of the novel is manifested in Gene doubts about Finny's generous spirit, when he imagines that they are in competition. This doubt leads to Finny's fall (the biblical connotations being quite obvious) and his death. The rupture of the prelapsarian homosocial utopia is tragic but as inevitable as adulthood. The tone and texture of the novel are an ambivalent mixture of dread and ecstasy, reflecting this basic tension between desire and the demand for maturation.

Finny shares much in common with another magnetic male figure of the American literary cannon, Jay Gatsby. Like *A Separate Peace*, *The Great Gatsby* is a first-person retrospective narrative, and its prose is economical and controlled but incandescent. Both novels revolve around charismatic men whose lives are built on illusions; both novels are narrated by men who are fascinated by these charismatic men; and both novels come to a tragic end as these illusions come crashing down on the Gatsby and Finny. Though Gatsby is a fraud and Finny appears to be completely genuine, both represent the nobility of holding fast to an illusion. Yet, their shared fate also represent the demand that dreams are no match for cold hard reality. Nick Carraway and Gene recall with a peculiar intensity their homosocial infatuation with Gatsby and Finny, respectively, but Gatsby and Finny represented threats to the normative order of things, being fabulists and conjurors. Both deaths were

inevitable and necessary and thus cannot quite be mourned, even as they leave indelible marks on their respective narrators.

### **Too True to be Normal: Failing to Give Up Guy Love**

If *A Separate Peace* enacts a heteronormative purgation of homoerotic desire, Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) enacts a failure to purge adolescent homosocial/homoerotic desire after the death of the same-sex love object. Williams's oeuvre features many dead queer characters. These characters often appear, not on stage, but in the retrospective narration of other characters. For example, Sebastian Venable is devoured by a mob in *Suddenly, Last Summer*,<sup>19</sup> or in *Streetcar Named Desire* Blanche DuBois's closeted gay husband, Allan Grey, commits suicide. Williams has an ambivalent position within the gay and lesbian literary and theatrical cannon, because he at once brought gay men into the limelight of Broadway, even as he killed them off.

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the already-dead queer figure is Skipper, the adolescent best friend of Brick Pollitt. The play follows in real-time the unfolding conflict between Brick, his wife Maggie, and his father Big Daddy. As the play begins, Brick has descended into bitter alcoholic indifference and aloofness from his wife and immediate family. Maggie pleads with Brick to resume physical intimacy; Big Daddy scolds and browbeats Brick for his alcoholism and immaturity. Both in his argument with Maggie and with Big Daddy, Brick confronts the lingering question about his relationship with Skipper. Big Daddy relays the "suggestion"—asserted by Brick's brother, Gooper, and sister-in-law, Mae—that Brick and Skipper's friendship was not "exactly normal" (944).<sup>20</sup>

Whether or not Brick and Skipper were lovers, or whether or not Brick harbored queer desire for Skipper, are interpretive questions that may lie outside the text's ability to answer, in part because these questions may be outside of Brick's capacity to answer. When Big Daddy raises the question, Brick expresses "shock" at Big Daddy for "talkin' so" (947). The play cannot be taken to

confirm any “homosexual” desire or sexual acts, per se, between Brick and Skipper. Brick actively denies the accusations, but Brick’s denials shouldn’t be taken at face value. Thus, we cannot infer anything definitive from the texts, except by suppositions that serve our own interpretive agendas. Consequently, the text remains highly plastic in the hands of critics and scholars. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in his 1958 essay “The Crisis of American Masculinity,” saw Brick as representative of contemporaneous male “confusion and desperation” brought about by the “sexual ambiguities” of the mid-century. Schlesinger asserts that Brick is “castrated” and “stymied by fear of homosexuality.”<sup>21</sup> Schlesinger’s essay, concerned with the seeming loss of confidence in masculinity among American men, finds in Brick a man who is not queer but psychologically arrested by homosexual panic—a straight man paralyzed by the fear of being gay.

Still other critics have offered more radically queer interpretations of the play. David Savran in his *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams* argues that, far from being a marginal threat at the fringes of heterosexual consciousness, homosexual desire pervades the ostensibly heteronormative Pollitt family. Savran’s argument is grounded not in the issue of Brick’s sexuality so much as that of Big Daddy, who Savran counter-intuitively reads as “the carrier of homosexuality.” Big Daddy transmits homosexuality from his adoptive parents, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, to his son Brick.<sup>22</sup> Williams himself intimates how Straw and Ochello’s queer union haunts the space of the play. In the “Note for the Designer,” he writes that the bedroom that serves as the play’s setting had been Straw and Ochello’s. They were “a pair of old bachelors who shared this room all their lives together. In other words, the room must evoke some ghosts; it is gently and poetically haunted by a relationship that must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon” (880). Savran asserts that Big Daddy, despite being an “exemplar of normative heterosexuality,” elliptically alludes to his own homosexual past when he says to Brick, “I knocked around in my time” (945).<sup>23</sup> In this latter claim, Savran may read more into the text than

is there, but his larger claim still stands: the Pollitt family has a queer lineage. Straw and Ochello's plantation was the basis for Pollitt's estate. The patrilineal inheritance is "contaminated" at its root with queer desire. Thus, Savran writes, "Homosexual desire is cast not as masculinity's anathema but as that which always already inheres inside the male subject... Homosexuality and heterosexuality are no longer represented as unmediated opposites, but as fluid and complicitous states of desire."<sup>24</sup> Whether we assume Big Daddy specifically has a homosexual past or not, his heritage is founded in a gay union between Straw and Ochello.

Taking Savran's approach to the play seriously, I would argue that Big Daddy and Ochello represent two different trajectories of development, which have their origin in homosexual (or at the very least homoerotic) desire. Big Daddy emerges from queerness as a paragon of heterosexual patriarchy. His life of destitution, "bumming" around the country, was reversed when the old bachelors took him into their home, beginning his steady ascent to power and wealth (945-6). Yet, he appears in the play to have an insatiable heterosexual appetite, as evidenced by his "unconscious lech" for Maggie (887), his description of laying his wife "regular as a piston" (941), or the violent imagery he offers of taking a mistress: "I'll strip her naked and choke her with diamonds and smother her with minks and hump her from hell to breakfast" (935). Big Daddy is callous and unsentimental; he is full of ceaseless energy aimed at economic and biological reproduction. His benefactor Ochello, on the other hand, withers after the death of his partner. "When Jack Straw died—why, old Peter Ochello quit eatin' like a dog does when its master's dead, and died, too!" (946) Ochello, like Brick, is unable to overcome the loss of his same-sex partner, whereas Big Daddy follows the normative pattern of maturity and represses his homosexual origins, becoming a patriarchal figure par excellence. Yet, his development into a hypermasculine heterosexual is predicated on an incorporation of his queer benefactors. He takes possession of Ochello and Straw's

estate, performing a sort of financial analogue to the psychic introjection of melancholic identification.

Brick threatens to follow the same pattern of Othello, degenerating unto death, if he cannot overcome his adolescent homosocial/homoerotic affection and develop into a normative patriarch like his father. Yet, I am inclined to depart from Savran's analysis of the play in an important way. While many critics and scholars side with Savran in seeing sexuality as the central issue of the play, I tend to think that Brick's possible homosexuality is less central than the issue of his maturity, which granted is ideologically imbricated with his sexuality. To be sure, any question regarding his sexuality arouses in Brick a violent response: he very nearly strikes Maggie and responds in hysterical "shock" when Big Daddy suggests that he and Skipper were lovers. Indeed, the most explicit and pejorative language in reference to homosexual acts are spoken by Brick.<sup>25</sup> Maggie and Big Daddy are much more permissive. Brick observes, aghast, how "casually" Big Daddy discusses the subject (948). As Savran argues there are some indications that Big Daddy may have had same-sex sexual experiences while bumming around the country, but frequently Brick cuts him off before he can finish explaining himself. Big Daddy tries to tell his son, "I'm just saying I understand such—" (946), but is interrupted. Big Daddy expresses an attitude of "tolerance," a luxury of his great wealth and power (948).

Similarly, Maggie sympathizes with Brick's love for Skipper. Though Brick believes she is "naming it dirty," Maggie insists that she is "naming it clean" (910). She tries to save face for Brick by asserting, "it was only Skipper that harbored even any unconscious desire" (910), but she explains that Brick's love for Skipper "was one of those beautiful, ideal things they tell about in the Greek legends, it couldn't be anything else, you being you, and that's what made it so sad, that's what made it so awful, because it was love that never could be carried through to anything satisfying or even talked about plainly" (909). At the same time, Maggie celebrates the same-sex love as "noble,"

“ideal,” and “incorruptible.” Maggie carefully leaves unspoken the exact nature of the relationship, observing that it cannot be “talked about plainly.”

For both Maggie and Big Daddy the principle issue is not the exact nature of Brick’s relationship with or his feelings for Skipper, but Brick’s refusal to “grow up” (949) and become an economically and biologically reproductive adult. While inseparable from sexuality, the primary issue is the larger organization of heteronormative maturity in the play. Maggie is conciliatory about Brick and Skippers relationship, but she is insistent that Brick *move forward*. She says, “My only point, the only point that I’m making, is life has got to be allowed to continue even after the dream of life is— all—over” (909). She chastises Brick, not for loving Skipper, but for refusing to let go of their adolescent dreams. She says to him, “But that fall you an’ Skipper turned down wonderful offers of jobs in order to keep on bein’ football heroes—pro-football heroes. You organized the Dixie Stars that fall, so you could keep on bein’ team-mates forever!” (910) Thus, imbricated with Maggie’s demand for sex and a child is the demand for Brick to take seriously their financial future, which hangs in the balance. Similarly, Big Daddy wants Brick to become his patriarchal successor and assume control of the plantation.

Thus, more central to the play than simply sexuality is “chrononormativity,” or heteronormative futurity. Brick arouses anxiety not merely because of what he may or may not have felt for Skipper, but because he is failing in his role as the next patriarch of the family, who must be a mature and economically and biologically reproductive adult. This chrononormative development entails disavowing, or simply moving past, his love for Skipper, so that he can reinvest his affective and sexual energies in Maggie. Elizabeth Freeman has offered a critique of heteronormativity that focuses on time. She argues that the body “is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation.” She refers to this as chrononormativity, “or the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, an individual’s narrative is

legible, or comprehensible, to the extent that it conforms to the temporal rhythms of economic and social reproductions. Freeman explains, “In a chronobiological society, the state and other institutions, including representational apparatuses, link properly temporalized bodies to narratives of movement and change. These are teleological schemes of events or strategies for living such as marriage, accumulation of health or wealth for the future, reproduction, childbearing, and death and its attendant rituals.”<sup>27</sup> A similar queer theoretical framework can be found in Lee Edelman’s critique of the child as a central metaphor for heteronormative conceptions of futurity in American rhetoric.<sup>28</sup> (See also Halberstam on “queer time,” Ahmed on the phenomenology of queer orientation, and DeAngelis’ application of “straight time” as applied to the bromance genre.)<sup>29</sup> In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, futurity is the central issue. Big Daddy’s relentless body is running out of time. The economic future of everyone in the play hinges on Brick’s willingness, or ability, to impregnate Maggie, “grow up,” and disavow his adolescent relationship with Skipper. This metaphor of the child is played out literally in the play, which comes to a sort of resolution when Maggie conjures an imaginary child into her womb.

Arthur Miller picks up on the theme of the child and reproduction in his 1958 discussion of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Miller more or less ignores sexuality, which he dismisses as a mere “surface” reality that obscures the larger themes.<sup>30</sup> Miller transforms Brick into a Millerian tragic hero, who is not fundamentally stifled by impotence or homosexuality but by a moral repulsion at the world he inhabits. Miller writes, “Around [Brick] is a world whose human figures partake in various ways of grossness, Philistinism, greed, money-lust, power-lust. And—with his mean-spirited brother as an example—it is a world senselessly reproducing itself through ugly children conceived without the grace of genuine affection, and delivered not so much as children but as inheritors of great wealth and power, the new perpetrators of inequity.”<sup>31</sup> Miller keys into *economic* reproduction and relates it to *biological* reproduction, though he passes over the relationship to sexuality that contemporary

queer theorist see. But Miller rightly sees how grotesquely sex, sexual reproduction, and material wealth are depicted in the play and argues cleverly that sexual intimacy between men and women are corrupted beyond the point of recovery. We see this in Big Daddy's violent and misogynistic sexual language and the obsessive monitoring of Brick and Maggie's marital bed by their greedy in-laws. The last great lie of the play is the promise of a nonexistent baby. Brick becomes indifferent to all of this, but he is violently protective of the memory of this friendship with Skipper. Brick again and again describes his friendship in the most idealistic terms: "a clean, true thing"; "It was too rare to be normal, any true thing between two people is too rare to be normal" (948); and "one great good true thing" (910). The relationship is dialectically opposed to the corrupt state of the world around him: "It was a pure an' true thing an' that's not normal" (949). Miller argues that Brick imagines his friendship as "an idealistic, even gallant and valorous and somehow morally elevated one, a relationship in which nothing was demanded, but what was given was given unasked, beyond the realm of price, of value, even materiality."<sup>32</sup> Brick, Miller continues, "clings to this image as to a banner of purity to flaunt against the world, and more precisely, against the decree of nature to reproduce himself, to become in turn the father, the master of the earth, the administrator of the tainted and impure world."<sup>33</sup>

Miller's attempt to suppress the queer implications of the play notwithstanding, his assessment of the play can be married to the queer theoretical critique of futurity. In the play, Brick seems dead set on defying the demand of futurity. The play is full of language that opposes the unproductive circle to "straight" progressive movement. In the long dialogue between Brick and Big Daddy in Act Two, Brick repeatedly observes how the two men "talk in circles" (936, 938) and "talk around things" (943). Big Daddy accuses his son of being "all balled up" (938) and "dodging away" from life (942); Big Daddy insists, "I'm going to straighten you out; now that I'm straightened out, I'm going to straighten you out!" (937) Brick seems to spiral and his communication with those

around him goes in the same unproductive circle, whereas Big Daddy and Maggie demand that he move forward into reproductive futurity, a straight line into the future. Brick threatens to sterilize the Pollitt family, leaving it only with Gooper and Mae's "no-neck monsters," the progeny of avarice and mendacity whom Brick rejects.

C.W.E. Bigsby observes that so many of Williams's characters struggle with the harsh reality of a modern materialist world, taking refuge in the memory of a lost ideal world. Bigsby writes that Williams saw the "public world as an image of the determinism that could never be successfully defeated or transformed by the impact of the moral will, but only resisted by the imagination, which becomes the primary source of romantic rebellion."<sup>34</sup> Brick holds tight to the past, like Blanche DuBois holding fast to the memory of Belle Reve, a beautiful dream corrupted by her ancestors' "epic fornications." Skipper too is a beautiful dream that Brick tries to preserve. Maggie notes that Brick and Skipper's relationship was something "that had to be kept on ice, yes, incorruptible, yes!—and death was the only icebox where you could keep it" (910). Beautiful dreams, Skipper or Belle Reve, are dialectically opposed to reality, and the dream must be overcome to make way for reality. In Brick's case, reality demands a great deal of him, but most centrally it demands that he give up the "one true thing" in his life and reconcile himself to the corrupted demands of heterosexual procreation and economic necessity.

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and William's larger oeuvre betray a fatalistic world view, in which those who refuse the demands of the sexual and economic order have little hope of winning out. Bigsby notes that Williams's plays accept "a fundamental determinism—social, environmentalism, and psychology. The conspiracy, biological or economic, is a felt presence in most of his plays."<sup>35</sup> The tragic aspects of Williams's plays derive from their exacting logic: the beautiful dream invariably fails to hold up before a crushing reality. By putting *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* alongside *A Separate Peace*, we can see how both texts accept a chrononormativity, and the demands of heteronormative

maturity entail giving up the homosocial love object. Gene accepts (however involuntarily) these demands. He “progresses” first by introjecting Finny into his fantasmatic self and, thereby, sublimating homoerotic desire into identification. Concomitantly with this, Gene gives up the beautiful dream weaved by Finny to make room for the brutal reality of war and the demands of adulthood.

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* actually offers two alternate endings, suggesting two different paths for Brick. In the original version of the play, Brick cynically replies “with charming sadness” to Maggie’s pledges of love, “Wouldn’t it be funny if that was true?” This ending, while hardly definitive, suggests that Brick refuses “progressive” maturation and participation in the reproduction of the social order. We may read Brick (in somewhat Millerian terms) as heroically refusing to exchange the beautiful dream for cold hard reality with its mendacity and materialism. In an Antigone-like act of fatalistic disobedience, Brick embraces the slow death of alcoholism and sexual sterility. The Broadway version of the play, which Williams wrote at the behest of Elia Kazan, suggests the opposite outcome. Brick is slowly charmed into admiration of Maggie and appears at the curtain to be on the verge of resuming his husbandly duties in order to make a child with her. Between these two poles there seems to be no middle ground: Brick can let go of Skipper and his “juvenile” ethical qualms with the prevailing social system and participate in the reproduction of that order, or he can hold fast to his passive resistance and continue drinking himself into oblivion. As we will see, the twenty-first century offers a third path, one that can reconcile homosocial affection and even homoeroticism with maturity. This narrative can castigate heteronormative social reproduction without being condemned to dissolution and death.

### **A Bisexual Love Story: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower***

Stephen Chbosky's coming-of-age novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999) was a minor success upon publication but became a bestseller after it was adapted into a film in 2012, directed by Chbosky.<sup>36</sup> In part because the film's popularity drove renewed interest in the novel, I will alternately discuss both the film and the novel throughout this section. The novel is composed of letters written by the protagonist Charlie. The letters, addressed to an unnamed recipient, chronicle Charlie's first year in high school, which proves to be a struggle. He suffers from chronic mental illness that regularly threatens to, and occasionally does, overtake him; he is still reeling from the recent suicide of his best friend, Michael; and, he is haunted by the earlier death of his beloved Aunt Helen, who we eventually discover sexually abused him. Amidst the dismal landscape of high school, Charlie meets a pair of stepsiblings, Sam and Patrick. As seniors in high school, they become both paternal mentors and sometimes erotic partners for Charlie. Charlie quickly develops a crush on Sam, a beautiful and caring young woman with her own traumatic past, and Charlie becomes fast friends with Patrick, a semi-openly gay young man with a sharp and chevalier wit. Through Sam and Patrick, Charlie enters a social circle of older high school students, where he finds a degree of acceptance and compassion. In the film version, Logan Lerman, Emma Watson, and Ezra Miller play Charlie, Sam, and Patrick, respectively.

Much like *A Separate Peace*, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a novel that mixes anxiety and ecstasy. *Perks* alternates between fear and joy as the fortunes of its characters shift abruptly from chapter to chapter. Suicide, rape, sexual abuse, homophobic violence, and domestic violence are manifest or threatened throughout the novel. Charlie lives in perpetual dread of recurrent crippling psychiatric episodes. His best friend Michael's suicide is, in many ways, the inciting incident of the novel, and the reader is given numerous reasons to fear that Charlie will attempt suicide. Consequently, everyday adolescent conflicts that beset Charlie are heightened by the threat of

suicide and psychosis. At the same time, Charlie's letters are filled with wonder at his adolescent discoveries: literature, music, drug experimentation, masturbation, his infatuation with Sam, and his new social world. The intermittent expression of joy, freedom, and camaraderie are captured in a scene from early in the novel. Charlie describes driving with Patrick and Sam, when the siblings enact a sort of ritual as they drive through the Fort Pitt traffic tunnel:

Anyway, Patrick started driving really fast, and just before we got to the tunnel, Sam stood up [in the back of the truck], and the wind turned her dress into ocean waves. When we hit the tunnel, all the sound got scooped up into a vacuum, and it was replaced by a song on the tape player. A beautiful song called "Landslide." When we got out of the tunnel, Sam screamed this really fun scream, and there it was. Downtown. Lights on buildings and everything that makes you wonder. Sam sat down and started laughing. Patrick started laughing. I started laughing.

And in that moment, I swear we were infinite. (38-9)

Though Chbosky's language is more spare and simple than that of John Knowles, this passage parallels Gene's description of Devon quoted above from *A Separate Peace*. Both passages confer on quotidian sights a transcendent quality, invoking infinity. In this passage, Charlie transfigures the most banal of urban infrastructure, a traffic tunnel, into a mystical portal. Sam's dress becomes the waves of a vast ocean, Pittsburgh's skyline inspires wonder, and Charlie declares the ecstatic experience of becoming infinite. The film version of this scene (which I will return to in a moment) replaces Fleetwood Mac's "Landslide" with David Bowie's "Heroes." Bowie's anthemic song inspires wondrous awe in Charlie, Sam, and Patrick (who are too young to recognize it), and in the film it inspires Sam and Patrick to enact the tunnel ritual. "Heroes," a song about hoping for glory in the face of certain failure, reinforces the novel and film's alternating sense of dread and ephemeral elation.

