Abstract

This master's thesis conducts an intersectional analysis of three different movies, namely *Fight Club* (1999), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), and *Moonlight* (2016). Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity will be the framework on which the intersectional analysis will be performed, prompting an analysis on how different identity markers affect the standing of a given masculine subject situated in any of the three movies' hegemonic masculinities. A special focus on a number of identity markers such as social class, race, and sexuality will change depending on the movie that is being analysed. This master's thesis finds that *Fight Club* puts a special focus on social class and ability, with an added opaque marker of race. *Boys Don't Cry* also puts a special focus on social class, but this time combined with the identity markers of gender, and to a lesser extent sexuality. *Moonlight* also has social class as a deciding marker, but sexuality and race are more at the fore in this text. The three texts portray wildly different results to the protagonists' resistance to their respective hegemonic masculinities. With *Fight Club* showcasing an overthrowing of the former hegemonic masculinity, *Moonlight* featuring a total rejection of hegemonic masculinity, and *Boys Don't Cry* showing a hegemonic masculinity that is successful in its subordination and ultimate erasure of the resisting masculinity. What all three texts have in common, however, are hegemonic masculinities that devalue femininity and those masculinities that are in close proximity to it. The most damning identity markers in that regard are non-heteronormative sexualities and gender expressions. Another commonality is the devaluement of different facets of black masculinity, as is evident in *Fight Club*'s co-opting of black masculinity in a bid to centre white

masculinity, *Boys Don't Cry*'s complete erasure of a black male character, and *Moonlight*'s devaluing of black effeminate, masculinity.

Masc On, Mask Off

An Intersectional Analysis of Hegemonic Masculinity in *Fight Club*, *Boys Don't Cry*, and *Moonlight*

Lyra Winther Tybo
Supervisor: Marianne Kongerslev
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Aalborg University
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Introduction

Western society is faced with a masculinity crisis. Due to shifting social values in society there has been an influx of young, predominantly white, disillusioned men who feel left behind. These men have formed movements and communities of their own, such as Men Going Their Own Way, and the incel–short for involuntarily celibate–community. But what many of these groupings have in common is having a decidedly misogynistic streak to them, and a yearning for a return to the past when "things were simpler". This is in turn capitalised on by charlatan "self-help gurus", who tell these youths that they are right to feel this way, because masculinity *is* under attack, typically painting the picture of a global, "woke" elite that is encroaching on their identities. And while there is definitely something to be said about the devaluement of men in recent times, putting the blame on women and a "woke" cabal is misguided.

In fact, the devaluement of men can be said to be done primarily by men themselves, as Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity illustrates. In hegemonic masculinity, types of masculinity are valued and devalued on the grounds of different identity markers they possess, from things such as race, class and physical ability, and so one group is capable of subordinating another if they are perceived as a higher valued masculinity in the hegemony. This also invites the framework of intersectionality to this analysis, as its main focus is to shed light on how different identity markers affect oppression and privilege. Another thing that is central to hegemonic masculinity is the tendency to subjugate femininity and those masculinities who are near it, which invites Halberstam's theory of female masculinity to the table, a concept that analyses the presence of masculinity in

bodies that are assigned female at birth. This theoretical framework will be applied to a collection of films to analyse how masculinity is framed in media.

To conduct this analysis, three specific films have been chosen to encompass a wide spectrum in terms of masculinity representation. This is also the reason why, at first glance, *Fight Club* (1999), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) and *Moonlight* (2016) might look like an eclectic collection of films, yet each of these films feature decidedly masculine, and decidedly underdog, characters vying for their place in society. These attempts vary in execution and success, but the culprit behind their woes can be argued to retain the same gestalt, which is that of a hegemonic masculinity that is hostile towards their expressions of masculinity. Thus, this master's thesis sets out to analyse and compare the intersections of different identity markers that are present in characters of the three films, and how these affect their masculinity in each of their already established hegemonies.

Theory

Intersectionality

Intersectionality as a concept was first devised by civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s to put into words the dynamics of discrimination and privilege that people of different social and political identities experience (Cho et al. 787), and is further defined by professors Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge as:

> [investigating] how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age – among others – as interrelated

> and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences (2)

The versatile analytical framework of intersectionality allows for a unique form of analysis when working with the chosen texts, as there are multiple interplays of categories of identity at play throughout all the films. *Fight Club'*s schizophrenic main character allows for an analysis with categories such as race, class and ability, while *Moonlight* offers a different perspective on the aforementioned categories of race and class, as well as sexuality. Furthermore, *Moonlight*, due to its three-part structure, also offers a unique look into how age affects an individual, as it follows the main character through three important stages of his life, ranging from childhood to early adulthood. *Boys don't Cry* also touches on the categories of race and class, while also being heavily centred around the categories of gender and sexuality, as the main character is a trans man. An important distinction to make in regards to this theoretical framework, is that intersectionality sees these different categories in play as always interconnected, and so one category cannot be examined in a vacuum without hurting the integrity of the study (Cho et al. 795). And so the interplay of these different categories of identity will allow for a multitude of interesting comparisons for both parallels and contrasts in the ways these different characters perform and experience masculinity.

