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Anne M. Floyd

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DECONSTRUCTING SOCIALLY-ENTRENCHED IDEALS OF MASCULINITY IN *FIGHT
CLUB, THE SUN ALSO RISES, AND GIOVANNI'S ROOM*

by

Anne Floyd

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Abstract

This paper examines the psychological attributes of the masculine gender role, analyzing three literary texts: Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996), Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), and James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956). Each of these texts portrays the pernicious influence of masculine gender role demands. *Fight Club* demonstrates the connection between norms of occupational success and violence; the narrator creates fight club in response to career frustrations. *The Sun Also Rises* illustrates the effect of sexual disability on masculine identity: Jake Barnes's genital wound causes him to question his worth as a man. *Giovanni's Room* portrays the way that internalized homophobia can create a fragmented sense of identity for David, a homosexual man who has internalized the homophobic norms of his society. In these texts, adherence to the masculine gender role leads to a loss of identity, destroying both the self and others in its wake.

Introduction

The perceived privilege of men, taken for granted by many feminists, is often illusory. Many men in Western cultures, especially men of low socioeconomic status or men who are members of a racially- or sexually-marginalized group, experience a sense of powerlessness in their lives. This sense of powerlessness has been reflected in American culture through books, television, film, and music, potentially affecting men from every walk of life. These media depict masculinity as a performance of hypersexual machismo that emphasizes sexual virility, occupational success, and heterosexuality.

'Performance' is the operative word: Men in American society are socialized to wear a mask, to portray an image of both stoicism and hypersexuality in order not to be seen as weak and effeminate. This performance can be a self-destructive act for men, reducing their capacity to relate to other people and ultimately to understand themselves. It is also an ideal that is impossible to live up to, which can inhibit a man's ability to create a coherent identity and to develop self-esteem that is based on internal rather than external factors.

My aim is to explore the ways in which masculine gender role expectations are portrayed in literature, a portrayal that can help illuminate the pernicious influence these expectations have on the way that men in Western cultures have experienced their own masculinity. To do this, I will analyze three novels: *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk (1996), *The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway (1926), and *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin (1956). These texts explore how failure to live up to certain aspects of the masculine gender role can lead to gender role strain, the negative effect of adhering to gender roles that prevents a person from achieving their full potential (Kilmartin 42-3). In particular, *Fight Club* depicts the emasculating effects of capitalism and the feminization of men, *The Sun Also Rises* depicts disabled masculine sexuality,

and *Giovanni's Room* depicts the way in which internalized homophobia can interact with homosexuality to create a fragmented sense of identity.

Studying literature can be an effective way to analyze masculinity because literature reflects the society in which it was written, both constructing and reinforcing its norms and customs. In “The Death of the Author,” French literary theorist Roland Barthes explains: “We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning...but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture” (145). By reflecting culture and different types of writing, texts convey the ideology—attitudes, morals, and values—of the society in which they are written. Though in the end the intentions of the author must be separated from the text, the way the text is written reflects the sociocultural milieu that influenced the author.

In addition, literature can be used as a site of sociocultural critique: Reading and interpreting it can illuminate or unveil truths about a society that its members would rather not recognize. Issues that are detrimental to our society such as sexism, racism, and heterosexism are rarely topics that are comfortable to discuss. Literature is unique in the way that it can draw readers in and change the way they think about these issues in a more palatable way than simply bombarding them with information. Examining literature as a site of social critique is especially useful because readers become invested in the characters they are reading about, thereby also becoming invested in the issues that the characters care about. This creates an emotional connection to issues about which the reader might otherwise have neither an awareness nor a concern.

It is important to note that we cannot take the personas of men in literary texts and use them as factual examples of masculinity. The men that will be examined in these texts can be analyzed as *mirrors* of masculinity: They are not real men but rather representations of the culture's constructions of masculinity. These fictional men can show what it is like to be a man in the novel's cultural milieu, often reflecting, even unconsciously, the author's experiences with masculinity.

My literary and cultural analysis is grounded in psychological concepts regarding the masculine gender role, particularly those examined in Dr. Christopher T. Kilmartin's groundbreaking text *The Masculine Self*. Kilmartin explains that sexuality, occupational identity, and antifemininity are three of the most important facets of the masculine gender identity. These three facets interact in the novels, though each novel primarily emphasizes one of the three facets: *Fight Club* highlights issues relating to occupational identity, *The Sun Also Rises* articulates problems regarding sexuality, and *Giovanni's Room* discusses the topic of antifemininity and homophobia.

In order to ground this analysis, I will first briefly explore these psychological concepts. As Kilmartin explains, norms about the masculine gender role and occupational identity emphasize the way that men define themselves based on their jobs (180). In particular, men desire wealth and high status in their careers, especially because traditional masculinity in white American culture articulates the importance of providing for a nuclear family (Kilmartin 49; 181). Men who do not have occupational success can experience gender role strain, which causes negative consequences such as stress, compromised health, mental health issues, and conflict. All of these issues can lead a man to lash out through violence, which is a way for him to feel powerful and secure in his own masculinity (Kilmartin 228).

Kilmartin explains that the male gender role also has strict rules about sexuality: “Being a ‘real man’ has often included expectations for certain ways of being a sexual man” (203). These ways include proscriptions against emotional intimacy in regards to sex and an emphasis on sexual success. Sexual success is one of the main ways that men prove their masculinity. In this context, sexual success refers to the number of a man’s sexual partners and his ability to develop and maintain an erection to successful completion (Kilmartin 206). Men who cannot perform these aspects of the masculine sexual identity may feel insecure about their sexuality, which can also cause them to feel insecure about other aspects of their identity; this is consistent with gender role strain theory (Kilmartin 42).

Antifemininity is the third main aspect of the masculine gender role and is defined as the avoidance of feminine attitudes, behaviors, and emotions. Kilmartin explains that antifemininity is strongly linked to homophobia, because “few things are socially defined as more feminine than loving or being sexually attracted to a man” (7). Males who act in a stereotypically feminine fashion are therefore assumed to be homosexual. As a result, antifemininity enforces traditional masculine behavior because of homophobia: Men fear being thought of as homosexual and react by avoiding feminine behavior.

The following analyses will explore the way in which masculine gender role expectations affect male experience in the texts. The pressure to conform to masculine gender role expectations is so deep that it permeates our literature and culture; analyzing *Fight Club*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *Giovanni’s Room* can thus shed light on the cultural phenomenon of masculinity. Each analysis reflects the sense of powerlessness that men can feel in response to these unrealistic norms.

***Fight Club*: Gender Role Strain Leads to Anarchical Revolt**

Fight Club is a cult classic that has been associated with masculinity in pop culture. Surprisingly, it is equally compelling to literary theorists: Its themes of failed masculinity and of the excesses of capitalism have sparked debate in academic circles. *Fight Club* begins by introducing an unnamed, anonymous narrator struggling with chronic insomnia. He works in a mid-level business career with a boss whom he hates; he has no friends or personal life to speak of. He complains that “ever since college, I make friends. They get married. I lose friends” (62). The only time he leaves the house for socialization is to attend an endless number of support groups for people with incurable diseases, on advice from his doctor to understand ‘true’ suffering.

The support groups fill a void in the narrator’s life and cure him from his interminable loneliness. More importantly, they give him the attention he craves, the attention that is absent from his isolated life. Pathetically, the narrator states: “This is why I loved the support groups so much, if people thought you were dying, they gave you their full attention” (107). Eventually, the support groups do not give the narrator the same high that they once did; he needs to find another way to escape his life, a way of bonding with other people that does not include support groups.

At this point, Tyler Durden comes into being, an alter-ego of the narrator who is depicted as another character until the end of the book. Tyler Durden, who appears while the narrator is asleep, starts fight clubs in bars for everyday men who feel that their lives are empty and meaningless. Marla Singer, a mentally-unstable seductress, interacts with both Tyler Durden and the narrator and furthers their rage. Eventually, the fight clubs escalate into a full-fledged anarchical movement against capitalism in America called Project Mayhem; it is meant to destroy modern society and start a new age.

After the narrator's friend Bob is killed participating in Project Mayhem and Tyler plans to bomb a national museum, the narrator realizes that things have gone too far and he must stop Tyler. This conflict ends in a fight between the narrator and Tyler, in which the two have a gunfight with Tyler holding a gun to the narrator's head on a roof. Marla arrives at the roof with all of the people the narrator has met in his support groups, at which point the persona of Tyler disintegrates as "my hallucination, not hers" (204).

When the bomb that he has made as Tyler fails to explode, the narrator decides what he must do. "With the police helicopters thundering toward us, and Marla and all the support group people who couldn't save themselves, with all of them trying to save me, I had to pull the trigger" (206). After shooting himself in the head, he is transported to the psychiatric ward of a hospital. At the end of the novel, the narrator sits in his hospital bed not wanting to return to real life because of the temptation of violence it brings. Every so often, he is approached by a member of fight club who tells him that they look forward to getting him back, but he does not want to hurt people anymore.