Given the pervasive anxiety of the novel and the film, it is perhaps remarkable that Charlie is unperturbed by Patrick's sexuality. This is not to say that Patrick's sexuality is without complication. Homophobia—manifested in gay bashing, self-loathing, and child abuse—are palpable threats, but Charlie and Patrick's friendship is relatively free of homophobia. Heterosexuality, on the other hand,

is often presented in a decidedly negative light. The queer-positive nature of *Perks* is perhaps characteristic of a multigenerational transformation in Americans' attitudes about sexuality. Writing in the late 1990s, Christine Jenkins observed a steady increase in the representation of gay characters in YA fiction since 1969, with a dramatic increase coming in the 1990s.<sup>37</sup> Jen Doll, writing in 2013 for *The Wire*, argues that contemporary YA fiction has undergone dramatic changes with respect to the depiction of LGBTQ characters. She writes,

Scholastic Publisher and Editorial Director David Levithan... told me that the environment for gay characters in Y.A. literature has indeed changed remarkably in the past 10 years. "If 2003 was the sea change year for gay Y.A., in which the world did not end because there were lots of gay Y.A. books, in which we were pushing down the door and getting in," he says, 2013 represents another wave of change. "For so many years, so many characters have been defined by their sexuality—they're 'gay'; we don't have to give them any other characteristics," he says. "But gay characters and gay kids have lots of other things going on. No one is just this one thing." In these new books, being gay or bi or lesbian or transgendered is wrapped up in conversations of identity that often transcend sexuality, and ask what happens beyond acknowledgment, coming out, and even generalized acceptance of one's choices.<sup>38</sup>

This change in representations of LGBTQ characters in YA fiction corresponds with the more queer-positive attitudes of the generation of young adults who have come of age since the 1990s. Generation X and Millennials are the demographic cohorts most accepting of LGTBQ peoples.<sup>39</sup> Both the evolution of queer representation in YA literature and the adoption of more queer-friendly attitudes in post-Baby Boom demographic cohorts fit squarely into the post-closet culture, which emerged in the 1960s and dramatically grew between the dates of the novel's publication (1999) and the release of the *Perks* movie (2012).

Borrowing from Ron Becker, I have argued that the 1990s were characterized by "straight panic," as straight men attempted to negotiate the continuing growth in queer visibility and slowly emerging anti-homophobic discourses. Straight panic is manifest when hetero-masculinity, historically defined in part by homophobia, comes into conflict with anti-homophobic cultural norms, which gained currency particularly among Generation X and Millennial cohorts. As noted in

chapter one, the anxious negotiation of this cultural transition was manifest in popular television and independent cinema in the 1990s. In television series—such as *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, and *Frasier*—while the straight male protagonists often labor to avoid being perceived as homophobic, they also feared being perceived as gay. In films—such as *Chasing Amy*, *Threesome*, and *Chuck and Buck*—same-sex desire threatens heterosexual privilege or homosocial bonds, leading to the dissolution of friendships. However, beginning with the mid-2000s, the emerging post-closet culture demanded a rewriting of homosocial norms. Television series—such as *Scrubs*, *Two and a Half Men*, *Boston Legal*, and *Psych*—drawing on the bromance formula, begin to imagine straight male friendships as incorporating the language of same-sex marriage to articulate life-long bonds, or partnerships. Later still, television series—such as *Faking It*, *Happy Endings*, *Sirens*, and *Partners*—imagine gay-straight male friendships in which the straight panic is attenuated or irrelevant. Charlie’s lack of homophobic anxiety in *Perks* anticipates the post-closet era, but, as we will see, unlike the gay-straight male friendships in the television series just mentioned, Charlie and Patrick’s relationship is far from being asexual.

If we turn now to the main theme of this chapter, we can begin to see how *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* presents an alternative to the normalizing script of hetero-masculine maturity. *Perks*, I will argue, enacts as sort of bi-sexual love story that runs counter to the normative coming-of-age script. By “bi-sexual” I do not refer to an identity category. Charlie’s libidinal energy is clearly invested in his opposite-sex crush, Sam. However, Charlie and Patrick’s relationship is erotically ambiguous and is inextricably bound up with Sam, forming a sort of threesome. Additionally, *Perks* dispenses with the ideological demand of disavowing same-sex affection as a precondition for maturity, but rather courts homoerotic desire between Charlie and Patrick alongside Charlie’s love for and occasional physical intimacy with Sam. Thus, the social, erotic, and romantic orientation of the novel and the film are often bisexual, flowing from Charlie evenly between Sam and Patrick.

This structure subverts heteronormative conventions that demand a divestment from homosocial bonds and reinvestment in heterosexual desire.

Before exploring the bisexual nature of Charlie, Sam, and Patrick's relationship, we should observe how the novel codes heterosexuality. Not only does the novel depict affection between men in an anti-homophobic light, it often figures heterosexuality in pathological terms. Charlie is a wallflower in the first third of the novel, passively observing the social and sexual habits of others, which include a great deal of abuse and violence. Indeed, violence appears normalized in heterosexual relationships. This fact becomes clear in two instances of such violence that Charlie witnesses early in the novel. First, he witnesses his sister, Candace,<sup>40</sup> being hit by her boyfriend. From Charlie's point of view, up to this point the boyfriend is described as a nice guy who makes college-rock mix tapes. Charlie's father calls him "soft." Candace speaks in a belittling manner to the boyfriend. After being struck, Candace becomes more affectionate with the boyfriend, and Charlie sees them having sex (11-12). In a second instance, Charlie witnesses a date rape at a house party. Later he sees the rapist and his victim dancing together. They appear to be a normal loving couple (31-2). As seen from Charlie's point of view, violence and sexual violence appear to be part of the natural progression of heterosexual relationships. When Charlie asks Sam if he should report the rape, she tells him that there is no point because of how hard it is to prove, "especially in high school when the boys and girls are popular and still in love" (32). Violence is normalized, and everyone appears helpless to redress it. Amidst all of the heterosexual violence we encounter early in the novel, the only the relationships free of violence is the one between Patrick and the closeted football star Brad. Charlie witnesses them kissing, just as he witnesses his sister's assault and the rape at the party, but Patrick and Brad's intimacy is, to that point in the novel, uniquely non-violent (36-7). The relationship only becomes violent after Brad's father catches the two together and savagely beats his son (146). Heteronormative violence intervenes to disrupt the non-violent gay relationship.

It is not only heterosexual courtship that is plagued by violence, however. In the world of the novel, violence and psychological illness are transmitted through the heteronormative family. Charlie's father grew up in an abusive household. His stepfather beat him, his sister Rebecca, and mother. The abuse only ended when another relative murders the abuser. Rebecca goes on to have several abusive husbands, and Charlie worries that Rebecca's children will perpetuate the cycle of violence and victimhood (86-7). Charlie's maternal grandfather is a drunk who brags about brutally beating his children, Charlie's mother and Aunt Helen (58). Charlie's Aunt Helen was also sexually abused as a child by a friend of the family. Helen's parents do not believe her account of abuse and, turning a blind eye, allow the abuse to continue (89-90). The survivor of long-term abuse, Helen as an adult suffers from substance abuse and mental health issues. She sexually abuses Charlie, who represses the memories (89). Charlie's family is unaware of the abuse. Sam alludes to her own sexual abuse at the hands of an adult man when she was seven (eleven in the film). As with Helen, Sam's abuser is a family friend, and Sam's abuse seems to explain her earlier self-destructive behavior.<sup>41</sup> Thus, violence and abuse are pervasive within the heterosexual and normative familial lineage. This violence goes unchecked. Rape cannot be prosecuted, parents ignore or are unaware of sexual abuse, and domestic violence can only be ended by equally violent vigilante justice. Charlie charts the legacy of abuse backward, almost to the point of original sin: "It's like if I blame my Aunt Helen, I would have to blame her dad for hitting her and the friend of the family that fooled around with her when she was little. And the person that fooled around with him. And God for not stopping all this and things that are much worse" (211). Yet, Charlie rejects this fatalism and inevitability. The book thematically argues against determinism and the ceaseless reproduction of violence. Charlie expresses this notion succinctly when he writes, "even if we don't have the power to choose where we come from, we can still choose where we go from there. We can still do things. And we can try

to feel okay about them” (211). Sam and Charlie, as products of violence and abuse, labor to break the cycle of violence, abuse, and self-destruction.

Fatalism has played an interesting role in the texts discussed in this chapter. In *A Separate Peace*, once Gene has committed the original sin of doubting Finny’s authentic friendship, he is pulled toward an inevitable tragic conclusion. The inciting incident, jarring the tree branch under Finny’s feet and causing him to fall and break his leg, happens in a split second, as if without Gene fully willing it. From that moment, the story tends slowly toward Finny discovering the betrayal and then Finny’s death. Gene is swept up by his circumstances. Following Tribunella, we may see the structure of the novel as organized by a basic ideology of hetero-maturity, or chrononormativity, in which Gene must traverse trauma in order to be dislodged from his adolescent youth into adulthood. All of this is inevitable, tragic, and necessary. Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, like so many of Williams’s protagonist, is recalcitrant in the face of social forces which relentlessly push him toward accepting Skipper’s death and moving forward with his life. Brick actively resists, drinking himself to death rather than reconcile to the social order he regards as fundamentally corrupt. In William’s deterministic universe resistance can be heroic but it is inevitably futile and self-destructive. Charlie, along with Sam and Patrick, battle uphill to resist the tragic cycles of their world, and ultimately seems successful. If Brick’s rejection of heteronormative reproduction is futile, then Charlie’s “bisexual” romance with Sam and Patrick presents a hopeful mode of resistance to the endless cycles of violence, abuse, and self-harm.

In a milieu of heterosexual abuse and violence, Charlie’s “bisexual” affection for Sam and Patrick becomes his salvation. Charlie’s relationship with Sam is triangulated with Patrick, making for something of a threesome, rather than an erotic dyad. The film and particularly the novel present a counter-normative picture of male maturation in which homoerotic ambiguity can exist alongside heterosexual development. Ambiguously queer desire coexists alongside heteroeroticism without

inducing excessive hysterical paranoia. Additionally, *Perks* refuses the heteronormative demands of melancholic disavowal of same-sex male desire. Although Charlie loses two objects of affection, Aunt Helen and his best friend Michael, he goes on to replace them with Sam and Patrick. Charlie's maturity does not depend upon the disavowal of his homosocial/erotic desire for Michael or Patrick. Rather, Charlie's life and wellbeing are tied to his embrace of a bisexual romance that includes Sam and Patrick.

The novel and the film have more in common than not, but there are important differences between the two that have implications on my central argument. In short, I would argue that, where the novel is a *bildungsroman* that takes as its primary theme the hope of overcoming trauma, the film hues more closely to the genre of the melancholic high school romances of the 1980s, e.g., *Pretty in Pink* (1986), *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987) or *Say Anything...* (1989). This narrative and thematic difference is related to formal differences between the two texts, which are in part inevitable when an epistolary novel is translated into a feature-length film. The world of the novel gets much smaller as it is translated into film: we see less of Charlie's extended family, less about the legacies of abuse, and less about Charlie's mentor and English teacher Bill. A greater proportion of the film is about the romantic tension between Sam and Charlie. The film also has a glossy ethereal quality that sharply contrasts the language of the novel, written in Charlie's stilted and awkward prose. Where the novel is more centered on overcoming trauma and becoming psychologically and socially "well," the film is more of an ecstatic love story. The overall effect is that, while the bisexual love story is present in both documents, it is more clearly presented in the novel than in the film.

Consider the final chapter of the novel versus the final scene of the film. Charlie, having recovered from his psychological meltdown, sees Sam and Patrick, who are on holiday from their first year of college. The trio goes for a drive and again travels through the Fort Pitt Tunnel, reenacting the ritual from earlier. In the film, we again hear David Bowie's anthem "Heroes." The

bands of light that run the course of the tunnel flicker rapidly across the black surface of the pickup and the actors' faces in luminous bursts. The cinematography and sound design transform the dreary and mundane traffic tunnel into a site of transcendent joy. The camera hovers behind the pickup, floating elegantly, and zooms in as Charlie and Sam share a passionate kiss. Charlie stands up in the back of the pickup, as they emerge from the tunnel and Patrick and Sam shout joyously. Over this we hear the following voiceover from Charlie: "I am here. And I am looking at her, and she is so beautiful. I can see it. This one moment when you know you're not a sad story. You are alive. You stand up and see the lights on the buildings and everything that makes you wonder, and you're listening to that song on that drive with the people you love most in this world. And in this moment, I swear we are infinite." The seductive promise of this denouement is of one of sheer plentitude, a moment of psychic, affective, and physical wholeness, underwritten by heterosexual fulfillment.

In contrast, the novel concludes, with a long discourse on the possibility of overcoming trauma and living a full life. In the tunnel, Sam and Charlie do not kiss. His final thoughts sweep over the entire world of the novel—his family, his friends, and his mentor Bill. The differences in rendering the two scenes demonstrate the differences between the novel and the film. The novel's scope encompasses Charlie's whole life; the film is narrowly focused on the single moment and particularly on Sam. In the book, Charlie's final words are not promises of transcendent joy but of being "good." He lingers only a little on "infinite" moment but then points toward the future and the prospect of being a sophomore in high school. The last lines of the novel, addressed to the unnamed letter recipient, explain: "please believe that things are good with me, and even when they're not, they will be soon enough. And I will believe the same about you" (213). I tarry over these differences because of how they related to the larger thematic issue of homosociality and homoeroticism in the texts. The film's narrative and erotic focus on Sam orients it more squarely on the heterosexual resolution. The film still makes room for the bisexual romance between the three

main characters, but it subtly blunts the homoerotic implications of the novel. Indeed, Patrick, the queer third term in the threesome, is literally obscured behind Charlie and Sam's heads during the passionate kiss in the film's final scene. We see this difference in the stories' climatic scene when Sam makes a sexual pass at Charlie. In the book, the sexual encounter is cut short when it brings to the surface memories of his childhood sexual abuse. Yet, the film implies that the sexual encounter proceeds.

Charlie is implicated in subtly queer ways throughout the novel. At one point, he alludes to his own childhood same-sex experimentation: "I used to kiss this boy in the neighborhood a lot when I was very little." Charlie notes quickly that a psychiatrist exonerated this behavior as "natural" experimentation (124). The psychiatrist's heterosexist absolution presumes that Charlie's pre-adolescent homoeroticism is transitory, something that will be displaced by heterosexual maturation. If Charlie had fulfilled this normative script then the death of Michael would have allowed for a transition into heterosexual maturity, but, as we will see, *Perks* takes a different narrative path. For example, Charlie learns to masturbate from Patrick (127). The details of how this knowledge is passed on go unexplained. Patrick, at another point, tells Charlie, "It's too bad you're not gay" (136), alluding to an erotic desire for Charlie. The statement stops Charlie from crying, implying that he is pleased by Patrick's affection, perhaps because of, in spite of, or irrespective of the erotic desire expressed. A few minutes later Charlie tells Patrick, "You know, Patrick? If I were gay, I'd want to date you" (137). Patrick shrugs off the statement coolly. These verbal flirtations give way to actual physical expression later in the novel. After the violent and cruel breakup with his closeted lover Brad, Patrick falls into a depression and begins drinking heavily. He takes Charlie to all of the places where he and Brad used to go, including gay hookup spots. Patrick kisses Charlie. Patrick apologizes twice, but Charlie replies both times that it is "okay." Then Patrick "moved in to kiss me again. And I just let him. I don't know why. We stayed in his car for a long time" (160). Charlie continues to

“let” Patrick kiss him over multiple nights (164). Later in the novel Sam asks Charlie, “Did you want [Patrick] to kiss you?” Charlie shakes his head no (201). It is a feeble denial. True enough Charlie does not describe kissing Patrick in particularly erotic terms, but neither does he describe it in negative terms. The experience is glossed over in a few brief sentences, leaving quite open its significance. Charlie’s heterosexual experiences are equally ambiguous, his infatuation with Sam notwithstanding. After he starts dating Mary Elizabeth, a girl from Sam and Patrick’s clique, he refers to their physical intimacy as “weird.” His describes their first night of “above the waist” groping in terms of wonderment and confusion, noting how “difficult bras are” (126-7, 130). Charlie is not that “into” Mary Elizabeth, and there is a lack of personal chemistry between them, which may explain the lack of sexual chemistry. Yet, it is still notable that his homosexual experience with Patrick and his first heterosexual relationship are described in similarly muted terms.

Taken as a whole, the above moments in the novel at least attenuate Charlie’s heterosexuality, which is presented as more certain in the film. I do not mean to suggest that we can, based on the novel, ascribe to Charlie a particular sexual identity category—gay, straight, or bisexual. I am not particular interested in excavating Charlie as a veiled queer character, however plausible that reading may be. My point is that the novel casts Charlie’s sexuality in an ambiguous light, and the novel rewrites the heterosexual maturity story as a “bisexual” romance. His heterosexual/heterosocial relationship with Sam is closely imbricated with his homosocial/homoerotic relationship with Patrick, creating a sort of “bisexual” coming of age story in which the normative boundary between queer and straight is blurred.

When Charlie writes about the stepsiblings he often refers to “Sam and Patrick” as a pair, as though they were a single entity (cf. 129). While critical moments in the novel have Charlie alone with either Sam or Patrick, a greater number involve Charlie basking in Sam-and-Patrick’s loving, sometimes paternalistic cum erotic, friendship. One of the first such moments is when Patrick and

Sam take Charlie to his first party and hear a song on the radio they all like. Charlie says, “I feel infinite,” and he writes:

And Sam and Patrick looked at me like I said the greatest thing they ever heard. Because the song was that great and because we all really paid attention to it. Five minutes of a lifetime were truly spent, and we felt young in a good way. I have since bought the record, and I would tell you what it was, but truthfully, it’s not the same unless you’re driving to your first real party, and you’re sitting in the middle seat of a pickup with two nice people when it starts to rain. (33)

Arguably the feeling of completeness that Charlie experiences when wedged *between* Sam and Patrick is the central image of the novel. It is echoed near the end of the novel. In the week before Sam and Patrick leave for college, Charlie writes, “I just remember walking between them and feeling for the first time that I belonged somewhere” (198). This social and emotional completeness is complemented by the erotic triangulation between Sam-and-Patrick and Charlie. In the scene that immediately precedes Charlie and Sam’s first kiss, Patrick gives Charlie a new suit for Christmas. Charlie puts on the suit, and, when everyone sees him in it, he is transfigured and elevated, becoming for the first time an erotic object in the eyes of others. Importantly, in this moment, Sam-and-Patrick’s gazes are merged and simultaneously eroticize Charlie: “Sam and Patrick both agreed I looked handsome. Mary Elizabeth smiled. I think it was the first time in my life I ever felt like I looked ‘good’” (67).

The film also speaks to the triangulated and bisexual attraction between Sam and Patrick and Charlie. Charlie attends one of the periodic performances of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, in which Sam and Patrick and their clique participate. During the performance, Patrick in the role of Frank N. Furter picks out Charlie, who is in the front row, and seductively sits in his lap. Charlie smiles awkwardly, as Patrick earnestly sings to him, caresses him, and then rises to gyrate his behind in Charlie’s face. Yet, throughout the brief scene, the camera cuts away from Charlie and Patrick. At one point, we see Patrick making surreptitious eye contact with his then-lover Brad, and throughout the scene Charlie and Sam exchange looks. In the midst of the homoerotic play between Charlie and

Patrick-as-Frank, the camera cuts away to slow-motion shots of Sam in her costume bustier seductively looking at Charlie. Sam's dreamy, sexualized performance could be read as neutralizing the homoerotic play between Charlie and Patrick, but it must be noted that this specific scene is not in the book, and, when read alongside the rest of the film and intertextually with the novel, the scene only heightens the erotic bisexuality of *Perks*.

Viewed through the lens of intimate male friendship, Charlie and Patrick's relationship is significant as an alternative model for male development and maturation. By fusing Sam-and-Patrick, the novel circumvents some of the anxieties around the gay-straight male friendship. On the one hand, we can read his relationship with Sam as a cover that neutralizes his homoeroticism; on the other hand, the story does something more radical by predicating Charlie's maturation through the novel on his homosocial/erotic relationship with Patrick *and* his heterosocial/sexual relationship with Sam. Sam-and-Patrick collectively elevate Charlie and help him to form a path toward adulthood. Just as many bromance film and television series imagine "male partnership" as a compliment to heterosexual romance, or as narrative culture increasingly sees straight-gay male friendships as normal, *Perks* imagines male maturity as completely compatible with homosocial intimacy, even as it borders on the homoerotic. Patrick's affection for Charlie is as integral to his maturation as Sam's is.

Additionally, in *Perks* we see a reversal of the narrative of melancholic heteronormativity diagnosed by Tribunella. *A Separate Peace* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, respectively, provide successful and unsuccessful models of how heteronormative men can disavow adolescent homosocial/erotic affection and develop into mature heterosexuals. *Perks* in many ways provides just the opposite model. Charlie has already lost his childhood best friend, Michael, when the novel starts. Michael kills himself and the trauma pervades the early part of the novel. Charlie enacts mourning, in the Freudian sense, by transferring his affections from the lost love object, Michael, onto a new one,

Patrick. *A Separate Peace* ends with a definitive separation between Gene and Finny. Though Gene has incorporated Finny, he also casts Finny aside along with his own resistance to the reality that awaits him as an adult. In the final pages of the novel, Gene writes, “I was ready for the war, now that I no longer had any hatred to contribute to it.... Phineas has absorbed it and taken it with him, and I was rid of it” (203). Finny in this passage is a scapegoat, taking with him the barriers to Gene accepting his fate and become part of the war. Implicitly, Tribunella persuasively argues, Finny also carries off adolescent homoerotic desire. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* presents a similar binary choice between the romantically clinging to the dead ideal male companion and disavowing that same-sex love for heterosexual reproduction. In *Perks*, Charlie manages to progress toward maturity without disavowing same-sex affection but instead transfers that affection to Patrick, with whom it takes on an intensely erotic charge.

Charlie also transfers his affection from the dead Aunt Helen onto Sam. Charlie does not progress toward maturity by casting aside Helen and Michael but by reinvesting his affective and erotic desire with Sam-and-Patrick. This transference of affections is symbolically registered in the novel. At a Christmas party, Charlie gives Patrick a poem that Michael had given him, and he gives Sam a Beatles album that Helen had given him. Also at the party, before they kiss for the first time, Sam tells Charlie that she loves him “in a friend way.” Charlie writes, “it was the third time since my Aunt Helen died that I heard it from anyone” (69). The substitution of Helen for Sam is dramatically enacted when Sam and Charlie’s sexual encounter brings to the surface Charlie’s childhood sexual trauma, which allows Charlie to confront his trauma and move beyond it. For other characters as well, surviving and recovering from trauma comes, not from disavowal, but through rewriting their personal experiences. They do not simply come to “accept” their traumas; they transfigure them through love and erotic affection. Sam, for example, kisses Charlie after alluding to her own childhood sexual abuse. She says to him, “I want to make sure that the first person you kiss loves

you” (70). Thus, she rewrites her childhood trauma of sexual abuse by giving Charlie a mutually-loving first kiss. Similarly, when Patrick kisses Charlie and takes Charlie to the places where he and Brad had gone to hookup, Patrick is reenacting his failed and traumatic romance with Brad.

The heteronormative world mindlessly reproduces cycles of abuse and violence—much as Brick is expected to reproduce the mendacity and greed of his family in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Yet, Charlie, Sam, and Patrick attempt to rewrite their failed, traumatic, or dysfunctional histories through one another. Although the film focuses more on the resolution of trauma and dysfunction through a definitive heterosexual encounter, the novel centers on how histories of trauma can be rewritten through re-inscriptions that are unbounded by sexual or social categories. This bisexual romance rejects the policing of same-sex masculine affection. It blurs sexual categories, and, in doing so, it short-circuits the cycle of heterosexual reproduction—and with it, the legacies of violence and abuse.

## Conclusion

Nicholas Ray’s film *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) provides another example of a bisexual romance but with the opposite narrative resolution. *Rebel Without a Cause*, similar to *Perks*, imagines a white middle-class world that has gone menacingly awry. Self-satisfied middle-class parents lavish their adolescent children with material comfort but fail to provide the guidance needed for them to mature into normative bourgeois adults. The world of the film feels more like *Lord of the Flies* than its television contemporary *Father Knows Best*. In this dystopian vision, adolescents engage in knife fights and deadly car races. In one of his most iconic roles, James Dean plays Jim Stark. Jim and his family have just moved to town, in part to escape Jim’s juvenile delinquent past. Jim seems incapable of controlling himself and is prone to violence. He meets and falls for Judy (Natalie Wood). Where Jim displays masculine “delinquency” with violence and drunkenness, Judy is a female “delinquent,” caught walking the streets in the early morning hours, possibly “looking for company.” The film

takes a sort of Freudian position on Jim and Judy's delinquency. Jim's psychological dysfunction is the result of his father having been emasculated by Jim's mother and grandmother. Judy's father berates her and even calls her a "tramp." A sympathetic police officer suggests that Judy's misbehavior is intended to make her father "pay attention." Jim also meets Plato (Sal Mineo), whose parents have left him in the care of their maid. After a series of violent events that culminate in the death of Jim's rival Buzz, Jim and Judy slip away with Plato to an abandoned mansion where, for a few hours, they create an alternative family: with Jim and Judy as a loving couple and Plato as their son. However, the film suggests that Plato is gay and positions his filial affection for Jim as erotically charged. The reconstructed family carries within it a queer—and even incestuous—desire that subverts the heteronormative middle-class order, which has failed all three adolescents. As they navigate the decrepit mansion, the three appear to exist out of time. The world of the mansion is somewhere between a ghost story and a fairy tale. Through most of the film a general sense of quivering dread and sudden violence alternate with one another—even the otherwise boring visit to the planetarium culminates in a violent vision of the end of the world. The mansion offers a respite, a languorous and loving space, where Jim, Judy, and Plato fancifully imagine staying forever.

Yet, the film treats this utopian alternative to the straight world as necessarily provisional: something which must pass away in the inexorable logic of the narrative. Violent gang members discover the three, and finally the police shoot Plato, despite Jim's attempts to save him. Plato's death is tragic but singles the resolution of the film's drama. The death of the queer member of the trio leaves Judy and Jim unencumbered to progress as a heterosexual couple. Outside of the fantasy world of the mansion, Plato's place would have been untenable. The tragedy provides Jim's father with the occasion to assert his paternal and masculine role, silencing his domineering wife. After crying over the corpse of Plato, Judy and Jim turn their backs as he is carried away, looking back only long enough to see the ambulance door slam shut. Jim embraces Judy and introduces her to his

parents, enacting the incongruously banal ritual of introducing his sweetheart to his parents. Thus, the death of Plato restores the normative order allowing masculinity and heteronormativity to carry on. We may assume Jim and Judy date and perhaps marry, having been cured of their delinquency by the traumatic but ultimately healing events of the film. As we saw with Gene in *A Separate Peace* or Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the traumatic loss of Plato leaves Jim with an opportunity to re-orient himself socially, psychologically, and sexually. Like Gene, Jim appears to follow the socially prescribed narrative pattern of sublimating trauma into a sort of normative development. As Plato's body is carried away, Jim and Judy walk away toward a heterosexual future in which each will disavow their delinquency and latent deviation.

*The Perks of Being a Wall Flower* offers a different narrative of maturity. The novel maintains the commitment to psychological recovery from trauma. Charlie still must cope with the loss of Helen and Michael or else follow them into the grave, but the book implicitly critiques the "straight" world as pervasively and pathologically violent and the source of trauma and dysfunction. *Rebel Without a Cause* and *A Separate Peace* see the reconciliation with straightness as inevitable and necessary. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the reconciliation with straightness is an inescapable demand with the only alternative being the dissolution of the deviating subject. *Perks* imagines an alternative path through the erotically ambiguous triangulation of Charlie, Sam, and Patrick. Not unlike Jim, Judy, and Plato's loving threesome in the mansion, Charlie and Sam-and-Patrick form a loving social unit that counteracts the dystopian straight world they live in. Unlike *Rebel without a Cause*, *Perks* does not need to kill the queer character to resolve its storyline. *Perks* begins with the death of Michael, but it does not feel the need to erase same-sex desire between Charlie and Patrick in order to guarantee Charlie's psychological wholeness; quite the contrary, Patrick-and-Sam are important ballasts against Charlie's psychiatric instability.

As with the most recent developments within the bromance genre, discussed in chapter one, *Perks* suggests an evolving view of male friendship, in which same-sex affection between straight men and between straight men and gay men are not only tolerable but perhaps necessary to the maturation of masculine subjects. It is no longer the case that a masculine subject must be constituted through the disavowal of homosocial—and up to a point homoerotic—bonds. Charlie’s story is still one of heterosexual development. The film in particular foregrounds this straight maturity story, but his heteroerotic development is interwoven with his uncertain homoerotic relationship with Patrick. All of this suggests how in a post-closet culture, which the novel anticipates and the film embodies, masculinity and male homosociality can be reimagined in the absence of homophobia.

---

<sup>1</sup> Fiedler, “The New Mutants,” 205.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 200–5.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Matthews, “The Black/White Marijuana Arrest Gap, in Nine Charts.”

<sup>5</sup> Ward, *Not Gay*, 21–6.

<sup>6</sup> In John Bushman’s survey of middle and high school students in the late 90s, he found that *A Separate Peace* was among the top ten novels assigned in both the seventh and twelfth grades. Bushman, “Young Adult Literature in the Classroom--Or Is It?”

<sup>7</sup> Tribunella, *Melancholia and Maturation*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Sova, *Literature Suppressed on Social Grounds*, 256.

<sup>9</sup> McGavran, “Fear’s Echo and Unhinged Joy.” Perhaps the most discussed example of homoeroticism in the book comes when Finny and Gene sneak out to go to the beach, at the end of chapter three:

Finny and I went along the Boardwalk in our sneakers and white slacks, Finny in a light blue polo shirt and I in a T-shirt. I noticed that people were looking fixedly at him, so I took

a look myself to see why. His skin radiated a reddish copper glow of tan, his brown hair had been a little bleached by the sun, and I noticed that the tan made his eyes shine with a cool blue-green fire.

“Everybody’s staring at you,” he suddenly said to me. “It’s because of that movie-star tan you picked up this afternoon ... showing off again.”

Enough broken rules were enough that night. Neither of us suggested going into any of the honky-tonks or beer gardens. We did have one glass of beer each at a fairly respectable-looking bar, convincing, or seeming to convince the bartender that we were old enough by a show of forged draft cards. Then we found a good spot among some sand dunes at the lonely end of the beach, and there we settled down to sleep for the night. The last words of Finny’s usual nighttime monologue were, “I hope you’re having a pretty good time here. I know I kind of dragged you away at the point of a gun, but after all you can’t come to the shore with just anybody and you can’t come by yourself, and at this teen-age period in life the proper person is your best pal.” He hesitated and then added, “which is what you are,” and there was silence on his dune.

It was a courageous thing to say. Exposing a sincere emotion nakedly like that at the Devon School was the next thing to suicide. I should have told him then that he was my best friend also and rounded off what he had said. I started to; I nearly did. But something held me back. Perhaps I was stopped by that level of feeling, deeper than thought, which contains the truth. (47-8)

McGavran asks rhetorically, “What can that deep, truthful level of feeling be but that the boys, far more than ‘best friends,’ are in love with each other? And what can stop the sexual expression of such love but what Sedgwick calls homo-sexual panic?” (77)

<sup>10</sup> Consider for example the attempt to integrate anti-homophobic literature into the New York City schools in the early 1990s. The “Children of the Rainbow” curriculum was met with outrage. Myers, “How a ‘Rainbow Curriculum’ Turned Into Fighting Words.”

<sup>11</sup> My reading here of catharsis is informed in no small part by Augusto Boal’s critique of *harmatia*. Boal, Augusto, “Theater of the Oppressed.”

<sup>12</sup> Tribunella, *Melancholia and Maturation*, xi.

<sup>13</sup> A parallel can be noted here with how Robin Wood discusses the countercultural buddy films of the late 60s, wherein one or both of the male leads dies. Wood, as I discuss in chapter one, argues that the death of one of the partners heads off the possibility of homosexual sex. Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, 229.

<sup>14</sup> Tribunella, *Melancholia and Maturation*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> For brief discussions of both mourning and melancholia see Akhtar’s *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* on Grief (126), Mourning (177), and Moral Sadism (175-6), and see Laplace and Pontalis’s *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* on Work of Mourning (485-6) and Sense of Guilt (423-4).

<sup>16</sup> Butler writes, “If the assumption of femininity or the assumption of masculinity proceeds through the accomplishment of an always tenuous heterosexuality, we might understand the force of

---

this accomplishment as the mandating of the abandonment of homosexual attachments or, perhaps more trenchantly, the *preemption* of the possibility of homosexual attachment, a certain foreclosure of possibility that produces a domain of homosexuality understood as unlivable passion and ungrievable loss. This heterosexuality is produced not only by implementing the prohibition on incest but, prior to that, by enforcing the prohibition on homosexuality.” Butler, “Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification,” 24.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 26–29.

<sup>18</sup> Tribunella, *Melancholia and Maturation*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> It is problematic to classify Sebastian as “homosexual,” since his behavior in the play seems to be at least in part pedophilic in nature. Pedophilia is fundamentally different than same-sex sexual desire, even when manifest toward same-sex adolescents or children. Still, there are indications that Sebastian was attracted to adult men. Williams’s presentation of Sebastian is indicative of the conflation of pederasty with homosexuality within homophobic American culture in the twentieth century.

<sup>20</sup> Williams, *Plays 1937-1955*.

<sup>21</sup> Schlesinger, “The Crisis in American Masculinity,” 238–9.

<sup>22</sup> Savran, *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers*, 100.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Brick refers in strongly derisive terms to queer people and queer acts in the most explicit and: “unnatural thing,” “ducking sissies,” “fairies,” and “dirty” (945,947-948, 950).

<sup>26</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>28</sup> Edelman, “The Future Is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive.”

<sup>29</sup> Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 1–21; Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*; DeAngelis, “Queerness and Futurity in *Superbad*.”

<sup>30</sup> Miller, “The Shadows of the Gods: A Critical View of the American Theatre,” 41.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

---

<sup>34</sup> Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama, Vol. 2*, 30.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>36</sup> Olsen, “‘The Perks of Being a Wallflower’ Steadily Blossoms”; Bing, “Perks’ Guy in Pics; Nerve Racking up Deals.”

<sup>37</sup> Jenkins, “From Queer to Gay and Back Again.”

<sup>38</sup> Doll, “A New Way for Gay Characters in Y.A.”

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Pew Research Center, “Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage.”

<sup>40</sup> The sister is unnamed in the novel but is given the name Candace in the film. My account of the sister here is based primarily on the novel, however, not the film.

<sup>41</sup> Charlie’s sister tells him, “Sam had a reputation when she was a sophomore.... Sam used to be a ‘blow queen’” (49). In the film, Sam explains this to Charlie, saying, “I used to sleep with guys who treated me like shit. And get wasted all the time” (70).

**Chapter Five**  
**Queer Cannibals and Deviant Detectives:**  
**Subversion and Homosocial Desire in NBC's *Hannibal*<sup>1</sup>**

*Will Graham: Now my inner voice sounds like you. I can't get you out of my head.*

*Hannibal Lecter: Friendship can sometimes involve a breach of individual separateness.*

In the final season of HBO's *The Wire* (2002-8) Baltimore police detectives Jimmy McNulty and Lester Freamon invent a serial killer as part of a scheme to bring down the city's biggest drug kingpin. As part of the investigation into the fake serial killer, McNulty meets with the FBI behavioral crimes unit, who provide a profile of the fake serial killer, which the audience realizes bares a striking resemblance to McNulty. The suspect, the FBI agent explains, likely resents authority, feels alienated from his civil service job, feels superior to his bosses, is a high functioning alcoholic, "has trouble with lasting relationships," and is using the "murders" as a means to "assert his superiority and intellectual prowess" (5.8). As the scene unfolds, McNulty's face displays the creeping recognition of himself in the picture painted by the agent. McNulty's Ahab-like pursuit of high-end drug cases over the course of the series had long since become a pretext for his incorrigible anti-social behavior, which culminates in him mimicking the behavior of a serial killer: strangling the corpse of a homeless man in order to make his death look like a murder and kidnapping another homeless man. The final season of *The Wire* was a disappointment for many critics and fans, and perhaps the series became too self-aware, or demanded too much self-awareness of the audience, to be entirely satisfying as a drama. Yet, the series had always assumed a rather ironic posture toward the police procedural genre, to which it was indebted but against which it struggled. The series

---

<sup>1</sup> This chapter was adapted into an article published in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* (32.6 2015). I have here only changed the article in minor ways for the purpose transforming it back into a chapter. The article was written and sent to press before the final season of *Hannibal* had aired. Consequently, it represents an incomplete assessment of the series, but one that is consistent for the most part with the entire run of the series.

elevated the TV procedural to the level of high art, even as it critiqued the War on Drugs and War on Crime ideology that underwrote that genre. It is no surprise then that the series eventually would assume an ironic self-referentiality. It was making a critique of the way Americans are fixated on the psychopathic serial killer,<sup>1</sup> but it was also participating in a sort of inversion that has become common to the television detective series, wherein the detective's personal pathologies increasingly cause him to look and act like the very murderer he is chasing.

The preponderance of American police procedurals in the second half of the twentieth century—e.g., *Hawaii Five-O* (1968-80), *Dragnet* (1951-9, 1967-70), the *Law & Order* franchises (1990-present), the *CSI* franchises (2000-present), and *NCIS* franchises (2003-present)—are characterized by a basic faith in the police detective as the guarantor of social order. Ideologically, the detective has served as a “sanitary cordon” between normalcy and deviant criminality. The detective is liminal because she, or more likely he, stands between the normative “us” and the criminal, pathological, and deviant “them.” The detective's function is two fold: to apprehend the evildoer and to discern the truth. Running counter to this normative juridical and epistemic role, however, is a subversive thread that is latent in the detective's role as a liminal figure, who lives between the normative world and the “underworld.” This theme has its roots in the bleak Gothicism of the American *roman noir* and *film noir*—for example, in the moral ambiguity of Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe or Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade.

Sherlock Holmes provides a striking example of how this always already latent theme has come to the fore. Holmes, the very symbol of scientific rationality in the pursuits of justice and truth, was even in Arthur Conan Doyle's original stories a liminal figure. Holmes's drug use, his “bohemian” bachelorhood, and eccentricity all marked him aberrant. His lack of interest in women was particularly shocking to Dr. Watson, who on one occasion declared him to be “an automaton,—a calculating-machine!... There is something positively inhuman in you at times.”<sup>2</sup> From 1939 to

1946, Basil Rathbone played an affable, if supercilious, version of Sherlock Holmes; Ronald Howard would play an even more normalized Holmes in the *Sherlock Holmes* syndicated series in 1954. It was not until the 1970s that Holmes's eccentricities, so conspicuous in the original stories, would be discussed in a frank manner. Billy Wilder's *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970) was the first adaptation to raise the question of Holmes's sexuality, but Herbert Ross's *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (1976) would mark a fundamental shift in the representation of Holmes. *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* imagines Holmes as a cocaine addict driven to psychosis. This film was the precursor for future adaptations of Holmes and other detectives loosely modeled on him.<sup>3</sup> The recent spate of Sherlock Holmes adaptations—Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* films (2009 and 2011), BBC's *Sherlock* (2010-present), and CBS's *Elementary* (2012-present)—were actually preceded by a series of Holmes-like American-television genius detective in series such as Fox's *House, MD* (2004-12), USA's *Monk* (2002-09), USA's *Psych* (2006-present), CBS's *The Mentalist* (2008-present), Fox's *Lie to Me* (2009-11), and TNT's *Perception* (2012-2015). Both the Sherlock Holmes characters and Holmes-like detectives in these series are characterized by some sort of non-normative characteristics: some are mentally ill or neurologically atypical, some are drug addicts or alcoholics, several exhibit some sort of puerile arrested development, and many are anti-social and even “sociopathic.” Additionally, these Holmes figures are depicted as having a unique and even erotic connection with his psychopathic nemesis, Moriarty. The *Sherlock* series had fun with the queer implications of the Sherlock-Moriarty relationship in the season three premiere, and the *Elementary* series simply made Moriarty a woman—making explicit the erotic potential in the relationship, even as it collapsed the homoerotic formula.

This chapter examines the “deadly bromance” that unfold between Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter in NBC's *Hannibal* (2013-present). While formerly marked by a rigid ideological commitment to the division between normality and pathology, the detective series increasingly blurs

the lines between the pathological criminal other and the normative self. “Deviant detectives” not only blur the line between criminal anti-socialness and normality, but also subvert the normative expectations of gender, sexuality, and dis/ability. *Hannibal* is a representative example of the phenomenon, but, more so, it represents the *outer limit* of the phenomenon, straining to the breaking point the very liminality inherent to the genre. In the series, FBI profiler Will Graham’s loses his entire sense of identity; his selfhood is threatened by the influence of the serial killer Hannibal Lecter. This destabilized detective character subverts the boundary between the normative self and the deviant other. As a consequence, the series runs against the grain of the detective genre’s tendency to reinforce normativity, even as it fully realizes the moral and social ambiguity of the detective native to the genre.