Fight Club's dramatic plot shines light on an invisible problem for Twentieth- and Twenty-first-century American men: How to create an identity as an average man when cultural indicators of masculinity emphasize occupational success and wealth. Tellingly, consumerism and capitalism interact in *Fight Club* to become an emasculating entity. Consumerism refers to the idea that spending money on products and services is good for the economy, while capitalism is a system of economic organization emphasizing the private ownership of goods and free market competition. Consumerism is only possible in a capitalistic society and emphasizes the unequal distribution of wealth that capitalism entails. In "To Live Like Fighting Cocks: Fight Club and the Ethics of Masculinity," Andrew Slade articulates: "Men have been domesticated

into believing that the right possessions will determine the nature of their masculinity” (232). This is exemplified in the novel by the fact that the narrator lives in a condominium that is furnished with IKEA furniture, “the same Johanneshov armchair in the Strinne green stripe pattern” that everyone owns (43). These possessions are meant to show a certain status in the world: They scream that the narrator fits in with the crowd and is an integral part of his consumerist and capitalistic society.

While consuming mass-marketed goods means that a person fits in, it also means that the person is probably not from the bourgeoisie. People from the bourgeoisie are often able to afford handmade possessions that are from more expensive retailers than IKEA. If a person’s worth is based on their wealth, consuming cheap mass-produced goods means that a person does not measure up to richer members of society. When a person does not measure up in the occupational sphere, they often try to make it up in other sectors of their life to compensate.

Fight club becomes that way to compensate; it is not based on wealth or status in the world, which contrasts with the unequal way in which resources are divided up in capitalism and consumerism’s emphasis on owning the most goods. The narrator explains that “the new rule is that nobody should be the center of fight club, [Tyler] says. Nobody’s the center of fight club except the two men fighting” (142). Every man has the ability to appear powerful in fight club if they have the necessary physical strength to win a fight. Considering that the majority of fight club is made up of flabby office workers who are not trained in combat, the physical strength needed to win a fight would be negligible.

Therefore, almost any man can win in fight club and construct a hypermasculine identity that negates capitalistic hierarchies. It is especially important to construct this identity because shopping, which every man must do to adhere to consumerist norms, is a stereotypically

feminine pastime that has been traditionally associated with homemakers. While this is not explicitly stated in *Fight Club*, Tyler Durden makes it clear that he disdains all things that are associated with consumerism and the feminine sphere: “I’d rather kill you than see you working a shit job for just enough money to buy cheese and watch television” (155). A man who buys into the ideology of consumerism may ultimately feel like less of a man because he is working a “shit job” that he hates to engage in the feminine behavior of buying products (155).

This is especially problematic because antifemininity—behavior intending to negate being perceived as feminine—is one of the central ways that some men define themselves. In *The Masculine Self*, Kilmartin explains: “Many theorists (Chodorow, 1978; O’Neil, 1981; Brannon, 1985; Hartley, 1959) consider *antifemininity* the central organizing principle from which all other masculine social demands derive” (7). Men who embrace the principles of antifemininity shun behaviors that are stereotypically defined as feminine, behaviors such as crying, sharing emotions, or appearing emotionally vulnerable.

The men in *Fight Club* are particularly concerned with shunning antifeminine behaviors; this is depicted in the novel with the narrator’s aversion to crying. The narrator says: “Crying is right at hand in the smothering dark...when you see how everything you can ever accomplish will end up as trash” (17). The way in which the narrator associates crying with words as negative as “trash” indicates that he thinks that crying will emasculate, even harm, him. Crying will nullify all of his accomplishments and break down the careful façade of stoicism that he has constructed.

The narrator is particularly concerned about the way women will react to the ‘feminine’ behavior of crying. Referring to the peace that he finds at support groups, the narrator gripes that he will be unable to attend the support groups because Marla Singer has started attending them

and he might cry. “Until tonight, two years of success until tonight, because I can’t cry with this woman watching me” (22). Crying is seen as a form of weakness, and crying in front of a woman as sexually desirable as Marla Singer would emphasize the narrator’s inability to fulfill the masculine gender role.

Winning fights thus becomes a way to negate the emasculating or feminizing effects of consumerism, a way to assert antifemininity in an increasingly feminized world. Fight club allows men to reclaim their masculinity by affirming a pre-modern, less consumerist model of masculinity that values physical strength and fighting (Quiney 346). Tyler articulates his creation of fight club as a desire not to die without scars, which were seen as a badge of honor and a token of masculine success. Fight club, then, gives men the illusion that they are fighting for the survival of the fittest, that they are gladiators hardened by combat. Tyler does not want to die without scars because it would mean, according to pre-modern ‘kill or be killed’ warrior principles, that he was less of a man.

This would be especially damaging to the frail egos of the men who are in fight club, given that most of the men who participate do not measure up in some way. Tyler exploits the low self-esteem of the participants, articulating: “As long as you’re at fight club, you’re not how much money you’ve got in the bank. You’re not your job. You’re not your family, and you’re not who you tell yourself... You’re not your problems” (142). Fight club therefore allows men to escape from dead-end jobs and unhappy relationships, from the failings in their personal and occupational lives.

A prime example of this is in the case of Robert ‘Bob’ Paulson, who has been feminized by his involvement in a stereotypically masculine occupation—bodybuilding. Bob is forced to undergo surgery to remove his testicles after the steroids he used for bodybuilding caused him to

develop cancer. After undergoing the surgery, Bob is diagnosed with gynecomastia—the development of breasts in a male. Bob is mocked for his seemingly-feminine appearance, especially by the narrator, who calls Bob’s breasts “bitch tits” (17).

There are no depictions of Bob’s personality before his gynecomastia, but it can be assumed that he probably conformed to stereotypically masculine behavior because of his occupation. When the narrator meets Bob, the most striking feature of Bob’s personality is his propensity towards having gratuitously emotional public displays of emotion. The narrator describes the first time he goes to the testicular cancer support group, and “Bob the big moosie, the big cheesebread moved in on top of me in Remaining Men Together and started crying,” clearly not a masculine behavior (21).

In a sense, Bob has been socially castrated because of his breasts; he cannot fit in with other males because he looks physically different from them (Iocco 50). This is why, as one of the many men who fail to live up to masculine ideals, Bob joins fight club shortly after the narrator meets him. Fight club allows him to relive his glory days as a bodybuilder and to distance himself from his current persona as a feminized male. As with the other men, fight club is an escape from his life into a fantasy world in which he is still the peak of masculine perfection.

Bob’s dilemma as a man with breasts brings up another main theme of the novel: The late Twentieth- and Twenty-First-century phenomenon of the hypersexualization of the male body. Men are increasingly depicted in their underwear in public locations from billboards to magazines. Naked men have become less of a rarity in TV, film, and especially advertisements. In the film, after coming across one of many public depictions of the naked male body, the narrator points to a Calvin Klein ad on a bus in which a half-naked male model is advertising

underwear. He asks Tyler Durden sarcastically, “is that what a man looks like?” (Fincher, *Fight Club*). His message is clear: Like women, men face unrealistic standards for bodily perfection. Without steroid use, a strict diet, and hours in the gym, most men cannot live up to the ideal of having chiseled abdomens and muscled arms. Failing to live up to this ideal can cause stress and low self-esteem for men, just as it does for women. This is a fact that is often denied in our society because many men do not speak about it as much as women do; men are expected to be stoic and never express doubts about their masculinity or their body (Kilmartin 145).

The fight clubs in the novel reject these ideals, which makes them different from typical exercise activities for men that emphasize increasing musculature over enjoying oneself. According to the narrator: “The gyms you go to are crowded with guys trying to look like men, as if being a man means looking the way a sculptor or an art director says...there’s grunting and noise at fight club like at the gym, but fight club isn’t about looking good” (50). Unlike men in gyms, men in fight club have nothing to prove in terms of the appearance of their bodies. They can exercise without feeling as though they are exercising only for the sake of their appearance.

Tellingly, scarring—which positions the men as further opposite to idealized male gym bodies—is part of the initiation into fight club. In the film, when Tyler is initiating the narrator into fight club, he kisses the narrator’s hand and pours lye on it to create a kiss-shaped scar. Other members of fight club are initiated in a similar fashion, Tyler’s explanation being: “Without pain, without sacrifice, we would be nothing” (Fincher, *Fight Club*). As a result, men in fight club who have imperfections such as scars are perceived as more masculine than the man with impressive musculature.

To obtain these scars, men in fight club are raw and real—often frighteningly so when they are in the midst of the violence of the fights. This violence is another way that men can

prove their masculinity against airbrushed ideals of male perfection, against blank-eyed poster boys in Calvin Klein underwear pouting on billboards. Fight club allows men to literally lash out against these ideals of fake masculinity, to prove that being a real man has nothing to do with what you look like.

This is especially the case because according to Kilmartin, “aggression is one of the primary defining features of traditional masculinity” (224). Anger is one of the only emotions that men are truly allowed to express in American culture, because there is taboo against men showing vulnerability. Anger can easily become associated with aggression because it suppresses feelings of empathy by separating men emotionally from other people. This makes it easier to perform aggressive acts, to harm other people without feeling guilt (Kilmartin 224-5).

Furthermore, anger validates feelings of masculinity because anger implies dominance and control over people’s lives, over the world. It allows men to feel as though they have power in life, though it is merely the power to destroy. In the text, the narrator’s aggression in fight club escalates to fantasies about destroying the world. The narrator states: “What Tyler says about being the crap and the slaves of history, that’s how I felt. I wanted to destroy everything beautiful I’d never have. Burn the Amazon rain forests” (123). This quote shows the degree to which anger can give illusions of power and validate itself to create more frustration and rage.