The pleasure of the traditional detective story is grounded in the inevitable epistemological clarity that comes at the end. The detective narrative is defined by the accumulation of evidence and the final definitive assignment of guilt and innocence. This epistemic catharsis is experienced when the body of evidence transforms from inchoate noise into a definitive single of guilt, pointing clearly to one suspect. This clarity is ideologically satisfying because it reaffirms the stability and basic rightness of the social order and its institutions (the police and the courts) and reaffirms the power of reason to distinguish between innocence and guilt. The detective embodies and performs the “will to knowledge” and, in this regard, resembles the psychiatrist or public health official, who apply reason, rigorous methodology, and science to policing the boundaries between normalcy and deviancy.<sup>4</sup> Popular detective fiction at the end of the nineteenth century contributed to the imbrication of science and law enforcement. Before psychiatry had been fully entrenched, Sherlock Holmes applied various techniques for *reading* the bodies and actions of individuals. The gaze of reason applied to naked reality could set aright the fearful disorder of the modern city. Like so much post-Enlightenment scientism, Holmesian deduction inevitably gives voice to the prejudices of its

time. Phrenology and physiognomy in the Holmes stories often give an objective veneer to nationalist, classist, and racist prejudice.<sup>5</sup> In this way, the Holmes stories affirm that we can discern who is or is not normal, because “scientific” methods transfigure middle-class prejudice into empirical science.

The optimistic application of “science” to criminal justice was helped along by detective fiction, but it was manifestly part of the juridical apparatus by the early twentieth century. In one of the most famous criminal trials of the early twentieth century, the 1924 murder trial of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, the prosecution and defense proffered conflicting psychiatric evidence. The young men were said to have “immature and diseased brains,” they were accused of “perversion” (i.e., homosexuality), and lurid sexual motives were attached to their murder.<sup>6</sup> The trial was symptomatic of the American media’s sensational crime coverage, which began to take off in the 1890s and continues to this day.<sup>7</sup> The trial also anticipated the growing power of psychiatry and the way in which sexual “deviancy,” psychiatric abnormality, and criminality would be conflated. Psychiatry would solidify its role in criminal justice and public health after World War II. The American paranoiac obsession with “sexual psychopaths” develops most strongly with the two “sex crimes panics” of the 1930s and the post-war era. Driven in large part by sensational press coverage of crimes with a sexual element, a handful of murders fomented a national outcry for local, state, and federal governments to protect the public from sexual psychopaths. During both sex crime panics, expanded and transformed legal apparatuses were created to address sexual criminality *and* sexual deviancy more generally. Both of these episodes coincide with a marked increase in homophobic persecution, which many historians have argued was a fearful response to the massive social upheavals around Prohibition, urbanization, the Great Depression, the New Deal, and mobilization for World War II.<sup>8</sup> As Estelle Freeman notes the sexual psychopath became a dialectical other against whom normative sexuality could be renegotiated. A more liberal notion of

heterosexual desire was normalized in contradistinction to the deviant behavior of the pedophile, rapist, sexually-motivated murder, homosexual, and other categories of “perversion.” Perversion, which included all of these “deviancies,” then became a categorical antithesis to normalcy, helping to shore up “straight” sex.<sup>9</sup> Psychiatric discourse mirrored the popular prejudice, which conflated social abnormality and criminality under the same deviant category. The American Psychology Association for example lumped all “antisocial” individuals under the heading “Sociopathic Personality Disturbance,” including in this category criminals, psychopaths, alcoholics, pedophiles, and homosexuals.<sup>10</sup>

The sexual psychopath quickly became part of American popular culture. Patrick Hamilton’s *Rope* originally published and performed in London in 1929 is a veiled retelling of the Leopold and Loeb murder, which Alfred Hitchcock remade as a film in 1948. Richard Fleischer’s film *Compulsion* (1959) would more accurately recount the murder and trial. Hitchcock’s *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *Psycho* (1960), and *Frenzy* (1972) are but the most notable examples of his films that imbricate psychotic murder with sexual pathology, homosexuality, and mental illness. The psychopath as an antagonist in cinema has become even more common in the past thirty years, most notably in David Fincher’s blockbusters *Se7en* (1995) and *Zodiac* (2007) but also in critically successful films such as the Coen brothers’ *No Country for Old Men* (2007). The serial killer psychopath has become a staple of Anglo-American television crime series in the past decade, including, for example, CBS’s *Criminal Minds* (2005-present), Showtime’s *Dexter* (2006-13), ITV’s *Whitechapel* (2009-present), the BBC’s *The Fall* (2013-present), NBC’s *The Following* (2013-15), and FX’s *The Bridge* (2013-2014).

If queer sexuality, psychiatric illness, and other modes of social “deviancy” became inextricably entwined with criminality in the American imagination, we may conversely say that “normalcy” became the dialectical opposite that was constituted to define the ideal American citizen. Lennard J. Davis has observed that normalcy as defined by “averageness” is a relatively recent

cultural construction that coincides with the rise of the middle class. As an ideologically constructed dialectical opposite, the non-normative disabled body is grouped in with other “deviants.” He writes, “The problem for people with disabilities was that eugenicists tended to group together all allegedly ‘undesirable’ traits. So, for example, criminals, the poor, and people with disabilities might be mentioned in the same breath.”<sup>11</sup> Robert McRuer has observed that queerness and disability have been historically conflated: “people with disabilities are often understood as somehow queer..., while queers are often understood as somehow disabled (as an ongoing medicalization of identity, similar to what people with disabilities more generally encounter, would suggest).” These “queer/disabled figures” help “to maintain the fiction that able-bodied heterosexuality is not in crisis.”<sup>12</sup> Mid-century social containment entailed consolidating categories of otherness as a binary opposite of normalcy.

The aggregation of otherness has been subject to systematic criticism. LGBTQ critics and activists, as well as disability rights activists, have organized dissenting voices to combat this stereotyping and pathologizing. In the past three or four decades some LGBTQ groups have sought to normalize queer identities and to challenge the standards of heteronormativity; disability rights groups have similarly sought to integrate disabled persons into the public sphere and also challenge the normative standards of “ability” as systematically discriminatory. Though mental illness has a contested relationship to disability, some radicalized groups have sought to de-medicalize and de-pathologize the discourse around “mental illness” and to critique the very epistemology of psychiatry and the signification of “normality,” using activist approaches and theoretical frameworks developed by disability groups and theorists.<sup>13</sup>

The broad stigmatization of people with physical, cognitive, neurological, and psychological disabilities is linked to a pervasive fear of these populations. Mental illness is particularly associated in the public imagination with violent crimes disproportionate to the actual rate of violent crimes

committed by the population.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the mentally ill are more likely to be *victims* of violent crime than the general population.<sup>15</sup> Popular entertainment is a big part of the problem. According to Otto Wahl writing in 2003, in one sample of detective and police programs mentally ill characters who appeared “were usually criminals from whom the heroes had to protect the public.”<sup>16</sup> Similar observations have been made about how the broader category of disability is often used as a metaphor for evil in media.<sup>17</sup> The detective figure historically serves as a buffer between the aggregated pathological other and the normative self.

The current trend of deviant detectives runs in the opposite direction. While drawing on the latent moral ambiguity of the detective figure, the deviant detective represents an inversion of the categorical opposition between the normative self and the deviant other. The NBC series *Hannibal* is indicative of this trend but it also stands out as the most extreme example, because it subversively figures the protagonist detective’s self identity as radically malleable, threatening to transform him into a “psycho killer.”

NBC’s *Hannibal*, created by Bryan Fuller, is fundamentally about the relationship between Will Graham (Hugh Dancy) and Hannibal Lecter (Mads Mikkelsen). Graham, a gifted profiler who has the uncanny ability to empathize with serial killers, is called back into the field by Jack Crawford (Laurence Fishburne), the FBI’s Behavior Sciences Director. Lecter becomes Graham’s unofficial psychiatrist and uses this position to manipulate Graham. The series is based on Thomas Harris’s Hannibal Lecter series of novels: *Red Dragon* (1981), *Silence of the Lambs* (1988), *Hannibal* (1999), and *Hannibal Rising* (2006). All of the novels have been adapted into films. The adaptation of *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) was a massive success and won numerous awards. In adapting the Harris’s books, Fuller had to consider how to present the new series to an audience likely familiar with previous adaptations and the original books. The series, as a consequence, is self-consciously intertextual. *Hannibal* rewards hardcore fans by sprinkling direct quotes from the novels, as well as visual

references from the earlier films. Rather than being a faithful adaptation, the series is a playful pastiche of the original, swapping dialogue between characters and grafting quotes into completely different contexts. The series creates a sort of intertextual dissonance between itself and its antecedent texts. The most important way it does this is to often invert the positions of Graham and Lecter from the original novels and to substitute one for the other in criminal contexts. So, for example, Graham is arrested for a series of murders attributed to “the Chesapeake Ripper,” who is in fact Lecter. As the result of Lecter’s plotting, Graham is committed to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, the same institution that Lecter is committed to in the novels and films. In the series, Graham is literally substituted for Lecter, placed in the prison cell where Lecter should be—and Lecter even fills in for Graham as the FBI’s consulting forensic psychologist. In the final scene of season one, Lecter visits Graham in the State Hospital. The two men greet one another from opposite sides of the steel prison bars. In a pair of reverse shots, Graham appears between the bars in a prison jump suit, while Lecter is unobscured by the bars in one of his fine plaid suits. The scene slyly inverts the iconic sequences from the books and films when Will Graham or Clarice Starling confronts the imprisoned Lecter. A similar inversion is played out when Beverly Katz (Hettienne Park) visits Graham in prison to solicit his advice in catching a serial killer (2.1). The scene mirrors one from the novel *Red Dragon* and its two film adaptations, in which Graham visits Lecter at the State Hospital to solicit his advice. In the television series, it is Graham behind bars. Dialogue from the book and the film is quoted verbatim, but Graham’s lines are given to Katz and Lecter’s lines to Graham.<sup>18</sup> This is only one of the many inversions.<sup>19</sup>

The *formal* element of intertextual play, however, matches the thematic elements of the series. One theme of the series is substitution or inversions, as already demonstrated. An even more central theme of the series is that of *influence*. Influence takes many, often intersecting, forms in the series: seduction, manipulation, hypnosis,<sup>20</sup> the administering of drugs,<sup>21</sup> and psychiatric treatment.

The numerous overlapping psychiatric relationships in the series speak to the thematic centrality of influence and control.<sup>22</sup> A related theme is that of transformation or transfiguration (themes borrowed from the novels) and power of one individual's persona to take over another's. Many of these originate with Lecter, who is the chaotic epicenter of the series. To the extent that Lecter has coherent motives for his actions, they seem to be mostly derived from his god complex, and the pleasure and curiosity he experiences in setting events in motion.<sup>23</sup>

Graham and Lecter's relationship form the central examples of manipulation and influence. Lecter attempts to manipulate Graham, transform him into a serial killer, and remake Graham in his own image. During most of season one, Graham is almost entirely unaware of the influence that Hannibal is attempting to exert on him. Influence as a theme is present in Harris's novels, though it functions in a more problematic way. It even manifests as a sort of rape fantasy, when Clarice Starling is brainwashed into becoming Lecter's lover in the *Hannibal* novel. Harris's novel seems to imagine Starling's "conversion" story as a happy ending, when it is more like a rape/captivity fantasy. In Fuller's *Hannibal*, influence as a theme takes on a homoerotic quality in the form of the deadly bromance between Lecter and Graham. The series is peppered with instance of homoerotic influences and manipulation. Lecter is ensnared in a sort of love/murder triangle with his patient Franklin and Franklin's friend Tobias Budge, who turns out to be a serial killer.<sup>24</sup> Graham and Lecter's relationship remains largely homosocial (platonic)<sup>25</sup> but, as we will see, the series shades their relationship in various ways as queer.

Because I am focusing my analysis on the quasi-erotic relationship between Graham and Lecter in the series, it is worth noting how the series departs from the earlier novels and films in terms of eroticism and sexuality. First, an important part of the erotic economy of the series is the choice of casting Mads Mikkelsen as Hannibal Lecter. Mikkelsen's Lecter is a marked departure from the one played by Brian Cox, in *Manhunter*, and Anthony Hopkins, in all of the subsequent

films. Both Cox and Hopkins were much older when they played Lecter; they were also rather portly and otherwise physically plain actors. More importantly, Hopkin's performance of Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs* gives the appearance of a slithering cobra, who looks at his interlocutors as if they were a potential meal. Mikkelsen, on the other hand, is muscular with square jawed and high cheekbones. His Lecter wears fine suits and exhibits an effortless and charming refinement. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing, but this fact only heightens his appeal. Lecter becomes both a source of terror and an object of erotic desire.

The second and more significant difference to be noted is that Thomas Harris' novels, and to a lesser extent the film adaptations, are quite homophobic and transphobic. They also participate in the conflation of queerness, disability, and criminal violence. Harris's pathogenetic accounts of mental illness are ethically, politically, and even medically repugnant. The murders and villains in the Lecter novels are disfigured, trauma survivors, or are coded in some way as sexually "deviant." The most villainous figure in all of the Harris's novels is probably Mason Verger. Verger is paralyzed with a severely disfigured face, which Harris describes in vivid detail. Verger is a pedophile, rapist, and a sadist. He also appears to have at least homosexual tendencies, as he attempts to seduce Lecter. Similarly, Francis Dolarhyde, the Red Dragon serial killer, is born with a cleft palate, experiences vivid hallucinations, and endures years of various kinds of abuse. Dolarhyde's murders are also sexual in nature. Jame Gumb, the Buffalo Bill killer from *Silence of the Lambs*, is diagnosed as a sort of "transsexual" with a long history of abuse. His murders are at least partly motivated by his unclearly defined gender "deviancy."<sup>26</sup> Margot Verger, Mason's sister, provides a slightly different example. She kills two people, including her brother. The novel *Hannibal* implies that Margot becomes a butch lesbian as a result of childhood trauma, having been abused and raped by her brother. This is a particularly distasteful homophobic trope, as it diminishes Margot's sexuality into a symptom of abuse. Harris's prose fatalistically observes Margot's muscular physique and implicitly

codes her masculine performance in freakish terms. Indeed, in the novels, violent serial murders are associated with “deviant sexuality,” trauma survival, and physical and mental disability.

Whereas Harris’s novels position queerness and disability as terrifying others, in the *Hannibal* television series gender, sexuality, and disability are more ambiguously positioned, particularly in the protagonist, Will Graham. In *Red Dragon*, Graham is depicted a uniquely gifted forensics psychologist. However, in *Hannibal*, he is almost superhuman in his ability to assume the point of view of other individuals. Graham reenacts murders in his imagination, and we literally see Graham performing the murders in all their grizzly details. Erasing the boundaries between his identity and that of another is inherent to his methodology. As a consequence, Graham lives a solitary life, surrounding himself with stray dogs he has rescued from the street. One character says of Graham that he has a “unique cocktail of personality disorders and neuroses that make [him] a highly skilled profiler” (1.6). Lecter asserts that Graham is capable of “pure empathy” and has “too many mirror neurons” (1.1, 1.10). Graham describes his own condition in a conversation with Jack Crawford, his supervisor:

Crawford: Where do you fall on the spectrum?

Graham: My horse is hitched to a post that is closer to Asperger’s and autistics than narcissists and sociopaths.

Crawford: But you can empathize with narcissists and sociopaths.

Graham: I can empathize with anybody. It’s less to do with a personality disorder than an active imagination. (1.1)

The term “spectrum” in this instance suggests something much larger than the autism spectrum. (Indeed, the invocation of autism does not make much sense given the nature of Graham’s dis/abilities.) Graham and Crawford seem to articulate a vast map (grid) of human neuro-psychology that is not limited to two discrete categories—healthy or ill. Graham may be on the autism spectrum, but he is also charted on a whole series of spectrums for his capacity to feel

empathy and to experience delusion. These various psychiatric and neurobiological diagnoses are indicative of a peculiar disability, or conversely ableist, politics at work in the series. Graham's "illness" is also his "ability," in much the way that late modern superheroes "suffer" their abilities.

I certainly don't take *Hannibal* to be a model of disability politics in the media. On the contrary the series duplicates the ableist convention of using psychiatric and neurobiological disability to appeal to ableist fears of the mentally ill and neuroatypical. However, the series has the virtue of being narrated *from the point of view* of a disabled person. In this regard, the series is part of a larger turn in detective television series that center on psychologically, emotionally, or neurologically disabled detectives. The BBC's *Sherlock* (2010-present) often toys with the notion that its Holmes is a "high functioning sociopath" or high functioning autistic. USA's *Monk* (2002-09) made mostly comic, and ableist, use of the title character's myriad mental illnesses. Showtime's *Dexter* (2006-13) is about a serial killer who channels his murderous impulses by killing other serial killers. In Showtime's *Homeland* (2011-present) Carrie Mathison is a brilliant Central Intelligence Agency analyst who also suffers from bipolar disorder with occasional "psychotic breaks." In TNT's *Perception* (2012-2015) Daniel Pierce is a consulting neuroscientist for the FBI. Pierce is schizophrenic and experiences vivid hallucinations that often help him solve cases. In the Syfy network's *Alphas* (2012-13), Gary Bell is a member of a team of "alphas" (mutants with special abilities). Bell is autistic but functions as a critical member of the team with his ability to see electromagnetic waves. In FX's *The Bridge* (2013-15) Sonya Cross, a dogged El Paso homicide detective, is on the autism spectrum.<sup>27</sup> In HBO's *True Detective* (2014-present), Detective Rust Cohle experiences "visions" or "chemical flashbacks," which he attributes to "neural damage" from his time as a deep undercover narcotics officer (1.2).

Unprecedented numbers of mentally ill and neuroatypical peoples in leading detective roles on television can be attributed to the changes in the television ecology. The fragmentation of

television audiences and shifting profit models, driven by the rise of original cable channel programming, has dramatically changed what constitutes a successful television program. As a consequence, the need to appeal to the lowest common denominator, which characterized network television for most of its existence, has given way to niche programming that can take greater risks without worrying about alienating “mainstream” audiences.

However, the emergence of these anti-normative characters reflects a broader blurring of the lines between normalcy and deviancy. Certainly, public discussions around mental illness have become less stigmatizing in some respects. Psychiatry and psychopharmacology have expanded their reach into the lives of Americans. The pervasiveness of psychiatric diagnoses may have had the counter-intuitively effect of normalizing conditions heretofore categorized as abject and wholly other. Certain mental illnesses—specifically, depression and anxiety disorders—and relatively mild neurological, cognitive, and learning disabilities—such as obsessive compulsive disorder, dyslexia, attention deficit disorder, etc.—have become relatively normalized. Psychopharmacology has similarly normalized mood disorders (e.g., Wellbutrin to treat depression or Xanax to treat low-level anxiety) and learning disabilities (e.g., Adderall to treat attention deficit disorder). Prescription drug advertisements aim to increase sales of drugs by increasing the number of people who recognize themselves as mentally ill or as having a neurological disability. A consequence of aggressive psychopharmaceuticals marketing may be the normalization of mental illness.<sup>28</sup> More and more, Americans casually ascribe to themselves or others neuro-psychiatric conditions, such as dyslexia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, Asperger’s, and other conditions. Asperger’s syndrome, in particular, is increasingly thrown around to explain notable instances of social awkwardness or dysfunction.<sup>29</sup> It is far from clear whether these trends are positive or negative. Normalization tends to efface the challenges seriously disabled people face, even as it destigmatizes milder disabilities. Applying “Asperger’s” to someone may marginalize them, but it does not have the same slur-connotation that

accrued around “retarded.” In part, it seems to me, the rise of neurobiology and genetic science has altered many of the fundamental ways we think about normalcy and abnormality. We increasingly understand our identities in neurobiological terms, experiencing our moods, personality traits, and abilities as emergent properties of our brain structure.<sup>30</sup> To the extent that we have begun to understand ability and disability as a spectrum, expressing a range of neuro-psychiatric impairments, we may find hope in these trends. Physical disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and severe psychiatric conditions are still underrepresented or else represented as frightening, horrifying, or pitiable in the popular media. Moreover, conventionally attractive actors play all of the above noted characters, implying that we are willing to put up with a certain level of disability from people whom we find physically attractive. While I think there is room for guarded optimism, as I will note below, *Hannibal* and other series present another set of challenges that should also give us pause.