In addition, aggression is especially associated with feelings of power for men who have none: Men compensate with violence when they feel powerless and uncertain about their identity (Kilmartin 228). Often, men who are unsure of their identity are men who are from minority groups. Being from one of these groups puts men at a risk for oppression from the majority group, which is the cult of the white, rich, heterosexual male. A group that is especially at risk for violence is the young, poor male who fails to live up to the occupational achievement

aspect of masculinity. As Kilmartin explains: “Poor and oppressed men tend to be more violent than other men. This is not surprising, given that they feel the pressure to be a ‘big wheel’ while at the same time being prevented from many of the avenues for status attainment that privileged men enjoy” (223). Achieving occupational success is unattainable for these men, so they use violence to act out the aggressiveness and power that is part of the masculine ideal.

In this way, they affirm a different part of their masculine identity to compensate for failing to achieve the ideal of masculine success. This allows the man to fight perceptions of doubt about his masculinity to feel like a “real man”; in addition, the man can vent the anger he feels at failing to live up to expectations (Kilmartin 223). Most importantly, it can make a man with no control over his life feel powerful and have control over the fates of others by damaging or obliterating their bodies.

This power can be addicting to the men of *Fight Club*. The narrator describes the intoxicating quality of fight club by explaining that “after a night in fight club... nothing can piss you off. Your word is law” (49). The man who wins in fight club is the king of his domain, if only for a night. Winning gives him bragging rights to the other men in fight club, and more importantly, it lets him feel a confidence and certainty that is otherwise absent in his life. And losing is something that can be easily reversed, given that fight clubs are held constantly.

This struggle for masculine success enacted through violence is epitomized in *Fight Club* by Tyler Durden. Tyler works two dead-end jobs, one as a waiter in a five-star restaurant and another as a movie theater employee. At first, Tyler’s failure to achieve success leads him to lash out with minor acts of rebellion; he sabotages the food of the upper-class and splices pornography into Disney movies at the theater. Eventually, his behavior escalates into full-fledged violence because in his words, “[he] was the pawn of the world, everyone’s trash” (113).

By calling himself both a pawn and trash, Tyler makes it clear that he has extremely low self-esteem. Angry at himself and frustrated at his low status, he creates fight club and later, Project Mayhem. After constructing these organizations, he begins to develop many of the other qualities of ideal masculinity, such as success with women. He initiates an intensely sexual relationship with Marla Singer, a relationship that involves sexual encounters so torrid, so frenzied, that they keep everyone in the house awake for hours. These sexual encounters reaffirm Tyler's masculinity. Sexual performance is one of the ways men feel masculine, because men are pitted against each other as sexual competitors, and sexually successful men feel empowered (Kilmartin 206). By seducing Marla, Tyler proves that he can be successful in the sexual arena as well as the fight club arena. Marla is no more than a notch on Tyler's bedpost; however, by sleeping with an attractive woman, he feels powerful.

Through his sexual success, Tyler becomes the ideal masculine ego of the narrator. While much of the narrator's persona is grounded in failed masculinity, Tyler is all masculine self-assurance and machismo. In the film, Tyler drawls with typical bravado: "All the ways you wish you could be, that's me. I look like you wanna look. I fuck like you wanna fuck. I am capable, and most importantly, I am free in all the ways you are not" (Fincher, *Fight Club*). Therefore, Tyler is everything that the narrator wants yet ultimately fails to be.

The relationship between Tyler and the narrator is complicated by the fact that they are the same person, two sides of the same coin. In "Virility and Vulnerability, Splitting and Masculinity in *Fight Club*: A Tale of Contemporary Male Identity Issues," Caroline Ruddell explains that the situation is reminiscent of Freud's theory of the narcissistic ego, with Tyler as "an ideal ego that is based on libidinal excesses" (500). Tyler is constructed in order to allow the narrator to do the things that he wants to do yet his conscience prevents him from doing. This is

why it is Tyler rather than the narrator who creates fight club, starts Project Mayhem, and sleeps with Marla—all things that the narrator desires yet sees as deviant or immoral.

The narrator confirms this, claiming that: “I know why Tyler had occurred...From the first night I met her, Tyler or some part of me had needed a way to be with Marla” (198). The narrator is sexually fascinated by Marla; he drinks in her “short matte black hair” and her sensuous, “skim milk thin” body (18). But he also knows how unstable she is, and he cannot justify starting a relationship with her. Creating his alter-ego allows him to satisfy his sexual urges and initiate intercourse with her without having to feel responsibility for her mental health.

In addition, creating fight club allows him to lash out against the company for which he works, an insurance firm representing a car company whose faulty equipment causes people to become sick. The car company knows this but fails to fix it because it would make them lose money. Their greed and failure to respect human life need to be punished, but the narrator does not know how to do this without causing his career harm. Creating Tyler Durden, who in turn creates Project Mayhem to destroy capitalism’s excesses, is the narrator’s way of righting this wrong.

But the narrator’s attempts to strike out against his capitalistic and consumerist society are in vain: The bomb he constructs to blow up the museum fails to explode, and he experiences a complete psychiatric breakdown. In the end, he does not succeed in reorganizing the capitalistic society that feminizes him. The narrator, along with the members of Project Mayhem, becomes yet another example of a man who has failed to measure up to impossible and self-destructive masculine gender norms.

The Sun Also Rises: The Perils of Sexual Disability on Masculine Identity

The conflicts faced by the narrator in *Fight Club* mirror the struggles of the men in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, indicating that struggles with the masculine gender role have long been a part of American masculinity. In *The Sun Also Rises*, set in the early Twentieth Century, Jake Barnes is a World War One veteran and journalist who has sustained a war injury that makes it impossible for him to have sex. He is seemingly in love with Brett Ashley, a modern woman who refuses to date him because of the impossibility of a sexual relationship. Jake is friends with Robert Cohn, a Princeton graduate who falls deeply in love with Brett and has a brief affair with her in San Sebastian.

Brett rejects Cohn following their affair; the affair meant little to her, given that she is engaged to Mike Campbell. Mike is another World War One veteran, a bankrupt drunkard who comes from a wealthy family. Along with Brett's fiancé Mike Campbell and Jake's friends Robert Cohn and Bill Gorton, the group travels to Spain to fish and attend a fiesta featuring bullfighting. Massive drama ensues, including Brett's affair with the hypermasculine bullfighter Pedro Romero.

Cohn becomes jealous of Brett's relationship with Romero and starts a brawl with him. Cohn also takes his jealousy out on Jake, calling Jake a pimp for introducing Brett to Romero. The two get into a fistfight over Brett, after which Cohn cries and begs Jake to forgive him. Everyone goes their separate ways, and Jake returns to San Sebastian. He begins to receive telegrams from Brett begging him for help.

Jake rushes to Madrid to be at Brett's side in her time of crisis. Brett and Romero have broken up following his inability to accept Brett's lack of traditional femininity. Jake and Brett ponder their relationship but ultimately decide that they cannot be together. In response to Brett's assertion that the two could have had a good time together if Jake had not been injured,

Jake replies: “Isn’t it pretty to think so?” (247). Jake realizes that, even if he had never been injured, the reality of having a relationship with Brett would have been nothing more than a pretty but unrealistic dream.

Literary analysis of *The Sun Also Rises* focuses on the rigid masculine ideals tied to sexual performance and occupational success. These ideals are often exemplified in Jake Barnes’ struggle to feel a sense of mastery over his masculinity after his genitalia are damaged in World War One. Jake attempts to reclaim his masculinity in various ways to cope with his damaged sense of himself as a sexual being.

The plot of *The Sun Also Rises* is informed by its theme of emasculated men. The most obvious example is Jake, emasculated by his war wound. There is also, however, a psychological aspect to his emasculation. In his interactions with Brett Ashley, he lacks the power to refuse her anything. He is her toy, existing only to please her and bend to her will—and he knows it, albeit reluctantly. “I had been having Brett for a friend. I had not been thinking about her side of it. I had been getting something for nothing. That only delayed the presentation of the bill. The bill always came” (148). Jake is delusional in his belief that he has been getting Brett’s friendship for nothing, considering that he spends most of the novel cleaning up after Brett’s messes. However, he is aware that they have an exchange relationship—that he will not be getting her friendship for nothing. His awareness of Brett’s manipulation of him makes him an emasculated man all the more, because he is submitting to her power over him and tolerates it; he allows himself to be used.

Brett’s fiancé Mike is also an example of an emasculated man, the first to admit that he is a coward. “I’m not one of those chaps that likes being knocked about. I never play games, even” (191). He adds that he never participated in hunting because he was afraid that a horse would

fall on him. While many of his remarks are tongue-in-cheek, it is clear that he has never had a physical proficiency for sports, one of the cornerstones of masculinity.

He also does not live up to the masculine ideal of being a provider. Mike is completely bankrupt and owes money to “everybody” (192). While he comes from a rich family, he does not seem to have access to their funds. He has no career to speak of and spends his time flitting between social events with Brett. It seems as though he has no chance of ever being able to provide for himself or Brett without the help of his family.

In addition, Brett constantly cheats on Mike with men such as Robert Cohn and Romero. Instead of confronting Brett about her cheating ways, Mike takes refuge in drink. “I’m rather drunk,” Mike said. “I think I’ll *stay* rather drunk. This is all awfully amusing, but it’s not too pleasant. It’s not too pleasant for me” (203). Tellingly, even though Jake is in love with Brett and Brett is engaged to Mike, Jake is friends with Mike because, as Richard Hovey states in *Hemingway: The Inner Terrain*, “Mike is the sort who really doesn’t count” (48). He is an alcoholic who has the problems that come with this addiction; Jake does not have to feel jealous or intimidated by him. Even if it is Mike who is with Brett instead of Jake, Mike will never completely have Brett.

Robert Cohn is another man who is emasculated by Brett. Brett and Cohn have a short sexual affair that means little to Brett; Cohn is just another notch in her ever-lengthening bedpost. However, Cohn falls “ridiculously, romantically in love with [her] and miss[es] every cue of proper male behavior as a member of the ‘herd’ of men surrounding her” (Onderdonk 74). He follows her to Pamplona and tries to pursue a relationship with her; Brett, on the other hand, snubs him for the hypermasculine bullfighter Romero.

Cohn also fails to live up to the masculine gender role in his propensity to cry at the drop of a hat. In one scene, Cohn is sobbing on his bed when Jake enters the room. Cohn cannot seem to stop crying because he feels like a fool for falling in love with Brett and making a scene about her involvement with Jake. Not only is Jake unsympathetic, but he is also extremely uncomfortable with Cohn's show of emotion. As a result, Jake flees the scene, implicitly because he sees Cohn's behavior as embarrassing or non-masculine.

Pedro and the other bullfighters serve as a contrast to the emasculated men in the novel as hypermasculine performers of macho bravado. As Jake says in admiration to Robert Cohn: "Nobody ever lives their life all the way up except bullfighters" (10). While this statement is aimed at all bullfighters, Pedro best exemplifies this description. All of the men, especially Jake, revere Pedro as an example of perfect masculinity. Pedro's dominance over the bulls and his obvious virility allow him to control both his surroundings and women—something to which the other men aspire.

For example, the way Pedro dominates Brett and takes control of the relationship impresses the men:

"You must have a drink with me," [Romero] said. He seated himself, asking Brett's permission without saying anything. He had very nice manners. But he kept smoking his cigar. It went well with his face.

"You like cigars?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. I always smoke cigars."

It was part of his system of authority..." (185)

His system of authority is the way that he carries himself, the way that he dominates Brett and sits with her without having to ask her permission. He assumes that his presence is desired; it is inconceivable to him that she would not welcome his sexual attentions.

The cigar is also part of his system of masculine authority. The shape of the cigar is suggestive of a phallus, which may denote the power it represents in male society. Cigars are a symbol of machismo; “tough guy” movies feature men smoking cigars. Furthermore, Romero is confident enough in his sexuality that he can poke fun at the hypermasculine stereotype of the bullfighter. Brett asks Romero what bullfighters are like and he demonstrates it for her by tipping his hat over his eyes, angling his cigar, and mimicking the facial expression of Nacional, a famous bullfighter (186). By doing this, he is mocking the stereotype of the bullfighter as the epitome of masculine superiority and demonstrating the affectation of masculine behaviors that bullfighters sometimes portray.

In short, Romero is far more masculine than the emasculated American men and more masculine than even the other bullfighters. Men are considered inferior if they do not live up to hypermasculine ideals as Pedro does, which reflects the emasculation of men that is endemic to Western culture. Living up to this ideal is extremely difficult for the average male and only possible in extraordinary (and extreme) cases like Pedro. Even non-injured men like Cohn and Mike have a hard time living up to the masculine ideals that Pedro personifies.

For a man like Jake who has a sexual disability, this aim becomes nearly impossible: Jake’s masculine identity is threatened by the war wound that destroyed his genitalia. While it is never stated in the novel exactly what this wound is, it is clear that it has left Jake unable to perform sexual intercourse. It is so painful to Jake that he never describes his actual wound, only the effects of it. For example, when Jake and Brett are traveling in a taxi, they share a passionate

kiss. Afterwards, when they are both aroused but unwilling to continue their encounter, Jake states that “there’s not a damn thing we could do” in reference to sex and his disability (26).

This is the closest that Jake comes to naming his injury, which reflects the shame that he feels about his inability to perform sexual intercourse. This is logical considering that sexuality is one of the main ways in which men define their masculinity. Kilmartin explains: “The [masculine] norm is expressed in a set of demands for sexual competence, conquest, and performance” (206). Jake cannot fulfill any of these three demands, considering that both sexual competence and performance in a male depends on the ability to develop and maintain an erection.

Yet in response to Bill’s assertion that Jake is impotent, Jake replies that he is not impotent—he has “just had an accident” (115). According to society, being a man is defined by physical characteristics—the presence of a penis. In “Phallus, Performance, and Power: Crisis of Masculinity,” Khan et al. aptly state: “The penis is situated at the core of masculinity. The meanings of penile erection equate with male power and potency” (45). A man who does not have a penis or whose penis is damaged is not a man at all by society’s standards because he is unable to achieve an erection, to harness his own power.

For a man, the penis is linked inextricably to his sense of his own masculinity. Kilmartin explains: “‘Real men’ are also described as having huge penises...In fact, the penis is sometimes described as ‘his manhood’” (206). In this way, the penis is symbolic of a man’s ability to perform sex, even though sexual pleasure for women has little to do with the size of a penis. Bringing one’s partner to orgasm is another aspect of the masculine sexual identity, so a man’s perceived inability to satisfy his partner could make him feel emasculated (Kilmartin 206).

While Jake is technically able to perform the sexual conquest aspect of the masculine identity by gaining the sexual interest of numerous women, he is unable to keep their interest when they learn that he cannot have traditional sexual intercourse. This is exemplified in Brett's rejection of Jake's sexual advances. After they embrace each other in the taxicab, she cries for him to stop touching her because she cannot stand it. She says that she "simply turn[s] to jelly" when Jake kisses her but she "think[s] it's hell on earth" (26-7). The hell that she is in because of his kisses is not because she does not like them but that she likes them too much without the possibility of continuing the encounter to its inevitable conclusion. At the end of the encounter, she asks him to kiss her again but says that it is not good for her to see him.

It should be noted here that the whole crisis of Jake's inability to perform is based upon the *masculine* definition of sexual competence. Many women cannot achieve orgasm from intercourse alone; it simply does not stimulate the clitoris as much as other sexual activities. Therefore, even though Jake's genitalia have been damaged, he is capable of showing a woman pleasure in other ways. This is a fact that the novel ignores, probably because it is based upon a hypermasculine ideology of performance which Hemingway embraced.

In addition, much of the sexual ideology of the 1920s was defined against the establishment of the "new woman." The new woman, who Brett embodies, was hailed as a "liberated" female who was comfortable with her sexuality and believed in the concept of feminism. The new woman attempted to balance having an education, a career, and a family life. Men reacted to the development of the new woman by feeling threatened. As Leinwand notes in his book *1927: High Tide of the 1920s*: "[Some people] believed that America was becoming feminized and weakened [by the new woman]" (193). Many men resented the change to the

traditional roles of the nuclear family. They felt emasculated by the shifting gender landscape and longed for the bygone days where women existed to serve them in the home.

Men were especially confused about their role given that the frontier model of male sexuality was quickly becoming defunct with industrialization. Jeffrey Hantover explains this in “The Boy Scouts and the Validation of Masculinity” with a quote from the Twentieth century Boy Scout leader Daniel Carter Beard: “The hardships and privations of the frontier life which did so much to develop sterling manhood are now but legend and history” (161). What Beard is suggesting is that during the frontier days, men had many opportunities to display their manhood through combat or physical labor. After these activities were no longer necessary, men had fewer opportunities to show off their macho bravado. As a result, men held traditional, uncompromising masculinity in reverence but were never capable of living it out. It became the ideal, the specter that they blindly chased but were never able to catch. As depicted in *The Sun Also Rises*, this led to a great deal of hypermasculine posturing as compensation.

Men were torn between feeling pressured to live up to the demands of the new woman and wanting to live up to traditional neanderthalic ideals. The sexually assertive new woman could and did expect men to fulfill her sexual needs; Brett, as the embodiment of the new woman, cannot accept Jake because she is confident enough to know what she wants sexually. And what she wants is the hypermasculine Romero, a man who has all of the necessary functioning parts. She says to Jake, driving the dagger deeper into his heart: “I’m mad about the Romero boy. I’m in love with him, I think” (183). She feels comfortable sharing this with Jake because she does not think of him as a true man because he does not have functioning genitalia. Even if she enjoys kissing Jake, she cannot go further than that because she does not think of him as a sexual being when she takes into account his injury.

This leads Jake to become a feminized male, which is defined by theorist Todd Onderdonk as “the metaphorical representation of men acting or being treated ‘like a woman’—that is, adopting or being forced into states of shameful passivity or disempowerment” (61). Jake is a feminized male because he is physically unable to have sex and has internalized the stigma associated with this. This calls into question his entire identity and informs the way he approaches his life; as a consequence of feeling feminized because of his damaged genitalia, he acts in a non-masculine manner.