Will Graham’s psycho-neurological deviancy is particularly important when considered alongside the ways in which his character subverts norms of masculinity, particularly conventional representation of the American detective. The archetypal American detective is physically, morally, and psychically solid. If Dashiell Hammett’s Sam Spade was morally ambiguous, he nevertheless lived by a clear code, which placed him above the criminal elements among whom he worked. The American detective’s liminal position is a test—and affirmation—of his *solidity*, because he is able to stand between two worlds without being pulled into the underworld and its degenerate temptations.<sup>31</sup> Will Graham, on the other hand, is often in two places at once, in a literally ecstatic state of standing outside himself. Far from being a sanitary cordon that enforces boundaries, Graham is physically and psychically permeable and fluid. Fluidity is an important visual metaphor in the series. Graham is often sweating through his bed sheets, due to an encephalitic infection, and has vivid nightmares of being submerged in water. In one nightmare he suddenly melts into water (1.11). Graham’s imprecisely diagnosed psycho-neurological condition and the idea that he is “on

the spectrum” suggest the fluidity or perhaps indeterminacy of his selfhood. Graham’s psychic plasticity is a counterpoint to the mythical solidity of American hetero-masculinity.

Lecter is attracted to Graham because of his psychic fluidity. Lecter explains his interest in being Graham’s friend, to his therapist Dr. Du Maurier (Gillian Anderson): “He’s nothing like me. We see the world in different ways, yet he can assume my point of view” (1.8). Lecter invests in Graham as a singular hope for love and friendship, but his notion of friendship and love are unusual to say the least. In pursuing Graham’s friendship, Lecter aims to achieve a sort of psychic mirroring in which both men can truly see and understand each other. This relationship is part of a larger pattern for Lecter. He has re-created other patients in his image, creating serial killers, but Graham is uniquely able to receive Lecter’s imprint and completely reflect Lecter back to himself.<sup>32</sup> However, the mirroring does not seem to operate the opposite way. Will often appears as a vessel in Lecter’s imagination.<sup>33</sup> Further, Lecter appears to sincerely believe that his relationship is one based on love and that his will to transform Graham is also an act of love. After Graham has become aware of what is happening, Lecter explains the relationship in strikingly romantic terms, saying, “No one can be fully aware of another human being unless we love them. By that love we see potential in our beloved. Through that love, we allow our beloved to see their potential. Expressing that love, our beloved’s potential comes true” (2.9). Lecter is ultimately successful, though only temporarily, in implanting his self image into Graham. After being imprisoned Graham tells Lecter, “Now my inner voice sounds like you. I can't get you out of my head” (2.1). Lecter’s replies— “Friendship can sometimes involve a breach of individual separateness”—exposing something of the deep-seated anxiety around male friendship, not only in terms of homophobia, but also the fear of violating the psychic autonomy of the masculine individual. In their relationship, Lecter is the dominant, *phallic* personality who seeks to implant his self-image into Graham’s plastic and receptive psyche. Graham,

thus, assumes a stereotypical “feminine” position in the relationship, becoming the passive material that Lecter may shape.

Graham is imagined as psychically and physically penetrable throughout the series. While imprisoned, Graham sends another serial killer to murder Lecter. In doing so, Graham willingly takes on Lecter’s murderous personality. Graham hallucinates that he is growing antlers out of his back—the stag having been established as a symbol for Lecter (2.5). The antlers emerge out of his back, as if he is being pierced from the inside out and as if Lecter’s personality is growing inside Graham and bursting out like a butterfly from its chrysalis.<sup>34</sup> In another instance, Graham is literally penetrated by Lecter, who puts a tube down Graham’s throat and inserts an ear into his stomach, while he is in a catatonic state. The rape-like nature of this act is reinforced in the cinematography. Lecter also surreptitiously feeds Graham and numerous people food made from the bodies of his victims. One of the most salient visual elements of the series are the sumptuous meals that Lecter prepares for his guests, almost always made from the internal organs or muscle tissue of his most recent victim—perhaps the most insidious mode of penetration Lecter enacts.

Graham is eventually released, and he resumes his “therapy” with Lecter. Now fully aware of what Lecter is, Graham menaces Lecter. The prey becomes the hunter, and the manipulated becomes the manipulator.<sup>35</sup> Again, Graham’s transformation into a Lecter clone appears successful, as they reverse positions. The series creator, Bryan Fuller, characterizes Graham’s post-incarceration relationship with Lecter as seductive. Fuller explains, “Will is opening up a bit, but he’s opening up like a Venus flytrap for Dr. Lecter.”<sup>36</sup> (The gendered imagery here, Graham opening up to receive Lecter, is worth noting.) The audience is partly kept in the dark about Graham’s true motives, but we discover that he is coordinating his deception with Jack Crawford. They fake a murder in order to convince Lecter that Graham is fully converted.

The lynchpin of Graham's ruse is to entrap Lecter in a murder pact. The pact offers Lecter his most secret desire: a fully intimate murderous coupling with Graham. By the end of season two the homoerotic and marital metaphors approach an almost camp level. The queer implications of the series work at multiple registers, addressing different audience members across these different registers, allowing some to ignore them altogether, other to chuckle at the homoerotic play, and others still to take genuine pleasure in the homoerotic courtship between the two handsome leading men. It is important to note that *Hannibal* has developed an ardent fandom that includes a queer subculture. Aja Romano, writing for *The Daily Dot* during the series' first season, observed that "slashers," fans who "ship" (imagine or write relationships) between same-sex characters, "are already coming out in droves for Hannibal/Graham, or 'Hannigram,' as fans have dubbed the obligatory ship portmanteau."<sup>37</sup> Some remarkable fanart has been produced in this vein. An apparently Finish fan artist, with the Tumblr handle "dinagastuff," has created a large and impressive series of Hannigram slash illustrations, which follow some of the conventions of graphic novels. Though Romano notes that there has been substantial pushback from "conventional" *Hannibal* fans, the queer *Hannibal* fandom is certainly heartened by encouragement from the producers who go to great lengths to cultivate their fan base. Emily Nussbaum has noted how the BBC's *Sherlock* similarly engages in a sort of call and response with its fandom. The series three premiere directly incorporated fan fiction, including slash fan fiction. Nussbaum notes that these meta-textual examples acknowledges also acknowledge how the series itself, like all adaptations, are works of fan fiction.<sup>38</sup>

*Hannibal* specifically sends signals to its queer fan base, peppering episodes with thinly veiled queer references. For example, when they encounter Graham and Lecter's crime scenes in season two, investigators interpret the scenes as being part of a "courtship" ritual between the Chesapeake Ripper (Lecter) and his unknown "admirer" (Graham) (2.11). In another example, Lecter sketches

“Achilles lamenting the death of Patroclus.” In the flickering light of a fireplace, Lecter remarks to Graham, “Achilles wished all Greeks would die, so that he and Patroclus could conquer Troy alone” (2.12). While the basic analogy between Achilles and Patroclus and Lecter and Graham is clear enough, some viewers will recall the speculated homosexual relationships between the mythic Greek heroes, but other viewers may not attach any queer valences to the reference or simply ignore them. In another scene, Graham and Lecter eat a pair of Ortolan Buntings, rare songbirds. Bryan Fuller confesses to the not-too-subtle eroticism in the scene’s cinematography:

The scene has a very bizarre sexuality to it, because it’s all of these close-up shots of things [the birds] going in men’s mouths and then swallowing and eye rolling, so it’s hard not to think of the sexual subtext of what’s happening between these two guys at the same time. It felt like a lot was going on in the scene, not only just the communion but the exchange of body fluids, in a way, and swallowing for God’s sake. [Laughs.] So we can’t claim innocence on that scene.<sup>39</sup>

Fuller’s laugh is telling, as the scene has a camp quality, being over-the-top in its suggestion of homoeroticism, without actually depicting queer acts. The scene creates fodder for slash fans, while providing plausible deniability to fans who may be uncomfortable with its homoerotic possibilities.

The homoerotic subtext of the series even comes into play when Graham and Lecter are ostensibly at their most heterosexual. Both men are involved in a classic homosocial love triangle with psychiatrist and FBI consultant Alana Bloom. Bloom and Graham have an ongoing flirtation in season one, but Bloom and Lecter become involved in season two. In a particularly flamboyant sequence, a sex scene between Bloom and Lecter is intercut with a sex scene between Graham and Margot Verger. Fuller has described the sequence as a kind of four-way, because the editing creates a seamless transition from one couple to the other and in places Graham and Lecter are alternately entwined with Bloom. At a rather superficial level, these moments suggest that, though he is with Margot, Graham is thinking about Bloom. The four-way confirms both men’s heterosexuality, but it also places Graham and Lecter in the same bed. Granted they are mediated by Bloom, they are nonetheless erotically linked by her. In one shot for example, Bloom kisses Lecter and turns her

head to kiss Graham. Fuller explains the sequence in this way, “I knew that I wanted the barriers between all of these characters to come down in a way that they are *very* intimately involved in the conspiracies that are afoot and that the sex scene is very much a psychological one. That was important to me: to have a deeply psychological sex scene that blurred the barriers between whose bedroom we were currently in.”<sup>40</sup> *Narratively* the sex scene recuperates both men as heterosexual, but *visually* the sequence blurs the erotic boundaries between everyone involved and echoes a recurring theme of the series—the subversion of normative boundaries.

Important though it is, the erotic nature of Graham and Lecter’s relationship remains latent or possibly metaphorical throughout the series. But their homosocial relationship is quite real and overt. Bryan Fuller characterizes Graham and Lecter’s relationship at the end of season two as “murder husbands,” because they appear to be plotting and executing murders together.<sup>41</sup> The murder husband relationship is a ruse, hatched between Graham and Jack Crawford, but Graham at the last minute tips off Lecter. Graham hopes that Lecter will flee, revealing that the affection between them was mutual and real. Similarly, Lecter, before realizing Graham’s betrayal, had planned a life on the run with Graham and Abigail Hobbs, the adolescent young woman for whom both men developed paternal feelings. Lecter tells Graham, “The place was made for Abigail in your world. Do you understand? The place was made for all of us, together. I wanted to surprise you.” Thus, more than “murder husbands,” Lecter envisioned a family with Graham and Abigail. Even psychopaths, it seems, are compelled to seek domesticity.

*Hannibal* represents a fundamental subversion of the detective figure in American popular culture. Historically, the detective is a normalizing figure, who restores the social order when it is disrupted by a crime. The male detective is a psychologically and physically “solid” heterosexual male. Will Graham contradicts all of these prototypical qualities, suggesting queer sexuality, bodily and psychic penetrability, and psychological and neurological disability. *Hannibal*, while in many ways

a *sui generis* example, can also be seen as defining the extreme limit of a larger trend in the detective genre. More and more detectives seem to be conduits that connect the world of normalcy to the world of deviancy, rather than barriers that keep the two apart. A&E's *Those Who Kill* (2014), for example, follows Catherine Jensen, a homicide detective plagued by childhood trauma and a craving for vengeance. Jensen murders in cold blood a serial killer in the first episode of the series. Jensen often works with Thomas Schaeffer, a criminologist and profiler, who, like Will Graham, is troubled by his capacity to identify with the monsters he is hunting. The protagonist of Fox's *The Following* (2013-present), Ryan Hardy has a strange affinity with his nemesis, serial killer Joe Carroll. The BBC's *The Fall* stars Gillian Anderson as British police detective Stella Gibson. Gibson exhibits an almost sociopathic indifference to those around her. The series often draws parallels between Gibson and the serial killer she is stalking.<sup>42</sup> As already noted, in the BBC's *Sherlock* and in CBS's *Elementary*, the Holmes characters are attracted with varying degrees of eroticism to Moriarty, the sociopathic nemesis. In the BBC series *Luther* (2010-13), psychologically unstable police detective John Luther develops a strangely flirtatious relationship with a sociopathic serial killer, Alice Morgan.

Like these examples, *Hannibal* imagines an attraction or affinity between the detective figure and the psychopathic serial killer. Yet, *Hannibal* takes this theme to its logical conclusion by nearly erasing the boundary between the detective and the psychopath. The detective departs from his epistemic and social normalizing function. Masculinity within the detective genre—the stoic private dick of the hard-boiled genre or the by-the-book homosocial partners of the police procedural—is similarly subverted. Contemporary detective television series exhibit an anxious flirtation with the queer, the “deviant,” the psychopathic, and the criminal. The series reiterates the conflation of these “deviant” categories, just as earlier detective stories have, but in *Hannibal* the consolidated figure of the abject other is incorporated into the protagonist, with whom the audience is implicitly expected

to identify. The normative self and deviant other are no longer binaries separated by the detective figure.

These detective series may not be models for directly challenging hegemonic ideology, but they may effect ideological changes in ways that even political activism cannot. Heteronormativity, ableism, and phobic responses to mental illness have so much power in part because they are grounded in affective responses. Affective responses are notoriously difficult to challenge through rational argumentation. Salacious and lurid though *Hannibal* is, it appeals to anti-normative desires that, I contended, at least erode normative affective conditioning. *Hannibal* creates identification with a quasi-queered and psychically non-normative protagonist who, though terrified by what he is experiencing, is powerfully attracted to an aberrant male other. Along for the ride and equally seduced by Lecter's deviant phallic persona, the viewer's desires are similarly modulated to a deviant frequency. *Hannibal* should not necessarily be celebrated as a progressive television program, but it should certainly be understood as one that turns inside out the conventions of the detective series. The classic detective genre affirmed explicitly (as with *Dragnet*) or implicitly (as with *Law & Order*) affirmed the value and efficacy of the juridical system to maintain the social order, while also reinscribing the ideology of normalcy that conflated queerness, disability and mental illness, and criminality. *Hannibal* challenges nearly all of this in the figure of Will Graham, who blurs the very boundary between normalcy and deviancy upon which the detective series so obsessively depended.

---

<sup>1</sup> Co-creator and showrunner David Simon explained how the fifth season was intended as a critique of serial killers in pop culture in an interview with Emily Nussbaum: “We were very purposely mocking the American obsession with the psychosexual nature of violence... Seventy-five percent of the victims in my city are people of color, and they’re killed for economic reasons. A lot of them are killed by the same people over and over again who are never caught. That’s the definition of a serial killer. And you can’t get anybody to devote resources to that. But if somebody makes one white girl disappear in Aruba...” Nussbaum, “Pugnacious D.”

<sup>2</sup> Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet; And, the Sign of Four*, 102.

<sup>3</sup> Mike Hale contends that *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* is the “father” of all the contemporary Holmeses. He asserts that the film “established the template for all the twitchy, paranoid, vulnerable, strung-out Holmeses to come.” Hale, “How ‘The Seven-Per-Cent Solution’ Reinvented Sherlock Holmes.”

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the “will to knowledge” as developed by Michel Foucault, see Downing, *The Cambridge Introduction to Michel Foucault*, 87–98; Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, 57–85.

<sup>5</sup> See Cf. Boshears and Whitaker, “Phrenology and Physiognomy in Victorian Literature.”

<sup>6</sup> Darrow, “Closing Argument of Clarence Darrow in the Leopold & Loeb Case”; Lee, “Crowe Smashes at Darrow.” For more on the apparently contradictory accounts offered by the opposing psychiatrists see Baatz, “Leopold and Loeb’s Criminal Minds.”

<sup>7</sup> See Surette, “Predator Criminals As Media Icon.”

<sup>8</sup> See in particular D’Emilio, “The Homosexual Menace.”

<sup>9</sup> Freedman, “Uncontrolled Desires.” See also Chauncey, “The Postwar Sex Crime Panic”; Bérubé, *Coming out under Fire*, 257–60; Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, 55.

<sup>10</sup> The first installment of the American Psychological Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* published in 1952, amidst the second sex crime panic, conflated under the heading “Sociopathic Personality Disturbance” numerous conditions, including “antisocial individuals” (or what were commonly called “psychopaths”), “dissocial” individuals who exhibited “disregard for the usual social codes” (including criminals), individuals exhibiting “sexual deviation” (including “homosexuality, transvestism, pedophilia, fetishism and sexual sadism [including rape, sexual assault, mutilation]”), and drug and alcohol addicts (38-9). A similar conflation of “undesirable characteristics” can be seen in President Eisenhower’s Executive Order 10450 signed a year later in 1953, which established the investigative apparatus designed to ferret out unreliable and untrustworthy individuals from government employment. This category of suspect individuals were enumerated as follow, “Any criminal, infamous, dishonest, immoral, or notoriously disgraceful conduct, habitual use of intoxicants to excess, drug addiction, sexual perversion,” as well as any “mental conditions” that might “cause significant defect in the judgment or reliability.”

---

<sup>11</sup> Davis, “Constructing Normalcy,” 13.

<sup>12</sup> McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence,” 94. Regarding disability and otherness see also Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between mental illness and disability see Lewis, “A Mad Fight: Psychiatry and Disability Activism.”

<sup>14</sup> Link et al., “Public Conceptions of Mental Illness.”

<sup>15</sup> Hiroeh et al., “Death by Homicide, Suicide, and Other Unnatural Causes.”

<sup>16</sup> Wahl, *Media Madness*, 39.

<sup>17</sup> Dahl, “The Role of the Media in Promoting Images of Disability.”

<sup>18</sup> To see the specific rearrangements of dialogue compare episode 2.1 with Harris, *Red Dragon*, 83.

<sup>19</sup> The series even quotes itself, creating *intratextual* references. For example, at the end of season one Will Graham, having been shot by Jack Crawford, lays wounded on the floor of Garret Jacob Hobbs’s kitchen, the exact spot where Hobbs had fallen after Graham shot him. In this moment, Graham says to Crawford, “See. You see”—which were Hobbs’s last words spoken to Graham (1.13, 1.1). Similarly, in the final episode of season two, Graham calls Lecter to warn him that the FBI is coming for him by simply saying, “They know.” These are the same words Lecter uses to warn Hobbs that the FBI is coming for him (2.13, 1.1). These are examples of the theme of inversion or substitution and of how Graham’s personality is displaced by that of another person, usually a serial killer.

<sup>20</sup> Lecter uses drugs and hypnosis on Miriam Lass and Will Graham.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Lecter gives Abigail Hobbs psilocybin mushrooms in an attempt to create a familial bond with her; Lecter also give Mason Verger a cocktail of drugs, under the influence of which Mason mutilates his own face.

<sup>22</sup> Lecter has several patients whom he manipulates in various ways, including Will Graham, Abigail Hobbs, Margot and Mason Verger, Franklin, and Bella Crawford (Jack’s wife). Lecter himself is a patient of Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier (Gillian Anderson). Dr. Alana Bloom (Caroline Dhavernas) has a quasi-therapeutic relationship with Will Graham. Clark Ingram (Chris Diamantopoulos) is a social worker who oversees Peter Bernardone (Jeremy Davies). Ingram, like Lecter, uses his professional relationship to manipulated Bernardone (2.8, 2.9).

<sup>23</sup> Lecter talks with awe about how powerful God must feel dropping churches on his worshipers (1.2), a notion taken from the *Red Dragon* novel. In another quote taken from the novel *Hannibal*, Lecter say in the series, “I don't pray. I have not been bothered by any considerations of deity, other than to recognize how my own modest actions pale beside those of God” (2.11). Lecter appears to imagine himself as an indifferent god who intervenes to set things into motion only to watch them unfold. When Graham asks Lecter why he called Garret Jacob Hobbs to warn him that

the police were coming, a choice that had bloody and catastrophic consequences. Lecter merely replies, “I was curious what would happen. I was curious what would happen when I killed Marissa. I was curious what you would do” (1.12).

<sup>24</sup> Lecter goes to meet Tobias, and the two men size each other up in a veiled exchange, which takes on the feel of two men cruising one another. At one point Lecter refers to his Theremin instrument that can play between conventional notes, and he observes that he and Tobias “are both comfortable playing between conventional notes” (1.8).

<sup>25</sup> The show's creator, Bryan Fuller, has said that “I think the show, at its heart, is a story about heterosexual male friendship, and it is an exploration of all of the idiosyncrasies of that dynamic. It's, in a strange way, the horror or operatic version of *In The Company Of Men*.” Fuller, “*Hannibal*'s Bryan Fuller on Rebooting Season Two Halfway Through.”

<sup>26</sup> Lecter, in the film version of *Silence of the Lambs*, describes Buffalo Bill in the following way, “Billy is not a real trans-sexual, but he thinks he is. He tries to be. He's tried to be a lot of things, I expect.... Look for severe childhood disturbances associated with violence. Our Billy wasn't born a criminal, Clarice. He was made one through years of systematic abuse. Billy hates his own identity, you see, and he thinks that makes him a trans-sexual. But his pathology is a thousand times more savage and more terrifying.” The last sentence implies that transgender persons are in some way savage and terrifying.