For example, Jake uses irony to keep a connection with Brett while maintaining his self-respect. It must be difficult for Jake, who appears to be in love with Brett, to help her initiate affairs with other men and clean up the mess afterwards. As a result, Jake uses irony to hide his feelings about Brett’s affairs with other men. “Send a girl off with one man. Introduce her to another to go off with him. Now go and bring her back. And sign the wire with love” (239). Jake mocks himself for the way he defers to Brett’s will, taking the sting out of how embarrassing he must find his non-masculine behavior. If he makes light of something of which he is ashamed, it decreases his experience of suffering. But in the end, he is merely the spectator who watches Brett initiate affairs with Mike, Cohn, and Romero without participating in the action himself.

Furthermore, Jake’s suffering is increased because of the loss of what his genitalia represent. Elliot Ira explains: “Jake has ‘given more’ than his life, for his manhood has been sacrificed, or at least compromised, and with it the potential for offspring, his link to the future” (86). Propagating offspring is one of the key factors of masculinity, since traditional patriarchy is concerned with lineage. Passing on one’s name to offspring is a way to achieve immortality, a way to be remembered in the hearts and minds of others. Jake’s inability to pass on his genes and his name, then, calls into question his masculinity.

This is especially important because another way that males are able to achieve immortality is through career achievements; it is up for debate whether Jake would be able to accomplish substantial career achievements. For example, on the fishing trip when Jake and Bill wake up together, Jake tells Bill that he has not dreamt. Bill replies by saying: “You ought to dream...All our biggest business men have been dreamers. Look at Ford. Look at President Coolidge. Look at Rockefeller” (124). Bill’s assertion implies that Jake does not dream of anything because he lacks the ambition to follow through with what he wants. He is plagued with self-doubts about his masculinity because of his war wound. Feeling ashamed about his wound seeps into other aspects of his identity; it would make very little sense that he could be an effective career man when he does not feel like a man at all because of his injury.

Jake tries to reclaim his masculinity by conforming to several masculine ideals, including the masculine ideal of stoicism; he does not express emotion in public and seldom in private. The character of Jake reflects Hemingway’s Iceberg Theory, which is a short and clean writing style that omits superfluous content (“The Iceberg Theory and Hemingway's Style”). Jake expresses himself in the shortest and most concise way possible. The only times that he shows emotion is in response to Brett’s humiliations of him. For example, in his bed at night he ponders his relationship with Brett: “I started to think about Brett and all the rest of it went away...Then all of a sudden I started to cry” (31). This crying is an emotional release for Jake, the inevitable consequence of his tendency to bottle up feelings of intense hurt from his failed relationship with Brett. However, his crying intensifies his feelings of shame and hurt, given the masculine ideal of restricted emotionality. In “Patterns of Gender Role Conflict and Strain: Sexism and Fear of Femininity in Men's Lives,” James M. O’Neil states that restrictive

emotionality is one of the main characteristics on which men base their identity (208). By crying, Jake is reaffirming for himself that he is less of a man.

Yet he must outwardly keep up his façade of restricted emotionality, even if he allows himself to break down occasionally in private. For example, when he is on his fishing trip with Bill, Bill asks him if he was ever in love with Brett. Jake admits that he was once in love with Brett but lies through his teeth: “I don’t give a damn anymore” (124). Jake makes it obvious that this is patently false when he quickly follows up this assertion by asking to change the subject.

He also tries to reclaim his masculinity through masculine bonding activities such as fishing with Bill and attending bullfights. Fishing is a typical masculine activity that reflects a man’s competitive spirit. It is also a work activity that has always been more part of the male sphere than the female sphere, given that it is men who have made a living by going out in fishing boats rather than women. From its status as a work activity, it has become ensconced in American society as a traditional form of male bonding (Thompson). Part of its power as a male bonding mechanism is that men find it easier to bond through activities rather than deep conversations (Kilmartin 250).

An example of the male bonding that occurs on the fishing trip is the exchange in which Bill and Jake argue about the size of the fish they catch. After Bill asks how big the fish are, Jake replies: “They’re all about the size of your smallest” (120). This double-entendre, clearly referencing the size of Bill’s genitalia, allows Jake to make light of his situation and bond with Bill over their shared masculinity. It is also a way for Jake to show that he supposedly does not care about how his injury has affected the size of his genitalia because he is ironically underplaying the size of his “fish” rather than exaggerating it in the typical male fashion. In other words, it is a way for Jake to put up a stoic façade about his injury.

The activity of fishing also allows Bill and Jake to open up in ways that they would not normally open up to one another. It is only in this safe, masculine environment that Bill is able to open up to Jake and express that he truly cares. “Listen. You’re a hell of a good guy, and I’m fonder of you than anybody on earth. I couldn’t tell you that in New York. It’d mean that I was a faggot” (116). This execrable language deserves mention in itself, but the exchange nonetheless remains the most apparent example of men in the novel expressing affection for one another.

It is notable that even in this safe environment, as a man, Bill cannot express fondness towards another man without the disclaimer that he is not homosexual. This homophobia is a key factor of masculinity that was present in 1920 and continues to be present in 2014. Heterosexual men have a tendency to define themselves as apart from and opposite of homosexual men as a way of reaffirming their masculinity. This is easy for them to do because homosexual people have been and continue to be oppressed by mainstream society. Another factor that explains why this occurs is that men are concerned that showing affection for another man will make them seem homosexual, especially to other men. In this way, it is often a social risk for a man to show affection for another man.

Although his declaration of affection is a risk, Bill’s comment cements the male bonding between the two men. This allows Jake to start to recapture his masculinity. Even though he lacks the equipment necessary to be a sexually-functioning male, he proves to himself that he can still act out the male gender role. Furthermore, he proves that he can have a sense of humor about his disability, reducing its power over him and its ability to prevent him from doing what he wants in life.

Another way in which Jake reclaims his masculinity is through his participation in the excessive drinking that occurs during the fishing trip and especially at Pamplona. While it is true

that both men and women drink, it is more common for men to drink to excess because it is a social norm in Western culture. Part of the “tough guy” stereotype of the Western man is the ability for him to drink hard and hold his liquor. Men who do not drink or do not have a high tolerance for drinking are derogated as weak.

Mike makes it clear that being drunk is one of the social expectations for men when they attend the bull fight at Pamplona, and he berates Cohn. “Perhaps I am drunk. Why aren’t you drunk? Why don’t you ever get drunk, Robert? You know you didn’t have a good time at San Sebastian because none of our friends would invite you to any of the parties” (142). For a man, then, the expectation is that one should be drunk to be accepted, liked, and invited to all of the socially-relevant parties.

Being designated as a weakling is the last thing that Jake needs with his already fragile sense of his own masculinity, so it is not surprising that he drinks like a fish. Jake states that the whole group is drunk during an argument between Cohn and Mike (143). Later on in the day, he reflects about the good feelings that drinking gives him. “Under the wine I lost the disgusted feeling and was happy. It seemed they were all such nice people” (146). In this way, Jake uses the drinking both as a mechanism to achieve social acceptance and to reduce his feelings of bitterness about his situation.

Perhaps the best example of Jake’s attempts to reclaim his masculinity is his participation in the bullfighting festival at Pamplona. Pamplona gives Jake a unique opportunity to both bond with his friends and come to terms with his condition as a sexually disabled male. In this way, as David Blackmore explains: “At the fiesta in Pamplona...the battle for masculine domination in the bull ring serves as the focal point of an exclusively male subculture, with time-honored

traditions of masculine communion” (55). These traditions of masculine communion cement the male bonding that is already taking place.

Much of this masculine communion is initiated by Montoya, the owner of the inn the group stays at in Pamplona. “[Montoya] always smiled as though bull-fighting were a very special secret between the two of us; a rather shocking but really very deep secret that we knew about” (131). The way in which Montoya talks about bullfighting as a secret highlights that it is an activity that you can only participate in if you are part of an exclusive club—in other words, if you are a man. Further highlighting the fact that bull-fighting is an activity that is exclusively for males, Jake notes that men (not women) came from distant towns to discuss bullfighting with Montoya as part of the ritual of the bullfight (132).

In addition, Brett’s participation in the bullfighting festival exemplifies how this is an exclusively masculine activity because her presence disrupts the entire event. All of the men are distracted by Brett’s presence; she creates sexual tension that decreases the pleasure they get from watching the fight. Cohn and Romero are affected by this sexual tension enough to have a fight over Brett, which casts a pall over the other spectators. In short, the way Brett interrupts the festivities at the fight signifies once more that this is an event that is only for men if it is to be enjoyed properly.

Bonding at sporting events is a typical activity for men: Participating in the male environment of the bullfight allows Jake to forget his disability. For example, Jake points out the activity of the bulls to his friends: “Look how he uses his horns...He’s got a left and a right just like a boxer” (139). By being a spectator at the event, Jake is only one of the large assortment of men who are attending; he blends in, and there is nothing that would clue people in that he is a disabled man.

Unfortunately, Mike's drunken comments break this fantasy for Jake. Like Jake, the bulls in the contest are missing part of their genitalia and Mike cannot wait to point this out to him. After Jake leaves the table with his friends to talk to Romero, Mike drunkenly yells from the next table: "Tell him that bulls have no balls" (175). Jake outwardly brushes it off as nothing more than a drunken joke, replying: "Drunk...Borracho! Muy borracho!" (175). But some part of him has to be humiliated by the way that his disability is made public to everyone around him, especially to the bullfighter Romero, the stereotype of perfect masculinity. Romero has been unaware of Jake's disability; after Mike makes his comment, "Romero looks at [Jake] inquiringly" (175). If Romero did not know before now about Jake's disability, he would know soon after he asked around or put the pieces together for himself. This would serve to reaffirm Jake's feelings of insecurity about his masculinity when someone as masculine as Romero knows about his problem.