<sup>27</sup> Sonia's supervisor, a sort of father figure, describes her unique psycho-neurological disposition as being one of focus: “See, Sonya has a focus problem. She gets too focused. Makes her a great cop, but her personal life is not so good” (2.2). The series employs an autism consultant, who advises on the representation of autism. See Plank, “Creating Authentic Autistic TV Characters.”

<sup>28</sup> See for example the discussion of advertising strategies for bipolar disorder in Scull, *Cultural Sociology of Mental Illness*, 84–5.

<sup>29</sup> As already noted, Sherlock Holmes on *Sherlock* is characterized as autistic. Another example is Sheldon Cooper on *The Big Bang Theory*, a genius theoretical physicist who is almost entirely indifferent to social cues. Mike Judge, creator of *Silicon Valley*, when asked about the perception that some of his characters are autistic, replied, “I feel like I have a little bit of it myself.” Judge's comments are indicative of how increasingly Americans think autism to be widely continuous spectrum that can include more common forms of social “disability.” Judge and Berg “Mike Judge and Alec Berg on Making HBO's ‘Silicon Valley.’” Jerry Seinfeld recently identified himself as possibly being autistic. While almost certainly an incorrect diagnosis, some in the autism community saw it as potentially beneficial. President of the Autistic Advocacy Network, Ari Ne'eman opined that it might help destigmatize autism. Jarrett, “Autism Advocates Hope Jerry Seinfeld's Words Help Fight Stigma.”

<sup>30</sup> Some monistic philosophers of mind, who believe that the mind and the brain are one, have argued persuasively that as advances in neuroscience continued to enrich our understanding of the neurological underpinnings for our perceptions, emotions, and cognition that our basic ways of understanding those aspects of consciousness will be transformed. The husband and wife team Patricia and Paul Churchland, for example, imagined this possibility in a profile in *The New Yorker*.

“For instance, both he and Pat like to speculate about a day when whole chunks of English, especially the bits that constitute folk psychology, are replaced by scientific words that call a thing by its proper name rather than some outworn metaphor. Surely this will happen, they think, and as people learn to speak differently they will learn to experience differently, and sooner or later even their most private introspections will be affected.” MacFarquhar, “Two Heads: A Marriage Devoted to the Mind-Brain Problem.”

<sup>31</sup> In the article version of this chapter, I did not develop the idea of the straight circuit, but I think we can here see where the straight circuit clearly applies to this chapter. The detective’s masculinity is tested when he enters the criminal underworld. He often does so with a buddy or partner, whose support he relies upon. Exposure to the underworld tests the detective’s masculinity, but once the case is solved the detective may return to a relatively normative life.

<sup>32</sup> Lecter tells Du Maurier, “I see myself in Will” (1.11). Bryan Fuller has explained that Lecter is trying to transform Graham “into a truer version of himself that he can actually share his life with.” Fuller, “*Hannibal’s* Bryan Fuller on the Intimacy Between Will and Hannibal.”

<sup>33</sup> Lecter, in another citational repurposing from the original *Red Dragon* novel, says of Graham, “I see his madness, and I want to contain it, like an oil spill” (1.11).

<sup>34</sup> This is a metaphor Lecter actually uses in the series. After Graham nearly murders a serial killer, Lecter admiringly says to Graham, “I can feed the caterpillar, and I can whisper through the chrysalis, but what hatches, follows its own nature and is beyond me” (2.8). In this metaphor, Graham is not only a beloved but also a sort of child to Lecter.

<sup>35</sup> Dr. Du Maurier in season two suggests that Lecter has become susceptible to Graham’s influence:

Hannibal: Will Graham has asked to see me. I would like to see him. I continue to be curious about the way he thinks, despite all that's happened.

Du Maurier: He's still influencing you. Will Graham asking to see you betrays his clear intent to manipulate you.

Hannibal: And if I agree to see Will?

Du Maurier: It betrays your clear intent to manipulate him.

Hannibal: I miss him.

Du Maurier: You are obsessed with Will Graham.

Hannibal: I'm intrigued.

Du Maurier: Obsessively. And he will take advantage of that. (2.1)

<sup>36</sup> Fuller, “*Hannibal’s* Bryan Fuller on Rebooting Season Two Halfway Through.”

---

<sup>37</sup> Romano, "Gay Cannibal Fiction Divides *Hannibal* Fans." Molly Eichel, writing for the *AV Club* in recapping one episode ventured to predict how specific moments would create a buzz on Tumblr among queer *Hannibal* fans, demonstrating the call and response between the series and online fan communities. Eichel, "*Hannibal*: 'Su-Zakana.'" For more on the *Hannibal* fandom, Baker-Whitelaw, "A Delicious Guide to *Hannibal* Fandom on Tumblr"; Hall, "Meet The *Hannibal* Fannibals, TV's Newest And Most Intense Fandom."

<sup>38</sup> Nussbaum, "Fan Friction: 'Sherlock' and Its Audiences."

<sup>39</sup> Fuller, "*Hannibal*'s Vryan Fuller on the Mystery of Freddie Lounds' Murder."

<sup>40</sup> Fuller, "*Hannibal*'s Bryan Fuller on Mason Verger and an Incredibly Ambitious Sex Scene."

<sup>41</sup> Fuller, "*Hannibal*'s Bryan Fuller Discusses that Bloody, Jaw-Dropping Season Finale."

<sup>42</sup> The serial killer even asserts a connection with Gibson, telling her in a phone call, "We're very alike you and me. Both driven by a will to power, a desire to control everything and everyone. Obsessive, ruthless, living and breathing moral relativism." For a discussion of the parallels between Gibson and the serial killer see Genzlinger, "Gillian Anderson in 'The Fall,' on Netflix From BBC2."

## Conclusion

This dissertation has sought to interrogate two competing assumptions about male homosociality. On the one hand, scholars have tended to see homosociality as ancillary to the patriarchy and homophobia. Reflecting the broader assumption that “hegemonic masculinity” represents a relatively stable identity position, homosociality has been similarly imagined as a site in which such stable identities are constituted, sustained, and reproduced. The patriarchal and homophobic husband is one and the same with the frat boy, the business executive, and the right-wing politician. Hegemonic masculinity is isotropic across these different contexts. On the other hand, some scholars and popular writers have assumed that male same-sex emotional intimacy is inherently transgressive of heteronormativity, because it entails men exceeding supposed barriers to self-disclosure and emotional vulnerability, which are proscribed for men by homophobic culture. In other words, viewed from one angle same-sex male sociality simply enables the dominant social order of patriarchy and homophobia; viewed from another angle, genuine same-sex male intimacy represents an unmitigated challenge to homophobic norms of masculinity.

Both of these approaches offer insights from which we can learn but contain erroneous assumptions. Across different stages of his life and different social contexts, and even from moment to moment, the expectations of normative masculinity change. What constitute subversion of or adherence to norms is context dependent. The narrative approach I have adopted to studying male friendship attempts to make sense of how heteronormative stories actually need apparent contradictions. The straight circuit, an admittedly simplified framework, maps how men need to cycle through stages or events in their lives in which their masculinity is radically variable. These contradictions help to sustain hetero-masculine identities, not disrupt them. As I discussed in the introduction, sociological scholars have made significant contributions to explain how these variable masculine identities operate in lived experiences, and this dissertation has aimed to show how in

American narrative culture stories told about men often follow just such patterns. Whether in the western, narratives of masculine maturity, bachelor party stories, or detective stories, we see how men are often expected to perform different kinds of masculinity in one context (e.g., the frontier) or another (e.g., the settled homestead).

Simple models of dominations/subordination or normativity/transgression will ultimately fail to provide sufficiently complex explanations of performances of hetero-masculinity, but narrative models allow us to see how contradictions can be reconciled. Likewise, we see how such structures can be elastic but robust in the face of challenges and internal contradictions. At the same time, this framework opens up the possibility of exploiting these longstanding contradictions. Indeed, with the emergence anti-homophobic, or post-closet, culture we have seen how pre-existing contradictions are magnified, reworked, or reimagined. Given the central role of homophobia in the homosociality in the twentieth century, the emerging post-closet culture has inevitably led to remarkable changes in how male friendship has been imagined in narrative culture. The discourse of same-sex romance and marriage directly contributed to the bromance discourse. In turn we see male friendships reimagined, with varying degrees of irony, in terms of romantic straight or queer discourses. After the release of *Brokeback Mountain*, the West has been imaginatively reshaped, forever seen through a queered lens. Hetero-masculine maturity is now not only compatible with homosocial affection, it seems to depend on same-sex intimacy, and, in some cases, straight men appear to need friendships with gay men to guide them into heterosexual (or heteroflexible) maturity. Even the detective, the ultimate symbol of normative enforcement and masculine solidity, has been reimagined in feminine and homoerotic terms.

My hope is that we may see these changes as “leading indicators.” Media is of course in a continuous dialectical relationship with audiences. Media at once negotiates society’s larger ideological commitments. *Seinfeld*’s coining of the phrase “not that there’s anything wrong with that”

at once enacted the generalized anxieties among liberal straight men with the growing visibility of gay men, but the phrase also provided a short hand for expressing that generalized feeling and, thus, made the *feeling* into ideational content that could be discussed, commented upon, and critiqued. Along similar lines, as Vice President Joe Biden has observed, TV series such as *Will & Grace* enabled straight Americans to imagine gay men living “normal” lives alongside straight people. The way in which intimate male friendships have become explicitly themetized in American narrative culture similarly reflect the evolving reimagining of male friendship, but these images also provides a new imaginative framework for seeing male friendship evolve in the lived experiences of men in America.

Take for example the television series *New Girl* (2011-present), which I have discussed in passing already. This series frequently plays with the intense intimacy between two of the male leads Schmidt (Max Greenfield) and Nick (Jake Johnson). Friends since college, their relationship becomes something of a “life partnership.” Schmidt even throws an elaborate “Tinfinity” anniversary party to celebrate his and Nick’s tenth year of living together—the tenth being the tin anniversary (2.18). Nick, a grumpy working-class guy, often has trouble making sense of Schmidt’s affection for him. Schmidt buys Nick a cookie apropos of nothing. Nick is confounded by thoughtful gesture and by Schmidt’s declaration that he bought the cookie because he was “thinking about” Nick. Schmidt’s feelings are hurt when Nick says matter-of-factly that he does not think about Schmidt. As the episode unfolds, we discover the range of unreciprocated loving gestures that Schmidt does on a daily basis for Nick. Nick eventually confesses to being scared of Schmidt’s love because he feels he does not deserve it. He tells Schmidt, “You love me too much, Schmidt, and you picked the wrong guy. And when are you gonna get that through that giant head of yours? I’m just gonna let you down” (2.5). While there is an inescapable implicit homophobic thread in the episode, the conflict is not about Nick’s fear of being or appearing “gay,” but simply that he does not

understand how to respond to Schmidt's acts of loving generosity. Nick must renegotiate his deeply ingrained notions of friendship and comically austere hetero-masculinity.

In a more recent episode, Nick's cousin Bob and Bob's wife Carol ask him to donate sperm to help them conceive a child. Schmidt initially objects to this plan, saying he "vetoes" it. When Nick insists that Schmidt does not "have standing" to veto what he does with his sperm, Schmidt retorts, "You're my best friend in the whole entire world. We've been through a lot together, so I just feel like your sperm are partly my sperm." He further reveals that he has mapped out a "life plan" for Nick, which he charted on a spreadsheet. The life plan is intended to keep Nick "on track" and to prevent the two men from "drifting apart." The idea of the two men as life partners who plan a future together, along with Schmidt's claim on Nick's sperm, decidedly queers the men's relationship. Later in the episode, Schmidt defends Nick when Carol suggests that he is not romantic. Schmidt indignantly responds, "Nick is very romantic, okay? He does romantic things for me all the time.... Just the other week, you were very romantic to me. When I fell down in the parking lot and you picked me up?" Nick recalls merely picking Schmidt up, and he asks Schmidt, "How is that romantic?" Schmidt replies, "It was beautiful and it was kind. You know, romance doesn't always have to be sexual, you idiot." The two men then proceed to slap at each other ineffectually. Nick backs out of the plan, and Schmidt declares disappointedly, "So, we're not having a baby?"

Schmidt refuses to abide by the "boundaries" that Nick asserts. Those boundaries, which correspond roughly to the norms of hetero-masculine friendship, are systematically violated, and, by the end of the episode, Nick appears newly comfortable with, or at least curious about, Schmidt's life plan. Schmidt treats their relationships similarly to how he would a romantic relationship: it is a committed partnership. It is celebrated with anniversaries, infused with "romantic" gestures, and planned out over a lifetime. Schmidt's blurring of boundaries between homosocial and romantic

relationships causes Nick consternation, but he ultimately learns to accommodate, however begrudgingly, Schmidt's affection. There is nothing as revolutionary in *New Girl* as there was in *Will & Grace*, and *New Girl* goes out of its way to categorize Nick and Schmidt as straight. Yet, *New Girl* is clearly playing with gender norms and arguably queering friendship in ways that could provide models for Americans to reimagine male relationships. Even if Schmidt and Nick's relationship is played for comedic effect, just as surely as Will and Grace's relationships was similarly played for comedic effect, their relationship serves as an important emotional through line. Indeed, the "failure" of masculinities and the failed performance of masculinity is a defining element for all of the men on the series. Nick is a heavy drinking, working-class conspiracy theorist, who fails to manage even the most basic aspects of his life. Schmidt is a metrosexual "douchebag," who is deeply vain, materialistic, insecure, and needy. At every turn, he attempts to perform a suave masculinity, peppering his speech with hip-hop slang, but he only looks foolish in the process. The most endearing moments for both men are when they fail in their respective performances of masculinity, shed their preposterous exteriors, and become vulnerable. Far from the fantasy of male power imagined in the classic Hollywood western or police procedural, this model of male friendships is based on the failure and impotence of dominant fantasies of masculinity. It is a friendship based on need, lack, and vulnerability, and, while it is by no means free from homophobia, the relationship is defined more by its quasi-romantic quality than by homophobic distancing that used to be so central to American male homosociality. However, imperfect as it might be, we may see in this and other examples the kernels out of which will grow more and more models for post-closet male friendship.

Having said all of this, it is important to put this modestly optimistic conclusion into the larger contexts of social, economic, and political power in the United States. As I have noted, representations of male homosocial rituals, such as the bachelor party, remain regressive and continue to exhibit misogyny and homophobia. Even homophobia as wanes, homosocial affection is

often marked by misogyny. The focus of this dissertation has been male friendship, but we cannot completely separate friendship between men (specifically white straight American men) from the larger category of male same-sex association, which has long been a fundamental building block of oppression. As I write this conclusion in early April 2016, Donald Trump is the frontrunner for the Republican nomination for president. He rode to that position after making baldly racist remarks about Mexican immigrants. He has maintained his plurality lead over his rivals within the Republican Party despite, or more probably because of, a continual stream of racist and sexist remarks. Trump's supporters, based on polling, actually seem attracted to him because of his refusal to heed basic decorum. They praise him for "telling it like it is" and disregarding "political correctness."<sup>1</sup> As Evan Osnos noted in *The New Yorker*, Trump's unabashed attacks on Mexicans and Muslims has rallied white supremacists in a manner unprecedented since George Wallace ran for president in 1968.<sup>2</sup> Richard Nixon deployed his "Southern Strategy" to lure white Southerners away from their historical allegiance to the Democratic Party following passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, and since then some conservatives have used "dog whistle" rhetoric ("welfare queens," "illegal aliens," George H.W. Bush's Willie Horton attack ad, etc.) to send coded message to whites who consciously or not receive the racist subtext. Yet, Trump's message is not a dog whistle, and some polling suggests that an appreciable amount of Trump's support comes from people with racist views that far exceed the "coded racism" that has been common to conservative politics for more than half a century. As Lynn Vavreck observed, according to some polls, "Nearly 20 percent of Mr. Trump's voters disagreed with Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which freed slaves in the Southern states during the Civil War."<sup>3</sup> Trump's remarkable history of sexist comments is another part of his paradoxical appeal to men who feel that "political correctness" and feminism have silenced them. There is evidence that Trump has rallied Men's Rights groups to his banner, for example.<sup>4</sup>

Trump's slogan, "Make America Great Again," is reinforced by his repeated insistence that "we don't win any more," meaning that the United States is "losing" to other countries on security and trade. Distilled in Trump's message is the vision of a nation at once the helpless victim but also the omnipotent giant—restrained by weak, "low energy" politicians who do not understand how to get things done. "We" are losers, but Trump will make us great again. The beleaguered working-class white male is in a sense a metonymy of the country as a whole. Deprived of his rightful place in the world by corrupt politicians, immigrants, and unfair trade policies, he rallies to Trump's message. He is a loser, but he only loses because the game is unfair, and Trump will make him great again. Trump's willingness to offend people, to say racist and sexist things, only demonstrates how he embodies the omnipotent white masculinity of old, which white men can vicariously enjoy. He is the western lawman, the tough as nails private detective, and the cop who isn't afraid to play by his own rules. He is a fantasy of white male power, and he offers to share it with those voters.

It would be one thing if Trump were an isolated phenomenon, but he seems to be only the most acute symptom of long simmering racism and sexism that had been hiding in the coded rhetoric of right-wing politics for decades. Moreover, the realities of American gender and race in the United States have become visibly and palpably dire since the historic election of Barack Obama in 2008. Racial disparities are evidenced by the Flint water crisis, where a predominantly poor and black community was poisoned through lead exposure, and by the numerous deaths of unarmed black men and boys from police shootings since Michael Brown's death in 2014. Perhaps the most shocking example was the police shooting of Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old African-American boy shot by police while he was playing with a toy gun. Last year, a report exonerated the police officers involved, stating that the shooting was "reasonable." Women's rights had a bad year as well. According to *The New York Times*, in 2015 "state legislators passed 57 new constraints" on abortion access.<sup>5</sup> In Texas, the second most populous state, the "number of abortion clinics... has shrunk by

half since a 2013 state law imposed new regulations that many [clinics] said they found impossible to meet.”<sup>6</sup> It is hardly a surprise that race and gender realities are so bad in the United States, when we consider the gender and racial makeup of our legislative bodies. The membership of the most recent US Congress is “80 percent white” and “80 percent male.”<sup>7</sup> Republican state legislatures have waged a sustained campaign to create barriers to accessing the ballot, passing measures that disproportionately affect younger and poorer voters and voters of color.<sup>8</sup> Such measures have the effect of preserving political power for Republicans, whose constituency has become whiter, older, and more male over the past few decades. The federal judiciary is hardly better. Despite more diverse judicial appointments under the Obama Administration, as of 2011, “white males constitute at least two thirds of federal sitting judges at every level including the Supreme Court, United States Circuit Courts of Appeals, and the United States District Courts.”<sup>9</sup> Even the dramatic progress made by the Supreme Court’s *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling last year has been followed by new waves of state legislatures passing laws to protect and enshrine discrimination against LGBTQ peoples.<sup>10</sup>

I could continue citing similar facts, but most of my readers quite understand the status quo in United States, where political, economic, and social power is disproportionately held in the hands of white straight men. I end on this note because, though I have observed how fantasies of white male power (e.g., in the western) and white male privilege (e.g., in the bachelor party) operate in some of the examples considered in this dissertation, the guardedly optimistic view of post-closet male friendship argued for in this dissertation must be contextualized within the larger inequalities that persist in America. Acknowledging these two competing sets of facts—post-closet male friendship on the one hand and persistent inequalities on the other—is not a contradiction but a recognition that “hegemony” and “subversion” may subsist alongside one another. The fantasy offered by Donald Trump—the recovery of white male omnipotence—can exist along side the inchoate vision of *New Girl*—wherein white masculinity is continuously rearticulated and

reimagined. While we cannot afford to be Panglossian optimists, my hope is that there are signs for guarded optimism at least within some parts of American narrative culture.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sargent, “Morning Plum: No, Donald Trump Isn’t Really ‘Telling It Like It Is.’”

<sup>2</sup> Osnos, “The Fearful and the Frustrated.”

<sup>3</sup> Vavreck, “Measuring Donald Trump’s Supporters for Intolerance.”

<sup>4</sup> Resnick, “Donald Trump’s Heidi Cruz Attack Excites Men’s Rights Activists.”

<sup>5</sup> “The Reproductive Rights Rollback of 2015.”

<sup>6</sup> Goodnough, “Texas Abortion Law Has Women Waiting Longer, and Paying More.”

<sup>7</sup> Bump, “The New Congress Is 80 Percent White, 80 Percent Male and 92 Percent Christian.”

<sup>8</sup> Santos, “Angry Arizona Voters Demand: Why Such Long Lines at Polling Sites?”; Fausset, “North Carolina Exemplifies National Battles Over Voting Laws.”