This situation symbolizes the fact that even if Jake somehow is able to forget about his disability, the society of which he is a part will never let him forget it. His attempts to reclaim his masculinity will always fail because the society he is in does not think he is a man if he is missing the requisite parts. It is true that Mike's comment was made in jest, but it is one of many examples of Jake's friends awkwardly attempting to address his condition.

This awkwardness illustrates that the zeitgeist of the 1920s prevented Jake from coming to terms with the loss of his genitalia. Jake's injury is unnamed throughout the novel because it was something unspeakable, the white elephant in the room. Ultimately, the greatest injury to Jake was not to his body but to his identity. Jake could have lived a fulfilling life with his injury but he is unable to because his injury destroyed his sense of self, especially his sense of himself

as a man. His attempts to recapture his masculinity are destined to fail: Like the bulls he watches in the arena, Jake is missing an essential part of his masculinity that can never be reclaimed.

Giovanni's Room: A Tale of Fragmented Identity

In *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin, David, like Jake, struggles to construct a coherent masculine identity, in this case in a society that equates masculinity with heterosexuality. The text explores the difficulty in constructing an identity as a man while being homosexual. For its protagonist David, internalized homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality combine to create a fragmented sense of self both as a man and ultimately as a human being.

The novel, set in France in the 1950s, begins with David experiencing flashbacks of his life in Paris while reflecting on the forces that shaped his childhood in America. David articulates how he has always struggled to live a heterosexual lifestyle as a homosexual man. His first encounter with another male is with an American boy named Joey, whom David later rejects because he feels ashamed of his homosexuality. When he is in Paris, David has furtive encounters with a never-ending assortment of young men while openly pursuing a heterosexual lifestyle with his girlfriend Hella. He meets Giovanni, a passionate Italian man who works in a bar in the Paris *demimonde*, along with Jacques and Guillaume, two rich, older homosexual men who prey on young men for sex.

When David and Giovanni meet in the bar, they initiate a relationship and David eventually moves into Giovanni's room. At first, their relationship is blissful; however, it quickly becomes strained when Giovanni is fired from his job and then finds out about David's girlfriend Hella. Hella, who had left the country, writes David a letter telling him she would like to marry him and is coming back to France. When Hella arrives, David abandons Giovanni

because David has repressed his homosexuality and wishes to live a more socially-sanctioned (read: heterosexual) lifestyle with Hella.

With no job and no lover, Giovanni is forced to live in poverty in the ghettos of Paris. Out of desperation, he trades sexual favors with Guillaume in return for his old job back at Guillaume's bar. Giovanni, incensed by David's betrayal and filled with disgust by the way Guillaume has taken advantage of him, strangles Guillaume in a fit of rage one night. After Giovanni is arrested, he pleads guilty to the murder and receives a death sentence for his crime.

David hears about Giovanni's fate and falls into a deep depression. One night, he goes to a bar to find a man to sleep with, and unbeknownst to him, Hella follows him. After confronting him, Hella returns to America alone. Later, David receives a letter from Jacques with the date of Giovanni's execution. David tears it up, deciding that he must believe "that the heavy grace of God, which has brought me to this place, is all that can carry me out of it" (169). The novel ends with David standing in the wind with the pieces of the letter blowing back on him.

These shredded pieces of letter illustrate a theme of fragmented identity, which is addressed in literary criticism of *Giovanni's Room*. This criticism emphasizes how David cannot reconcile his homosexual orientation with the heterosexual norms of his society. David attempts to fix this identity fragmentation by pretending to be heterosexual. According to Robert Reid-Pharr in "Tearing the Goat's Flesh: Homosexuality, Abjection and the Production of a Late Twentieth-Century Black Masculinity": "Heterosexual identity...is formed through concurrent acts of repression and projection" (390). It is important to describe these psychoanalytical terms before continuing. Repression refers to the suppression of one's own desires or thoughts; these desires or thoughts remain unconscious because they conflict with a person's values or a cultural code of conduct, causing anxiety. Projection is the unconscious rejection of a characteristic of

yourself and the subsequent ascription of this attribute onto another person, object, or group of persons (Bennett 33).

David employs both of these stratagems in order to affirm his false heterosexual identity and deny his repressed homosexual feelings. He utilizes repression by suppressing his homosexual desires and adhering to heterosexual norms. This suppression is more effective at some times than at others; while he does not acknowledge his homosexual orientation, he has sex with random men at various points during the novel. In essence, David has created two contradictory identities: One as a man with repressed homosexual desires and the second as a seemingly heterosexual man.

David's contradictory identity is reflected in the way he uses the psychological defense mechanism of projection by becoming involved with the homosexual *demimonde* of Paris, a *demimonde* that he considers dirty and lecherous. "I was intent on proving, to them and to myself, that I was not of their company. I did this by being in their company a great deal and manifesting toward all of them a tolerance which placed me, I believed, above suspicion" (22-3). By projecting his repressed homosexuality onto people who are "immoral," David affirms the falsely heterosexual aspect of his contradictory identity and denies his homosexual orientation.

Another way he places himself above suspicion is by portraying an image that is clean and heterosexual, which positions him opposite to the lewd and homosexual *demimonde*. In this context, David's clean image refers to being uptight about sexuality and carefully controlling a wholesome image in public, if not private. Noticing David's neurotic cleanliness or purity, Giovanni realizes that it represents David's desire to camouflage his homosexuality and chastises him:

“You love your purity, you love your mirror—you are just like a little virgin, you walk around with your hands in front of you as though you had some precious metal, gold, silver, rubies, maybe diamonds down there between your legs!... You want to be clean. You think you came here covered with soap and you think you will go out covered with soap—and you do not want to stink, not even for five minutes.” (141)

David does not want to soil himself with anything, even with what Giovanni calls “the stink of love” (141). He thinks that creating an image of clean masculinity, a masculinity that does not allow the possibility of homosexual activity or love, will erase his homosexual orientation.

Sometimes this means that he literally cleans the spaces around him to protect this image. For example, when David and Giovanni are living together in Giovanni’s room as a couple, it becomes essential for David to portray an image of cleanliness to hide his homosexual orientation. Tellingly, one of his first actions is to throw out the trash and to organize the boxes and suitcases that litter the floor. By doing this, David is trying to purify himself of his homosexuality and maintain his “clean” masculinity.

Since David associates heterosexuality with masculinity, his “clean” masculinity allows him to feel as though he does not have homosexual urges. One way that David subconsciously bolsters his false heterosexual identity is by using imagery that depicts heterosexuality as white and homosexuality as black. In his journal article “In the Dark Room: Homosexuality And/As Blackness in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*,” Josep Armengol explains that in literature, the color white is associated with “light, cleanness, purity, rationality, transparency, goodness, [and] innocence” and black is associated with “darkness, dirt, sin, emotionality, obscurity, evil, [and] guilt” (675). David sees heterosexuality as good, pure, and clean, whereas he sees homosexuality as evil, sinful, and dirty.

David even describes his homosexuality as black. After his first homosexual encounter with Joey, he panics and begins to think about what other people would think about their relationship. As a result, for David: “A cavern opened in my mind, *black*, full of rumor, suggestion, of half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of *dirty* words” (9, emphasis added). The usage of the words “black” and “dirty” when describing rumors David has heard about homosexuality indicates that he associates it with darkness. Terrified by his own desires, he decides to stop seeing Joey and deny his homosexuality. This decreases his anxiety about his homosexuality and lets him maintain a façade of heterosexuality.

In Paris, David also describes Guillaume’s bar, which is the heart of the homosexual *demimonde*, as an “airless tunnel” and a “gloomy tunnel” (38; 43). Tunnels are dark, shadowy, and often dirty. David’s use of the word “tunnel” indicates his association between the bar and the color black. Furthermore, it represents his belief that living openly as a homosexual would exile him from society. The Oxford English Dictionary defines underground as “a subculture which seeks to provide radical alternatives to the socially accepted or established mode” (“Underground”). Something that is radical is by definition opposed to mainstream culture; by using the word “tunnel,” David implies homosexuality is underground and located on the fringes of society.

David has harsher words for the actual patrons of the bar, especially Jacques and Guillaume. When David is in a cab with Jacques, Guillaume, and Giovanni, he exchanges a glance with Giovanni that communicates “the least these dirty old men could do was *pay*” and describes their lewdness as something that “bubbled upward out of them like a fountain of *black* water” (49; 45, emphasis added). He continues on to describe an old man who is sitting next to

Giovanni at the bar as “a receptacle of all the world’s dirt and disease” (54). Again, dirt and darkness are associated with homosexuality.

In addition, David’s main homosexual partners (Joey and Giovanni) are racialized as people of color. For example, Joey is described as “dark” and his body as “brown” (6; 8). David introduces the Italian Giovanni as a “dark and leonine” man who has “black hair” (28; 61). As Armengol points out, Europeans who had a darker skin tone such as Italians were not considered Caucasian until they emigrated to America. Therefore, it is reasonable to represent Giovanni, a person of Italian descent living in Europe, as a person of color in the context of this novel (Armengol 678).

Men of color have historically been sexualized, represented as “a walking phallic symbol” (Judson and Shin 248). This is reflected in *Giovanni’s Room* by the way the men at Guillaume’s bar eye Giovanni’s lithe, dark body as “a valuable racehorse or a rare bit of china” whose only purpose is for sex (32). Giovanni perceives the homosexual desires of the men at the bar as filthy because he hates their attentions, feeling as though he “want[s] to escape...this dirty world, this dirty body” (24). Giovanni too has internalized the idea that homosexuality is dirty, that he himself is dirty because he has a homosexual orientation and is treated as a sex object by other men.

The way in which others associate Giovanni with filthiness and sex seeps into David and Giovanni’s relationship. According to Armengol, “David sees his homosexual relationship with Giovanni as...dark, dirty, and stinking” (680). This becomes clear as David and Giovanni spend increasing amounts of time in Giovanni’s room because David is not comfortable being seen in public with Giovanni. Descriptions of the room emphasize its filth and clutter: “The table was loaded with yellowing newspapers and empty bottles and it held a single brown and wrinkled

potato in which even the sprouting eyes were rotten. Red wine had been spilled on the floor; it had been allowed to dry and it made the air in the room sweet and heavy” (87). The fact that Giovanni brought his lover back to such an unhygienic and unromantic space is bizarre until David explains that the room contains “the terrors which encompassed Giovanni’s soul” and “Giovanni’s regurgitated life” (87-8).

In this way, Giovanni’s room is indelibly linked to Giovanni’s persona, and as David spends more time in Giovanni’s room, it begins to reflect their relationship. The entire room is flooded with darkness because Giovanni keeps the windows closed and “had obscured the window panes with a heavy, white cleaning polish” (85). David strengthens the association with filth and darkness by describing the walls as “dirty [and] streaked” and the room as “stinking and dirty” (86; 135). David implies that darkness and dirt are at the core of their relationship and later reaffirms this notion when he abandons Giovanni.

Indications that David associates homosexuality with darkness and dirt presuppose he has a strong tendency towards homophobia, a supposition that David’s behavior validates. When David is in Guillaume’s bar, he meets homosexuals who are wearing flamboyant earrings and other fancy accoutrements. David compares the sight of them to how “the sight of monkeys eating their own excrement turns some people’s stomachs. They might not mind so much if monkeys did not so—so grotesquely—resemble human beings” (27). Not only does David suggest that homosexuality is disgusting, he implies that people who are homosexual are less than human because of their sexual proclivities.

In addition to thinking the men are revolting, David becomes instantly repulsed by their feminized appearance: “I always found it difficult to believe that they ever went to bed with anybody, for a man who wanted a woman would certainly have rather had a real one and a man

who wanted a man would certainly not want one of *them*" (27). David thinks "real men" must act out heterosexual stereotypes of masculinity to be desirable, that heterosexuality and masculinity are the same thing. He does not think he can live openly as a homosexual without being feminized.

When David is living with Giovanni in his room, he becomes incensed at his own perceived feminization: "You want to go out and be the big laborer and bring home the money and you want me to stay here and wash the dishes and cook the food and clean this miserable closet of a room and kiss you when you come in through that door and lie with you at night and be your little *girl*" (142). In David's mind, there is no room for two men in a relationship: One half of the homosexual couple has to be the "woman," while the other is the "man." This is not entirely David's fault: It is more of a condemnation of the society of which David is a part. David cannot imagine a homosexual relationship where the two men are equals who do not parody heterosexual conventions because it does not exist in his world.

An encounter that David has with a blonde sailor at a bar who "wore his masculinity as unequivocally as he wore his skin," substantiates the notion that David thinks that real men must be heterosexual (92). David idealizes the young sailor, thinking that the man appears younger, blonder, and more beautiful than David has ever been but enough like David that David identifies with him. He wonders if he or his father had ever been like him and whether "pain and women baffled him" as they did David himself (92).

In short, David wants to *be* the sailor: He wants to be young, heterosexual and handsome, the epitome of American masculinity. David interprets his feelings of admiration and envy as attraction, ogling the man's rugged blond beauty. David panics when he realizes that he has made his homosexuality obvious to the other man, who gives David a "look contemptuously

lewd and knowing” (92). David flushes crimson and flees, thinking that the man would say “out of all that light and beauty, some brutal variation of *Look, baby, I know you*” (92).

Feeling desperately embarrassed and inadequate as a man, David “wanted to find a girl, any girl at all” (95). He passes some French whores whom he thinks are not attractive enough for him but then sees a girl he knows named Sue. Interestingly, Sue is boyish-looking: She has short blonde hair and small breasts; she wears blue jeans rather than a skirt, unusual for the time (95). David seduces the unenthusiastic Sue to reclaim his masculinity after the incident at the bar. Unfortunately, David hates himself and her as they have passionless sex; he wonders “how soon I could be free,” hoping she would “get it over with” so he could leave (100). The encounter does little to reaffirm his masculinity, merely increasing his sense of self-loathing. David knows that his performance of heterosexuality is a sham; he cannot be a heterosexual homophobe like the sailor at the bar, so he cannot be a “real man.”

David’s homophobia makes it difficult for him to accept his homosexual orientation. In “James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*: Expatriation, ‘Racial Drag,’ and Homosexual Panic,” Mae G. Henderson posits that David’s “internalized homophobia...is a consequence of social sanctions that pathologize or criminalize homosexual identity and activity” (310). David is a product of both French and American social sanctions, but Henderson is referencing American social sanctions rather than French. In the 1950s, every state in the United States had laws against sodomy, laws that were not deemed unconstitutional until 2003. Although laws in France during the time also prohibited homosexual acts, homosexuality was more discussed and accepted in French culture (Williams).

David makes the connection between America and homophobia apparent when he is breaking off his relationship with Giovanni. Referring to homosexuality, David says: “People

have dirty words for—for the situation...It *is* a crime—in my country and after all, I didn't grow up here, I grew up *there*" (81). By referring to America as a reason that he cannot have a relationship with Giovanni, David is acknowledging that he is living according to American sexual mores. Given the way in which sexuality and masculinity are intrinsically linked concepts, David's sense of himself as a man is controlled by these sexual mores (Abur-Rahman 482).

In "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood," Baldwin himself writes that "it is virtually forbidden—as an unpatriotic act—that the American boy evolve into the complexity of manhood" (815). Similarly, David constructs his sexuality from the American ideal that men cannot grow up, which can be represented as lack of responsibility in the context of this novel (Tuhkanen 124). It is an ideal that he has learned from his father, who takes refuge from responsibility in alcohol, heterosexually promiscuous sex, and adolescent behavior after David's mother dies. His father is in a state of never-ending immaturity, remaining "boyish and expansive" even as an older man (12).

Both David's aunt Ellen and his dead mother present the opposite image of David's father. In a picture, David's mother is portrayed as "straight browed" with "a strength as various as it was unyielding" (12; 13). Ellen is confident and imperious, with a "face and figure beginning to harden" (11-12). She is a cold rather than maternal figure for David, who is frightened by her. Both women reflect the 19th century feminine norm that women should take responsibility for men's sexual activities. Women were expected to police the sexual appetites of men and keep them from straying too far out of line (Abur-Rahman 483). For example, Ellen watches David's father interact with women "as though she were afraid he would do something awful, watched him and watched the women" (12).

In this way, men were not responsible for their own sexual behavior because women policed it for them. It is this absence of responsibility that prevented men from growing up, which is depicted in *Giovanni's Room* in David's father's buddy-buddy relationship with his son. It is a problem for David because he wants a more traditional father-son relationship, secretly yearning for the authority he outwardly shuns. After David's encounter with Joey, things worsen: David becomes "secretive and cruel" because of his shame and pushes the boundaries of his father's (lack) of authority (16).

This culminates in a scene where David drives while drunk and crashes into another vehicle. David's father does not know how to react but feels instinctively that he has done something wrong in raising David. He lets himself off the hook for his bad parenting decisions, rationalizing that "I did the best I could" (19). David feels differently, understanding from that point on that they would never have a real conversation or have a true relationship because his father is immature and inauthentic (19). He flees by enlisting in the army and then traveling to Europe to escape his father's lack of responsibility.

Unfortunately, it is something that catches up with him no matter how far he runs. David, internalizing his father's performance of masculinity, drinks to excess and has promiscuous sex with random men and women. He also internalizes his father's lack of responsibility and immaturity, especially in regards to how he relates to women. This is portrayed through his interactions with Hella and his Italian landlady. For example, after Hella follows him to a homosexual bar and finds him with a man, she packs up her things to leave. David watches her pack, standing "the way a small boy who has wet his pants stands before his teacher" (163). The way this is phrased is telling; Hella represents the authority figure policing David's sexuality, and David represents a boy trapped in a state of immaturity and incontinence. Furthermore,

Hella is not a benevolent authority figure; in this metaphor, she is a teacher who humiliates her student by making him admit he soiled his pants in front of the class.