<sup>9</sup> Stubbs, “A Demographic Snapshot of America’s Federal Judiciary: A Prima Facie Case for Change.”

<sup>10</sup> Katz and Eckholm, “Anti-Gay Laws Bring Backlash in Mississippi and North Carolina.”

## Bibliography

- “1984 Domestic Grosses.” *Box Office Mojo*. Accessed March 17, 2015.  
<http://boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=1984&p=.htm>.
- “2014 Domestic Grosses.” *Box Office Mojo*. Accessed March 17, 2015.  
<http://boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=2014&p=.htm>.
- “2015 Network Responsibility Index.” GLAAD, 2015. <http://www.glaad.org/files/GLAAD-2015-NRI.pdf>.
- Adams, Brad. “Thailand: Human Rights Watch Letter on UN Human Rights Council Candidacy.” Open Letter. Human Rights Watch, October 18, 2014.  
<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/21/thailand-human-rights-watch-letter-un-human-rights-council-candidacy>.
- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Akhtar, Salman. *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*. London: Karmac, 2009.  
<http://site.ebrary.com/id/10415394>.
- Alberti, John. “‘I Love You, Man’: Bromances, the Construction of Masculinity, and the Continuing Evolution of the Romantic Comedy.” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 30, no. 2 (March 2013): 159–72. doi:10.1080/10509208.2011.575658.
- Alger, William Rounseville. “The Literature of Friendship.” *The North American Review* 83 (1856): 104–32.
- American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Mental Disorders*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1952.
- Ames, Christopher. “Restoring The Black Man’s Lethal Weapon Race & Sexuality in Contemporary Cop Films.” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 20, no. 3 (July 1992): 52–60.  
 doi:10.1080/01956051.1992.9944228.
- Anderson, Eric. “Inclusive Masculinity in a Fraternal Setting.” *Men and Masculinities* 10, no. 5 (April 4, 2007): 604–20. doi:10.1177/1097184X06291907.
- . *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Appiah, Anthony. “Tolerable Falsehoods: Agency and the Interests of Theory.” In *Consequences of Theory*, edited by Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson, 63–90. Selected Papers from the English Institute 14. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Arxer, S. L. “Hybrid Masculine Power: Reconceptualizing the Relationship between Homosociality and Hegemonic Masculinity.” *Humanity & Society* 35, no. 4 (November 1, 2011): 390–422.  
 doi:10.1177/016059761103500404.

- Attwood, William. "Why Does He Work So Hard?" In *The Decline of the American Male*, 49–66. New York: Random House, 1958.
- Attwood, William, George B. Leonard, and J. Robert Moskin. *The Decline of the American Male*. New York: Random House, 1958.
- Baatz, Simon. "Leopold and Loeb's Criminal Minds." *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 2008. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/leopold-and-loebs-criminal-minds-996498/?no-ist>.
- Baker-Whitelaw, Gavia. "A Delicious Guide to *Hannibal* Fandom on Tumblr." *The Daily Dot*, June 4, 2013. <http://www.dailydot.com/fandom/guide-hannibal-tv-fandom-tumblr-fannibals/>.
- Bakhtin, M. M. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Barbaro, Michael. "Biden Expresses Support for Same-Sex Marriages." *The New York Times*, May 6, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/07/us/politics/biden-expresses-support-for-same-sex-marriages.html>.
- Becker, Ron. "Becoming Bromosexual: Straight Men, Gay Men, and Male Bonding on U.S. TV." In *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*, edited by Michael DeAngelis, 233–54. Contemporary Approaches to Film and Media. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014.
- . *Gay TV and Straight America*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2006.
- . "Prime-Time Television in the Gay Nineties: Network Television, Quality Audiences, and Gay Politics." *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 42 (Fall 1998): 36–46.
- Bederman, Gail. *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner. "Sex in Public." In *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, edited by Donald E. Hall and Annamarie Jagose, 165–79. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Bérubé, Allan. *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two*. New York: Free Press, 1990.
- Bigsby, C. W. E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama, Vol. 2: Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Billington, Alex. "Toronto Interview: Appaloosa Writer, Director, and Star Ed Harris." *First Showing*, September 19, 2008. <http://www.firstshowing.net/2008/toronto-interview-appaloosa-writer-director-and-star-ed-harris/>.
- Blake, Mariah. "Mad Men: Inside the Men's Rights Movement—and the Army of Misogynists and Trolls It Spawned." *Mother Jones*, February 2015.

- <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/01/warren-farrell-mens-rights-movement-feminism-misogyny-trolls>.
- Bly, Robert. *Iron John: A Book About Men*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1990.
- Boal, Augusto. "Theater of the Oppressed." In *Theatre/Theory/Theatre*, edited by Daniel Gerould, 462–73. New York: Applause, 2003.
- Boshears, Rhonda, and Harry Whitaker. "Phrenology and Physiognomy in Victorian Literature." In *Progress in Brain Research*, 205:87–112. Elsevier, 2013.  
<http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/B978044463273900006X>.
- Brady, Lois Smith. "The Last Hurrah." *The New York Times*, September 1, 1996.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/1996/09/01/travel/the-last-hurrah.html>.
- Bryers, Stephen R. "Saloons and Taverns (United States)." In *Alcohol and Drugs in North America: A Historical Encyclopedia*, edited by David M Fahey and Jon Miller, 624–25. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2013. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10796550>.
- Bump, Phillip. "The New Congress Is 80 Percent White, 80 Percent Male and 92 Percent Christian." *The Washington Post*, January 5, 2015, sec. The Fix.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/01/05/the-new-congress-is-80-percent-white-80-percent-male-and-92-percent-christian/>.
- Bushman, John. "Young Adult Literature in the Classroom--Or Is It?" *The English Journal* 86, no. 3 (March 1997): 35–40.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- . "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification." In *Constructing Masculinity*, edited by Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, Simon Watson, and Carrie Mae Weems, 21–36. Discussions in Contemporary Culture. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Caine, Barbara, and Marc Brodie. "Class, Sex, and Friendship: The Long Nineteenth Century." In *Friendship: A History*, edited by Barbara Caine. Critical Histories of Subjectivity and Culture. Oakville, CT: Equinox Pub, 2009.
- Carlson, Marvin. "Invisible Presences—Performance Intertextuality." *Theatre Research International* 19, no. 2 (1994): 111–17.
- Carrigan, Tim, Bob Connell, and John Lee. "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity." In *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, edited by Rachel Adams and David Savran, 99–118. Malden: Blackwell, 2002.
- Carter, Julian. *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Casper, Drew. *Hollywood 1963 - 1976: Years of Revolution and Reaction*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

- Chauncey, George. "Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War One Era." *Journal of Social History* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1985): 189–211.
- . *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.
- . "The Postwar Sex Crime Panic." In *True Stories from the American Past*, edited by William Graebner, 160–78. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1993.
- Chayefsky, Paddy. "\*\*\*\*\*The Bachelor Party." In *The Television Plays*, 227–77. *The Collected Works of Paddy Chayefsky*. New York: Applause, 1995.
- Chbosky, Stephen. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. New York: Pocket Books, 1999.
- Chen, Elizabeth J. "Caught in a Bad Bromance." *Texas Journal of Women and the Law* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 241–66.
- Chudacoff, Howard P. *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Clark-Flory, Tracy. "The 'Man Crisis,' Continued." *Salon*, May 30, 2012. [http://www.salon.com/2012/05/31/the\\_man\\_crisis\\_continued/](http://www.salon.com/2012/05/31/the_man_crisis_continued/).
- Clatterbaugh, Kenneth C. *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity: Men, Women, and Politics in Modern Society*. Boulder: Westview, 1997.
- Claybaugh, Amanda. "Temperance." In *American History Through Literature, 1820-1870*, edited by Janet Gabler-Hover and Robert Sattlemeyer, 1152–58. Detroit: Charles Scribner's Son, 2006.
- Cobb, Michael L. *Single: Arguments for the Uncoupled*. New York: NYU Press, 2012.
- Cohen, Philip N. "Still a Man's World, Review of *The End of Men*, by Hanna Rosin." *Boston Review*, January 10, 2013. <http://www.bostonreview.net/books-ideas/still-mans-world>.
- Coles, Tony. "Negotiating the Field of Masculinity: The Production and Reproduction of Multiple Dominant Masculinities." *Men and Masculinities* 12, no. 1 (October 1, 2009): 30–44. doi:10.1177/1097184X07309502.
- Connell, Raewyn. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Coontz, Stephanie. *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*. New York: Viking, 2005.
- Crain, Caleb. *American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and Literature in the New Nation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.
- D'Acci, Julie. "Television, Representation and Gender." In *The Television Studies Reader*, edited by Robert Clyde Allen and Annette Hill, 373–88. New York: Routledge, 2004.

- Dahl, Marilyn. "The Role of the Media in Promoting Images of Disability-Disability as Metaphor: The Evil Crip." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 18, no. 1 (1993). <http://cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/viewArticle/718/624>.
- Darrow, Clarence. "Closing Argument of Clarence Darrow in the Leopold & Loeb Case." In *Famous Trials*, edited by Douglas Linder. University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law, 2014. <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/leoploeb/darrowclosing.html>.
- Davis, Lennard J. "Constructing Normalcy." In *The Disability Studies Reader*, edited by Lennard J. Davis, 3rd ed., 3–19. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Davis, Matthew. "Men's Clubs." In *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia*, edited by Bret E. Carroll, 299–301. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003.
- DeAngelis, Michael. "Queerness and Futurity in *Superbad*." In *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*, edited by Michael DeAngelis, 213–31. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014.
- . , ed. *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*. Contemporary Approaches to Film and Media. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014.
- Dean, James Joseph. *Straights: Heterosexuality in Post-Closeted Culture*. New York: NYU Press, 2014.
- Deitcher, David. *Dear Friends: American Photographs of Men Together, 1840-1918*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001.
- Demetriou, Demetrakis. "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique." *Theory and Society* 30, no. 3 (June 2001): 337–61.
- D'Emilio, John. "The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America." In *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, edited by Kathy Lee Peiss, Christina Simmons, and Robert A. Padgug, 226–40. Critical Perspectives on the Past. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.
- D'Emilio, John, and Estelle B Freedman. *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2012.
- Dewey, Caitlin. "Inside the 'Manosphere' That Inspired Santa Barbara Shooter Elliot Rodger." *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/05/27/inside-the-manosphere-that-inspired-santa-barbara-shooter-elliott-rodger/>.
- Dhaliwal, Nirpal. "A Fine Bromance." *The Guardian*, June 10, 2007. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jun/11/gayrights.gender>.
- Doll, Jen. "A New Way for Gay Characters in Y.A." *The Wire*, March 28, 2013. <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/entertainment/2013/03/new-way-gay-characters-y/63563/>.

- Dollimore, Jonathan. "Civilization and Its Darkness." In *Conrad's Heart of Darkness and Contemporary Thought: Revisiting the Horror with Lacoue-Labarthe*, edited by Nidesh Lawtoo, 67–86. London: Bloomsbury, 2012.
- . "Perversion, Degeneration, and the Death Drive." In *Sexualities in Victorian Britain*, edited by Andrew H. Miller and James Eli Adams, 98–117. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- . *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Downing, Lisa. *The Cambridge Introduction to Michel Foucault*. Cambridge Introductions to Literature. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Doyle, Arthur Conan. *A Study in Scarlet; And, the Sign of Four*. Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003.
- Duggan, Maeve. "Online Harassment." *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project*, October 22, 2014. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/>.
- Duvall, John N. "Introduction: A Story of the Stories of American Fiction After 1945." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Fiction after 1945*, edited by John N. Duvall, 1–12. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. <http://universitypublishingonline.org/ref/id/companions/CBO9781139013888A004>.
- Edelman, Lee. "The Future Is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive." *Narrative* 6, no. 1 (January 1998): 18–30.
- Edgerton, Gary R. *The Columbia History of American Television*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Eichel, Molly. "Hannibal: 'Su-Zakana.'" *The AV Club*, April 18, 2014. <http://www.avclub.com/tvclub/hannibal-su-zakana-203596>.
- "Executive Order 10450." *National Archives*, 1953. <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/10450.html>.
- Farrell, Warren. *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.
- Fausset, Richard. "North Carolina Exemplifies National Battles Over Voting Laws." *The New York Times*, March 10, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/11/us/north-carolina-voting-rights-redistricting-battles.html>.
- Faust, M. "Interview with Actor-Director Ed Harris." *Art Voice*, October 1, 2008. [http://artvoice.com/issues/v7n40/ed\\_harris\\_interview](http://artvoice.com/issues/v7n40/ed_harris_interview).
- Fiedler, Leslie A. "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey." In *The Devil Gets His Due: The Uncollected Essays of Leslie Fiedler*, 46–53. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint: Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2008.

- . *Love and Death in the American Novel*. 1st Dalkey Archive ed. Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997.
- . “The New Mutants.” In *A New Fiedler Reader*, 189–210. Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 1999.
- Fiske, John. “Moments of Television: Neither the Text nor the Audience.” In *Remote Control: Television, Audiences, and Cultural Power*, edited by Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner, and Eva-Maria Warth, 56–78. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Foucault, Michel. *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*. Edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Freedman, Estelle B. “‘Uncontrolled Desires’: The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960.” *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 1 (June 1987): 83–106.
- Freeman, Elizabeth. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Perverse Modernities. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Friedman, Jaclyn. “A Look Inside the ‘Men’s Rights’ Movement That Helped Fuel California Alleged Killer Elliot Rodger.” *The American Prospect*, October 24, 2013. <http://prospect.org/article/look-inside-mens-rights-movement-helped-fuel-california-alleged-killer-elliott-rodger>.
- Fuller, Bryan. “*Hannibal’s* Bryan Fuller Discusses That Bloody, Jaw-Dropping Season Finale.” By Todd VanDerWerff. *The A.V. Club*, May 23, 2014. <http://www.avclub.com/article/hannibals-bryan-fuller-discusses-bloody-jaw-droppi-204896>.
- . “*Hannibal’s* Bryan Fuller on Rebooting Season Two Halfway Through.” By Todd VanDerWerff. *The A.V. Club*, April 19, 2014. <http://www.avclub.com/article/hannibals-bryan-fuller-rebooting-season-two-halfwa-203515>.
- . “*Hannibal’s* Bryan Fuller on the Intimacy Between Will and Hannibal.” By Todd VanDerWerff. *The A.V. Club*, April 26, 2014. <http://www.avclub.com/article/hannibals-bryan-fuller-intimacy-between-will-and-h-203741>.
- . “*Hannibal’s* Bryan Fuller on the Mystery of Freddie Lounds’ Murder.” By Todd VanDerWerff. *The A.V. Club*, May 10, 2014. <http://www.avclub.com/article/hannibals-bryan-fuller-mystery-freddie-lounds-murd-204383>.
- Gabriel, Trip. “Call of the Wildmen.” *The New York Times*, October 14, 1990, sec. Magazine. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/14/magazine/call-of-the-wildmen.html>.
- Gao, George. “Most Americans Now Say Learning Their Child Is Gay Wouldn’t Upset Them.” *Pew Research Center*, June 29, 2015. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/29/most-americans-now-say-learning-their-child-is-gay-wouldnt-upset-them/>.

- Garfield, Bob. "Don't Say His Name." Podcast. *On The Media*. New York: WNYC, January 30, 2015. [http://www.onthemedial.org/story/dont-say-name/?utm\\_source=sharedUrl&utm\\_medium=metatag&utm\\_campaign=sharedUrl](http://www.onthemedial.org/story/dont-say-name/?utm_source=sharedUrl&utm_medium=metatag&utm_campaign=sharedUrl).
- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Genzlinger, Neil. "Gillian Anderson in 'The Fall,' on Netflix From BBC2." *The New York Times*, June 10, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/11/arts/television/gillian-anderson-in-the-fall-on-netflix-from-bbc2.html>.
- Godbeer, Richard. *The Overflowing of Friendship: Love Between Men and the Creation of the American Republic*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.
- Goldberg, Herb. *The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege*. New York: Penguin, 1987.
- Goldwag, Arthur. "Leader's Suicide Brings Attention to Men's Rights Movement." Intelligence Report. Southern Poverty Law Center, Spring 2012. <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2012/spring/a-war-on-women>.
- Goodnough, Abby. "Texas Abortion Law Has Women Waiting Longer, and Paying More." *The New York Times*, March 18, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/20/us/women-cite-longer-wait-and-higher-costs-for-abortions-in-texas.html>.
- Grazian, David. "The Girl Hunt: Urban Nightlife and the Performance of Masculinity as Collective Activity." *Symbolic Interaction* 30, no. 2 (May 2007): 221–43. doi:10.1525/si.2007.30.2.221.
- Greene, Mark. "Touch Isolation: How Homophobia Has Robbed All Men Of Touch." *The Good Men Project*, November 11, 2013. <http://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/megasahd-touch-isolation-how-homophobia-has-robbed-men-of-touch/>.
- . "Why Men Have so Much Trouble Making Friends." *Salon*, April 12, 2014. [http://www.salon.com/2014/04/12/why\\_do\\_mens\\_friendships\\_feel\\_so\\_hollow\\_partner/](http://www.salon.com/2014/04/12/why_do_mens_friendships_feel_so_hollow_partner/).
- Gross, Jane. "Male Bonding, but No Strippers; For Some, Stag Parties Yield to War Games and Ball Games." *The New York Times*, July 7, 1998. <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/07/07/nyregion/male-bonding-but-no-strippers-for-some-stag-parties-yield-war-games-ball-games.html>.
- Halberstam, Judith. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. Sexual Cultures. New York: New York University Press, 2005.
- Hale, Mike. "How 'The Seven-Per-Cent Solution' Reinvented Sherlock Holmes." *The New York Times*, January 25, 2013. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/26/movies/how-the-seven-per-cent-solution-reinvented-sherlock-holmes.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/26/movies/how-the-seven-per-cent-solution-reinvented-sherlock-holmes.html?_r=0).

- Hall, Ellie. "Meet The *Hannibal* Fannibals, TV's Newest And Most Intense Fandom." *BuzzFeed*, May 31, 2013. <http://www.buzzfeed.com/ellievhall/meet-the-fannibals-tvs-newest-and-most-intense-fandom#.frmbn7njA>.
- Hall, Oakley M. *Warlock*. New York: New York Review Books, 2006.
- Hamilton, Patrick. *Rope: A Play*. London: Samuel French, 2003.
- Hammaren, Nils, and Thomas Johansson. "Homosociality: In Between Power and Intimacy." *SAGE Open* 4, no. 1 (January 10, 2014). doi:10.1177/2158244013518057.
- Harbidge, Lesley. "Redefining Screwball and Reappropriating Liminal Spaces: The Contemporary Bromance and Todd Phillips' the Hangover DVD." *Comedy Studies* 3, no. 1 (May 23, 2012): 5–16. doi:10.1386/cost.3.1.5\_1.
- Harris, Thomas. *Hannibal*. New York: Dell Book, 2000.
- . *Red Dragon*. New York: Dell Book, 1990.
- . *Silence of the Lambs*. New York: Dell Book, 1998.
- Heartfield, James. "There Is No Masculinity Crisis." *Genders*, no. 35 (2002). [http://genders.org/g35/g35\\_heartfield.html](http://genders.org/g35/g35_heartfield.html).
- Hecht, Ben, and Charles MacArthur. *The Front Page: From Theater to Reality*. Edited by George W. Hilton. 1st ed. The Art of Theater Series. Hanover: Smith and Kraus, 2002.
- Hiroeh, Urara, Louis Appleby, PB Mortensen, and Dunn Graham. "Death by Homicide, Suicide, and Other Unnatural Causes in People with Mental Illness: A Population-Based Study." *The Lancet* 358 (December 22, 2001): 2110–12.
- Holder, Travis Michael. "Bachelor Party." *Backstage*, January 28, 2004. <http://www.backstage.com/review/bachelor-party/>.
- Homans, Jennifer. "Review of *The End of Men*, by Hanna Rosin." *The New York Times*, September 13, 2012, sec. Sunday Book Review. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/16/books/review/the-end-of-men-by-hanna-rosin.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/16/books/review/the-end-of-men-by-hanna-rosin.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).
- "Hot 100 Billboard." *Billboard*, March 4, 2006. Google Books.
- Ibson, John. *Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Isherwood, Charles. "A Bride's Best Friends for Never." *The New York Times*, July 26, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/27/theater/reviews/27bachelorette.html>.
- Jarrett, Tracy. "Autism Advocates Hope Jerry Seinfeld's Words Help Fight Stigma." *NBC News*, November 7, 2014. <http://www.nbcnews.com/health/mental-health/autism-advocates-hope-jerry-seinfelds-words-help-fight-stigma-n243636>.

- Jenkins, Christine. "From Queer to Gay and Back Again: Young Adult Novels with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969 -1997." *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 68, no. 3 (July 1998): 298–334.
- Jewett, Robert, and John Shelton Lawrence. *The American Monomyth*. 1st ed. Garden City: Anchor, 1977.
- Johnson, David K. *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Johnson, Susan Lee. "A Memory Sweet to Soldiers' The Significance of Gender in the History of the 'American West.'" *The Western Historical Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (November 1993): 495–517.
- . *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001.
- Judge, Mike and Alec Berg. "Mike Judge and Alec Berg on Making HBO's 'Silicon Valley.'" By Kim Masters. Podcast. *The Business*. Los Angeles: KCRW, May 12, 2012.  
<http://www.kcrw.com/news-culture/shows/the-business/mike-judge-and-alec-berg-on-making-hbo2019s-2018silicon-valley2019>.
- Katz, Jonathan, and Erik Eckholm. "Anti-Gay Laws Bring Backlash in Mississippi and North Carolina." *The New York Times*, April 5, 2016.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/06/us/gay-rights-mississippi-north-carolina.html>.
- Kerbel, Michael. "The Golden Age of TV Drama." *Film Comment* 15, no. 4 (August 1979): 12–15.
- Kimmel, Michael S. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012.
- . "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity." In *Theorizing Masculinities*, edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, 119–41. Research on Men and Masculinities Series 5. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994.
- Kimmel, Michael S. *The History of Men: Essays in the History of American and British Masculinities*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2005.
- King, Margaret J. "The Recycled Hero: Walt Disney's Davy Crockett." In *Davy Crockett: The Man, the Legend, the Legacy, 1786-1986*, edited by Michael A. Lofaro, 137–58. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985.
- Kitses, Jim. "Authorship and Genre: Notes on the Western." In *The Western Reader*, edited by Jim Kitses and Gregg Rickman, 57–68. New York: Limelight Editions, 1998.
- Knowles, John. *A Separate Peace*. New York: Scribner, 2003.
- Koehler, Robert. "Review: 'Appaloosa.'" *Christian Science Monitor*, September 20, 2008.  
<http://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Movies/2008/0920/p25s04-also.html>.
- Laplanche, Jean, and Pontalis, J.-B. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*. Translated by Nicholson-Smith, Donald. New York: Norton, 1974.

- Lawrence, Christopher. "‘Hangover’ Movies Have Been a PR Bonanza for Caesars, Vegas." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, May 21, 2013.  
<http://www.reviewjournal.com/entertainment/movies/hangover-movies-have-been-pr-bonanza-caesars-vegas>.
- Lee, Jennifer L. "The Man Date." *The New York Times*, April 10, 2005.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/10/fashion/10date.html?pagewanted=all>.
- Lee, Robert. "Crowe Smashes at Darrow." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 27, 1924. ProQuest Historical Newspaper.
- Lewis, Bradley. "A Mad Fight: Psychiatry and Disability Activism." In *The Disability Studies Reader*, edited by Lennard J. Davis, 3rd ed., 161–76. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Link, BG, JC Phelan, M Bresnahan, A Stueve, and BA Pescosolido. "Public Conceptions of Mental Illness: Labels, Causes, Dangerousness, and Social Distance." *American Journal of Public Health* 89, no. 9 (September 1999): 1328–33.
- London, Jack. *John Barleycorn: "Alcoholic Memoirs."* Oxford World's Classics. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Lotz, Amanda D. *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the 21st Century*. New York: NYU Press, 2014.
- Lowder, J. Bryan. "Another Casualty of Homophobia: Platonic Male Affection." *Slate*, November 21, 2013.  
[http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2013/11/21/male\\_affection\\_and\\_touch\\_homophobia\\_ruins\\_platonic\\_touch\\_for\\_straight\\_men.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2013/11/21/male_affection_and_touch_homophobia_ruins_platonic_touch_for_straight_men.html).
- Lusted, David. *The Western*. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2003.
- MacDonough, Carla Jane. *Staging Masculinity: Male Identity in Contemporary American Drama*. Jefferson: McFarland, 1997.
- MacFarquhar, Larissa. "Two Heads: A Marriage Devoted to the Mind-Brain Problem." *The New Yorker*, February 12, 2007.
- Mailer, Norman. "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster." In *The Portable Beat Reader*, edited by Ann Charters, 581–605. New York: Penguin, 1992.
- Marquis, Don. "Her Foot Is on the Brass Rail." *Don Marquis*, 1935.  
<http://www.donmarquis.org/herfoot.htm>.
- Mason, Jeffrey D. "Arthur Miller: A Radical Politics of the Soul." In *The Oxford Handbook of American Drama*, edited by Jeffrey H. Richards and Heather S. Nathans, 322–38. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Masterson, Bat. *Famous Gunfighters of the Western Frontier: Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, Luke Short and Others*. Dover ed. Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 2009.

- Matthews, Dylan. "The Black/White Marijuana Arrest Gap, in Nine Charts." *The Washington Post*, June 4, 2013. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/06/04/the-blackwhite-marijuana-arrest-gap-in-nine-charts/>.
- May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. Fully rev. and updated 20th anniversary ed. New York: Basic Books, 2008.
- McConachie, Bruce. "American Theatre in Context, from the Beginnings to 1870." In *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*, edited by Don B. Wilmet and C. W. E. Bigsby, 111–81. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- McConnell, A. R. "The Multiple Self-Aspects Framework: Self-Concept Representation and Its Implications." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 3–27. doi:10.1177/1088868310371101.
- McGavran, James. "Fear's Echo and Unhinged Joy: Crossing Homosocial Boundaries in A Separate Peace." *Children's Literature* 30 (2002): 67–80.
- McKay, Kate, and Brett McKay. "Bosom Buddies: A Photo History of Male Affection." *The Art of Manliness*, July 29, 2012. <http://www.artofmanliness.com/2012/07/29/bosom-buddies-a-photo-history-of-male-affection/>.
- McRuer, Robert. "Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence." In *The Disability Studies Reader*, edited by Lennard J. Davis, 2nd ed., 88–99. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Menand, Louis. "Show or Tell: Should Creative Writing Be Taught?" *The New Yorker*, June 8, 2009. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/06/08/show-or-tell>.
- Messerschmidt, James, and R.W. Connell. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005): 829–59.
- Messner, Michael A. "Friendship, Intimacy, and Sexuality." In *The Masculinities Reader*, edited by Stephen Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett, 253–65. Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
- Metz, Tamara. *Untying the Knot: Marriage, the State, and the Case for Their Divorce*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman: Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem*. Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics. New York: Penguin, 1998.
- . "The Shadows of the Gods: A Critical View of the American Theatre." *Harper's Magazine*, August 1958.
- Mitchell, Lee Clark. "Naturalism and Languages of Determinism." In *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, edited by Emory Elliott, Martha Banta, and Houston A. Baker, 525–45. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

- Mondello, Bob. "In the Wild West, Death Becomes an Outlaw Icon." Streaming audio. *National Public Radio*, September 21, 2007.  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14599702>.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by 'Dual in the Sun' (King Vidor, 1946)." *Framework* 15–17 (1981): 12–15.
- . "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema." In *Movies and Methods*, edited by Bill Nichols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Muñoz, José. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Murdock, Catherine Gilbert. *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870-1940*. Gender Relations in the American Experience. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- Myers, Steven Lee. "How a 'Rainbow Curriculum' Turned Into Fighting Words." *The New York Times*, December 13, 1992, sec. Week in Review.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/13/weekinreview/ideas-trends-how-a-rainbow-curriculum-turned-into-fighting-words.html>.
- N. Currier (firm). *The Bible and Temperance*. Lithograph, c1835 1856. Popular Graphic Arts. Library of Congress. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/90711753/>.
- . *The Progress of Intemperance*. Lithograph, c 1841. Popular Graphic Arts. Library of Congress. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001703755/>.
- Neale, Steve. "Masculinity as Spectacle." In *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, 277–87. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- "Nerdist Writers Panel #129: Bryan Fuller." Podcast. *Nerdist*, February 25, 2014.  
<http://nerdist.com/nerdist-writers-panel-129-bryan-fuller/>.
- Newcomb, Horace, and Paul Hirsch. "Television as a Cultural Forum." *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 8, no. 3 (1983): 561–73.
- Nissen, Axel. *Manly Love: Romantic Friendship in American Fiction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Nussbaum, Emily. "Fan Friction: 'Sherlock' and Its Audiences." *The New Yorker*, January 27, 2014.  
[http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/television/2014/01/27/140127crte\\_television\\_nussbaum](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/television/2014/01/27/140127crte_television_nussbaum).
- . "Pugnacious D." *New York Magazine*, April 4, 2010.  
<http://nymag.com/arts/tv/features/65235/>.

- Olsen, Mark. "The Perks of Being a Wallflower' Steadily Blossoms." *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 2012. <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/nov/01/entertainment/la-et-mn-1101-perks-wallflower20121101>.
- Osnos, Evan. "The Fearful and the Frustrated." *The New Yorker*, August 31, 2015. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/08/31/the-fearful-and-the-frustrated>.
- Packard, Chris. *Queer Cowboys: And Other Erotic Male Friendships in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Parker, Robert B. *Appaloosa*. New York: Berkley Books, 2006.
- Parsons, Elaine Frantz. *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Penner, James. *Pinks, Pansies, and Punks: The Rhetoric of Masculinity in American Literary Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011.
- Peterson, Jennifer. "The Competing Tunes of *Johnny Guitar*: Liberalism, Sexuality, and Masquerade." In *The Western Reader*, edited by Jim Kitses and Gregg Rickman, 321–40. New York: Limelight Editions, 1998.
- Pew Research Center. "Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage," July 29, 2015. <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/07/29/graphics-slideshow-changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>.
- Plank, Alex. "Creating Authentic Autistic TV Characters." By Kim Masters. *The Business*. Los Angeles: KCRW, October 28, 2013. <http://www.kcrw.com/news-culture/shows/the-business/creating-authentic-autistic-tv-characters>.
- Reeser, Todd W. *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Resnick, Gideon. "Donald Trump's Heidi Cruz Attack Excites Men's Rights Activists." *The Daily Beast*, March 25, 2016. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/03/25/donald-trump-s-heidi-cruz-attack-excites-men-s-rights-activists.html>.
- Riesman, David. *The Lonely Crowd*. Abridged edition with a new forward. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961.
- Rodrick, Stephen. "Judd Apatow's Family Values." *The New York Times*, May 27, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/27/magazine/27apatow-t.html>.
- Romano, Aja. "Gay Cannibal Fiction Divides *Hannibal* Fans." *The Daily Dot*, April 15, 2013. <http://www.dailydot.com/fandom/gay-hannibal-fandom-homophobia-problem/>.
- Roosevelt, Theodore. *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2009.
- Rosin, Hanna. *The End of Men: And the Rise of Women*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2012.

- Rott, Nate. "#Gamergate Controversy Fuels Debate On Women And Video Games." Streaming audio. *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio, September 24, 2014. <http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2014/09/24/349835297/-gamergate-controversy-fuels-debate-on-women-and-video-games>.
- Rotundo, E. Anthony. *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1993.
- . "Romantic Friendship: Male Intimacy and Middle-Class Youth in the Northern United States, 1800-1900." *Journal of Social History* 23, no. 1 (Autumn 1989): 1–25.
- Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." In *Literary Theory, an Anthology*, edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 533–60. Malden: Blackwell, 1998.
- Saad, Lydia. "Americans' Acceptance of Gay Relations Crosses 50% Threshold." *Gallup*, May 25, 2010. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/135764/Americans-Acceptance-Gay-Relations-Crosses-Threshold.aspx>.
- Salisbury, Mark. "Andrew Dominik: Interview." *Time Out London*, n.d. <http://www.timeout.com/london/film/andrew-dominik-interview-1>.
- Santos, Fernanda. "Angry Arizona Voters Demand: Why Such Long Lines at Polling Sites?" *The New York Times*, March 24, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/25/us/angry-arizona-voters-demand-why-such-long-lines-at-polling-sites.html>.
- Sargent, Greg. "Morning Plum: No, Donald Trump Isn't Really 'Telling It Like It Is.'" *The Washington Post*, September 24, 2015, sec. The Plum Line. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/wp/2015/09/24/morning-plum-no-donald-trump-isnt-really-telling-it-like-it-is/>.
- Savran, David. *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.
- . *Taking It Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Schlesinger, Arthur. "The Crisis in American Masculinity." In *The Politics of Hope*, 237–46. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963.
- Schrank, Ben. "Can't Guys Just Learn to Fight for a Friendship?" *The New York Times*, October 26, 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/28/fashion/cant-guys-just-learn-to-fight-for-a-friendship.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/28/fashion/cant-guys-just-learn-to-fight-for-a-friendship.html?pagewanted=1&_r=0).
- Scott, A. O. "Ed Harris Directs and Stars in an Old-Fashioned Western." *The New York Times*, September 18, 2008, sec. Movies. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/19/movies/19appa.html>.
- Scull, Andrew, ed. *Cultural Sociology of Mental Illness: An a-to-Z Guide*, 2014. <http://public.eblib.com/EBLPublic/PublicView.do?ptiID=1647787>.

- Sedgwick, Eve. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
- Silver, Nate. "How Opinion on Same-Sex Marriage Is Changing, and What It Means." *The New York Times*, March 26, 2013, sec. FiveThirtyEight.  
<http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/03/26/how-opinion-on-same-sex-marriage-is-changing-and-what-it-means/>.
- Sismondo, Christine. *America Walks into a Bar: A Spirited History of Taverns and Saloons, Speakeasies, and Grog Shops*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1998.
- Smith, W.H. *The Drunkard, or The Fallen Saved*. New York: Samuel French, n.d.
- Solnit, Rebecca. "Listen Up, Women Are Telling Their Story Now." *The Guardian*, December 20, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2014/dec/30/-sp-rebecca-solnit-listen-up-women-are-telling-their-story-now>.
- Spangler, Lynn. "Buddies and Pals: A History of Male Friendships on Prime-Time Television." In *Men, Masculinity, and the Media*, edited by Steve Craig, 93–110. Research on Men and Masculinities Series 1. Newbury Park: Sage, 1992.
- Spector-Mersel, Gabriela. "Never-Aging Stories: Western Hegemonic Masculinity Scripts." *Journal of Gender Studies* 15, no. 1 (March 2006): 67–82. doi:10.1080/09589230500486934.
- Sragow, Michael. "Gay Undercurrent Trickles Through Great 'Red River.'" *The Baltimore Sun*, December 30, 2005. [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2005-12-30/features/0512300240\\_1\\_brokeback-mountain-tom-dunson-red-river](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2005-12-30/features/0512300240_1_brokeback-mountain-tom-dunson-red-river).
- Stallybrass, Peter, and Allon White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.
- Starecheski, Laura. "The Power Of The Peer Group In Preventing Campus Rape." *Morning Edition*. National Public Radio, August 18, 2014.  
<http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2014/08/18/339593542/the-power-of-the-peer-group-in-preventing-campus-rape>.
- Stevens, Dana. "You Can Give a Movie a Long Title but That Doesn't Mean It's Good." *Slate*, September 20, 2007.  
[http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2007/09/you\\_can\\_give\\_a\\_movie\\_a\\_long\\_title\\_but\\_that\\_doesnt\\_mean\\_its\\_good.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2007/09/you_can_give_a_movie_a_long_title_but_that_doesnt_mean_its_good.html).
- Stone, John Augustus. *Metamora; Or, The Last of the Wampanoags*. In *American Drama: Colonial to Contemporary*, edited by Stephen Watt and Gary A Richardson, 53–79. Mason: Cengage Learning, 2003.

- Stubbs, Jonathan. "A Demographic Snapshot of America's Federal Judiciary: A Prima Facie Case for Change." *NAACA News*, February 2011.  
<http://scholarship.richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1074&context=law-faculty-publications>.
- Surette, Ray. "Predator Criminals As Media Icon." In *Media, Process, and the Social Construction of Crime: Studies in Newsmaking Criminology*, edited by Gregg Barak, 131–58. New York: Garland, 1994.
- Syrett, Nicholas L. *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities*. Gender and American Culture. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- "The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford." *IMDb*, n.d.  
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0443680/>.
- "The Bachelor Party (1957)." *Turner Classic Movies*. Accessed March 14, 2015.  
<http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/67892/The-Bachelor-Party/>.
- "The Homosexual: Newly Visible, Newly Understood." *Time*, October 31, 1969. Academic Search Premier.
- "The Reproductive Rights Rollback of 2015." *The New York Times*, December 19, 2015, sec. Editorial. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/20/opinion/sunday/the-reproductive-rights-rollback-of-2015.html>.
- Tiger, Lionel. *Men in Groups*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1969.
- Traina, Cristina L. H. *Erotic Attunement Parenthood and the Ethics of Sensuality Between Unequals*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.  
<http://public.eblib.com/EBLPublic/PublicView.do?ptiID=836885>.
- Traister, Bryce. "Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies." *American Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (June 2000): 274–304.
- Tribunella, Eric L. *Melancholia and Maturation: The Use of Trauma in American Children's Literature*. 1st ed. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010.
- Triplett, Frank. *Jesse James: The Life, Times, and Treacherous Death of the Most Infamous Outlaw of All Time*. New York: Skyhorse Pub., 2013.
- Turan, Kenneth. "Brothers in Arms, Foes in Matters of the Heart." *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 2008. <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/sep/19/entertainment/et-appaloosa19>.
- Turner, Fredrick Jackson. "The Frontier in American History." *The Project Gutenberg*, 1920.  
[http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22994/22994-h/22994-h.htm#Page\\_1](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22994/22994-h/22994-h.htm#Page_1).
- U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. "2008 Human Rights Report: Thailand." Washington, DC, February 25, 2009.  
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eap/119058.htm>.

- Vavreck, Lynn. "Measuring Donald Trump's Supporters for Intolerance." *The New York Times*, February 23, 2016, sec. TheUpshot. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/25/upshot/measuring-donald-trumps-supporters-for-intolerance.html>.
- Verrier, Richard. "Las Vegas Is Placing Its Bets on Hollywood." *The Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 2014. <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/cotown/la-et-ct-onlocation-las-vegas-think-like-a-man-20140709-story.html>.
- Viruet, Pilot. "'Two and a Half Men': TV's Worst Sitcom Ends As Terribly As It Lived, and I Watched Every Episode." *Grantland*, February 20, 2015. <http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/two-and-a-half-men-tvs-worst-sitcom-ends-as-terribly-as-it-lived-and-i-watched-every-episode/>.
- Vorlicky, Robert. *Act Like a Man: Challenging Masculinities in American Drama*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.
- Wade, Lisa. "American Men's Hidden Crisis: They Need More Friends!" *Salon*, December 7, 2013. [http://www.salon.com/2013/12/08/american\\_mens\\_hidden\\_crisis\\_they\\_need\\_more\\_friends/](http://www.salon.com/2013/12/08/american_mens_hidden_crisis_they_need_more_friends/).
- Wahl, Otto F. *Media Madness: Public Images of Mental Illness*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=18324>.
- Ward, Elizabeth Jane. *Not Gay: Sex Between Straight White Men*. Sexual Cultures. New York: New York University Press, 2015.
- Watt, Stephen, and Gary A Richardson. *American Drama: Colonial to Contemporary*. Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2003.
- Whitehead, Stephen. *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions*. Malden: Polity Press, 2002.
- Whyte, William. *The Organization Man*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1956.
- Wickenden, Dorothy, Jelani Cobb, and Eric Froner. *The Legacy of Reconstruction*. Sound Cloud audio file. *The Political Scene*. Accessed April 11, 2015. <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/political-scene-the-legacy-of-reconstruction>.
- Willemen, Paul. "Anthony Mann: Looking at the Male." In *The Western Reader*, edited by Jim Kitses and Gregg Rickman, 209–12. New York: Limelight Editions, 1998.
- Williams, Raymond. "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory." In *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner, 152–65. Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
- Williams, Tennessee. *Plays 1937-1955*. New York: Library of America, 2008.

- Winter, Thomas. "Crisis of Masculinity." In *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia*, edited by Bret E. Carroll, 117–19. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003.
- Wister, Owen. *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains*. Dover Thrift Editions. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2006.
- Wister, Owen, and Frederic Remington. "The Evolution of the Cow-Puncher." *Harpers*, September 1895, 602–17.
- Wood, Robin. *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Wyden, Peter, and Barbara Wyden. *Growing Up Straight: What Every Thoughtful Parent Should Know About Homosexuality*. New York: Stein and Day, 1968.
- Zimmerman, Ron, John Powers Severin, Steve Buccellato, Richard Starkings, and Wes Abbott. *Rambide Kid: Slap Leather*. New York: Marvel Worldwide, 2010.