David's Italian landlady continues the theme of irresponsible men and responsible women. She tries to offer David advice after Hella leaves him that he must get over his heartbreak and get married: "Men—not just babies like you, but old men, too—they always need a woman to tell them the truth" (69). By comparing David to a baby, the landlady emasculates David and makes it clear that she is above him. As David gathers his things to leave, he wonders how she can see right through him so that he feels like "a half-grown boy, naked before his mother" (70). David's landlady has authority over him as his temporary mother figure, in addition to power because he is figuratively naked—defenseless—before her.

One of the ways that David reclaims his power is by practicing compulsory heterosexuality. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler explains that gender norms have become unified because the masculine gender identity is formed through compulsory heterosexuality: "For bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (194). In essence, Butler is articulating that for masculinity to express the male sex rather than the female sex, compulsory heterosexuality must exist as a "model of gender intelligibility" (194). Compulsory heterosexuality places masculinity opposite of femininity and hierarchically superior to femininity under patriarchy. Thus, men require the heterosexual model for gender so they know what it is to act in a masculine ("superior") rather than feminine ("inferior") fashion.

David practices compulsory heterosexuality because his identity has been formed around it; he has internalized the need for a heterosexual family unit in order to feel like a man. This

stems from his desire to be like his father, who has fleeting relationships with multitudes of women while David is growing up. His father wants David to become a man like himself: a heterosexual man who has sex with a legion of women and then eventually gets married and has a family. Each aspect—having sex with many women, and having a family—is equally important in creating a masculine identity.

This is exemplified when David's father is arguing with Ellen; he says, with typical bluster: "All I want for David is that he grow up to be a man. And when I say a man, Ellen, I don't mean a Sunday school teacher" (15). Since David's father is addressing Ellen in this statement, even naming her, he is implying that Ellen herself is a Sunday school teacher. By associating the office of a Sunday school teacher with a woman, David's father is saying that he does not want David to grow up to be a feminized male. Many men during the time believed that having homosexual desires makes men effeminate, so what David's father is exhorting here is that David grow up to be heterosexual (Abur-Rahman 483).

Having internalized that he would disappoint his father if he were homosexual, David pursues a heterosexual relationship with Hella. Tellingly, he associates safety with establishing a traditional family unit with Hella: "I wanted children, I wanted to be inside again, with the light and safety, with my manhood unquestioned, watching my woman put my children to bed" (104). Anything less would put David's manhood into question and would leave him open to uncomfortable inquiries about his sexuality.

Part of the reason this is true is because masculinity has been tied to the ability to pass on one's genes. In the time in which this novel was set, it was not possible for David to adopt a child as a homosexual man or part of a homosexual couple. His only option lay in marrying a woman and having children with her in order to continue his name and legacy. This, ultimately,

is what brings David to Hella. He starts the relationship because he thinks that she would be fun to be with. The relationship quickly progresses into something serious when he realizes she could provide security for his masculine identity.

Hella seems unsure of David's feelings, and she flees to Spain to decide about his marriage proposal. When she comes back, David has fallen in love with Giovanni and finds her "stale..her body uninteresting" (158). David discusses how he has convinced himself that he is in love with her, but he concludes that he never really was. Looking back, he "was not sure now, in spite of everything, that it ever meant more...to me" (4). Clearly, Hella has been nothing more than a distraction to him, a fleeting dream of what his life could be like if he was heterosexual.

But David is not heterosexual, which his love affair with Giovanni confirms. However, David is not able to face his homosexuality. As Jacques astutely notes: "Think...of the men who have kneeled before you while you thought of something else and pretended that nothing was happening down there in the dark between your legs" (56). By pretending that his homosexual encounters are not happening, David can continue with the myth that he is heterosexual. However, he cannot build a complete persona because his homosexual orientation and his internalized homophobia are mutually incompatible. Sexuality is one of the main defining tenets of masculinity, so David's fragmented sense of his sexuality leads to a fragmented sense of self (Kilmartin 203). David has a vision of what his life should be like and has long since decided that his life has no room for homosexual desires. However, these homosexual desires do not just disappear, and David is stuck fragmented between his homosexual desires and the heterosexual identity he projects to others.

As a result, by the end of the novel David becomes trapped within his own self-image (Bieganowski 77). He looks at himself in the mirror, which, more than an avenue for his

narcissism, has become a metaphor for his sense of identity as a man: “The body in the mirror forces me to turn and face it. And I look at my body, which is under sentence of death...It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time” (168). His body, as a representation of his identity, is under sentence of death because of the difficulty of having a coherent masculine identity as a homosexual man in a homophobic society. Giovanni’s impending execution, which only occurs because of his homosexual relationship with Guillaume, is a literal representation of the perils of being a homosexual man in the 1950s. Baldwin implies that homosexuality, in this time period and context, leads to either a metaphorical death of the soul or literal death from being murdered by a virulently and mercilessly homophobic society.

Conclusion

Literature is an important influence in analyzing the male experience because as a part of culture, it reflects and reinforces the masculine norms that create what it is to be a man. *Fight Club*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *Giovanni’s Room* have a special significance because of their clarity and content. Each book reveals an aspect of our culture of masculinity that has always been there but had rarely been enunciated clearly. By reading *Fight Club*, it becomes obvious that men act out through violence because it is sometimes the only way they are allowed to feel power. Reading *The Sun Also Rises* makes it apparent that men in our culture place a fanaticized importance on the penis; as a symbol of manhood, its destruction denotes the destruction of the self. In reading *Giovanni’s Room*, it is clear that male homophobia is based upon the fear of being homosexual, a fear that is so ingrained in our culture that homophobia is rampant in the gay community. While a critical audience must note that these are representations of male experience rather than factual depictions, the portrayal of what it is to be a man in literature is powerful because it allows us to venture into worlds, minds, and hearts that would

never be accessible otherwise. The texts do not show us how men are in real life, but we can imagine how these effects would play out.

Analyzing the depictions of masculinity in *Fight Club*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *Giovanni's Room* makes it clear that the same themes and values regarding masculinity have their roots deep in American society, albeit manifested in different forms. The inherent difficulty in generalizing norms of masculinity across separate time periods and experiences is bridged by these repeated themes in literature. Indeed, the only thing generalizable about the male experience is that every man has to face the cultural norms of masculinity. As we have witnessed in *The Sun Also Rises*, the idealized version of the male penis exists in few men and thus cannot be by itself an index of male experience. Furthermore, men cannot be defined by a lack of female characteristics because men can have these characteristics: In *Fight Club*, Bob has breasts because of his gynocomastia.

The question becomes: If gender norms rather than physical signifiers (or the lack thereof) inform male experience, how does this affect what it means to be a man? Gender norms are determined by society rather than the individual, which means that no individual has complete control over his own experience of masculinity. These norms can prevent men from creating a coherent masculine identity because there are severe consequences from deviating from these rigid and damaging strictures. In order to participate in society, a man must conform to these ideals to avoid alienation by his peers.

These texts illustrate ways men form their identity on external rather than internal indices of worth. Instead of valuing inherent qualities of his personality—qualities like kindness, intelligence, or humor—a man is taught to base his worth on external qualities. These external qualities or behaviors are described by Dr. Christopher T. Kilmartin in *The Masculine Self* as

relating to occupational identity, sexuality, and antifemininity. While these standards are harmful in themselves, they become forces of destruction when a man fails to live up to them and tries to affirm a different aspect of his identity in compensation.

As a result, in *Fight Club* the narrator creates an anarchical social movement as a way of compensating because he has failed to achieve sufficient success in his occupation. As an insurance company drone, the narrator has little power to change the capitalistic world which feminizes him. Creating fight club makes him feel powerful because of his leadership role and the natural high that occurs from winning fights. Ultimately, however, his attempts at compensation cause him enormous damage: He splits into two different identities, and he is hospitalized at the end of the novel for the dissociative mental illness that occurs from this.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake attempts to compensate for the powerlessness he experiences after his sexual ability is compromised from the damage to his genitalia in World War One. He compensates by participating in stereotypical male bonding activities such as fishing, attending bull fights, and drinking to excess to show that he is a normal male without a disability. The society of which he is a part, however, continues to treat him differently because of his injury. As a result, Jake is left pursuing an unattainable and ultimately destructive infatuation with Brett Ashley, which prevents him from achieving happiness or a coherent identity as both a man and a sexual being.

David in *Giovanni's Room* reacts to the perceived feminizing effect of his homosexual orientation by engaging in homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality to maintain his masculinity. David associates power with heterosexual privilege and is unwilling to give up this power to pursue other men openly. Clinging to the idea of a heterosexual family unit, he pursues a relationship with Hella while sleeping with Giovanni on the side. David's inability to come to

terms with his homosexual orientation indirectly results in Giovanni's execution. It also destroys David, who is trapped within his own split self-image.

All of these texts showcase the destructive influence that masculine gender role expectations can have on men's lives, especially when men try to compensate for a lack of so-called "masculine" qualities. Masculinity becomes a mask, a caricature of a caricature of maleness that projects the image of masculinity as machismo and hypersexuality. This vision of masculinity does not allow room for affection or emotional intimacy, which every human being needs. It does not even allow room to have any affection for the self, because a man cannot love himself if he bases his self-esteem upon external rather than internal factors. This can leave men with a fragmented sense of identity, unable to have a true relationship with other people or feel a sense of wholeness in themselves. As seen in *Fight Club*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *Giovanni's Room*, adherence to the masculine gender role ultimately leads to both a loss of identity and annihilation of the soul.

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