Central to the concept of intersectionality are the four domains of power as put forth by Collins and Bilge: the structural, the cultural, the disciplinary and the interpersonal domains. First is the structural domain of power, which concerns itself with fundamental structures of social institutions such as housing, job markets and health, and how different intersections of e.g. race, gender and sexuality affect

access to these facilities (Collins and Bilge 6). Second is the cultural domain of power, which focuses on the increasing significance of ideas and culture in the organisation of power relations (Collins and Bilge 9), i.e. it shines light on the myths in society that have permeated for so long and with such fervour that they have been accepted as truths. Third is the disciplinary domain of power, which is about how different intersections of categories such as ability, class, gender and race affect how the rules and regulations apply to an individual or group, either in or against their favour (Collins and Bilge 12). And lastly the interpersonal domain of power, which refers to the way an individual experiences the convergence of the structural, cultural and disciplinary power (Collins and Bilge 14).

Hegemonic Masculinity

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was first coined by Raewyn Connell, and builds on the Gramscian idea of a cultural hegemony. Where Antonio Gramsci posited that a dominant culture or class would seek to exert its influence over the dominated majority through perceived intellectual and moral superiority (Storey 83-84), Connell argues that a similar type of hierarchical system can be found amongst masculine individuals and the way they express their masculinity: “Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 77). This categorisation of a dominant masculinity also necessitates a categorisation of the other masculinities in a masculinity hegemony, of which Connell has three: subordinate, complicit, and marginal masculinity.

The subordinate masculinities often have in common that they are in some way linked to a more traditionally feminine expression and more feminine-coded pastimes than what is deemed acceptable by the hegemonic masculinity. This leads to a lot of the victims of subordination being homosexual men, but something as simple as being an underperformer in hegemonically acceptable pastimes such as sports is enough to be subordinated in some capacity (Connell 78-79). Complicit, sometimes called complacent, masculinities are those who share sufficient enough hegemonic traits not to be subordinated by the hegemony, but are not in possession of enough of the traits to be considered hegemonic themselves. These masculinities still draw benefits from the standing hegemony—e.g. a higher status, and power over the subordinate groups—and thus accept the status quo, however, unlike hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinities also have to make some concessions to those who are subordinate, such as doing their share of the housework in a family unit (Connell 79). Marginal masculinities are in many ways enforcers or at least proponents of hegemonic masculinity, much like complicit masculinities, but they are so without drawing the same benefits that complicit masculinities do, due to belonging to marginalised categories, e.g. black men in America (Fernández-Álvarez 49). Marginal masculinities are perhaps the most interesting masculinities in the scope of this master's thesis, as Connell's thoughts surrounding marginal masculinities echo the notions of intersectionality to a striking degree: "The interplay of gender with other structures such as class and race creates further relationships between masculinities" (Connell 80).

And so the different categories have been explained. However, what is most interesting about hegemonic masculinity, and what will no doubt prove important in this master's thesis, is its protean capabilities when applied to different situations: "I

emphasize that terms such as 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'marginalized masculinities' name not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships" (Connell 81). Hegemonic masculinity, then, is not to be understood as a single monolithic masculinity that lords over femininity—or even one single masculinity that lords over all other collective masculinities—but rather as the dominant masculinity in whatever microcosm that is under scrutiny. As such, the three films will feature vastly different scopes and types of hegemonic masculinity, which in turn affects which masculinities are subordinated, complicit and marginalised, and so it also showcases different ways in which the struggle for power or acceptance takes form. Because a hegemony is not a power structure that is set in stone, it is even sometimes referred to as a 'moving equilibrium', wherein subordinate and marginal factions have the capacity to entirely overthrow the currently dominant faction (Connell 76), an instance of such will be seen in *Fight Club*.

Female Masculinity

Where Connell's research on masculinities is largely focused on hegemonic masculinities, which due to historical reasons have been predominantly centred around white heterosexual males, Halberstam's concept of female masculinity concerns itself with masculinity that is anything but white masculinity, even going so far as to claim that masculinity only "becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body" (2). And in terms of masculinity in the realm of feminine bodies, Halberstam's thoughts surrounding the relation between butchness and female-to-male trans men, and how the transgender man's body has been used both as a signifier of gender transgression and gender conservatism

(depending on the theorists involved), are of great interest to this master's thesis (*Female Masculinity* 160). The idea of gender transgression is especially interesting in relation to this master's thesis, as hegemonic masculinity often positions itself in such a way that it supports gender inequality (Pascoe 20). And female masculinity touches on just that, in the sense that it upheaves binaries: "It is important when thinking about gender variations such as male femininity and female masculinity not simply to create another binary in which masculinity always signifies power; in alternative models of gender variation, female masculinity is not simply the opposite of female femininity, nor is it a female version of male masculinity" (*Female Masculinity* 28-29). And so it would be interesting to bring a concept such as female masculinity into a framework such as hegemonic masculinity, especially when .

Central to the notion of female masculinity in relation to a trans masculine subject is the concept of "border wars" in the sense that butch women and trans men occupy two sides of a border that at times overlap, making the way these bodies are perceived overtly indistinguishable from one another. This results in butch women and trans men being subject to much of the same marginalisation and derision from a hegemony, this despite their very different ways of attaining their gender expression, as Halberstam also addresses:

> I also recognize that there are huge and important differences between genetic females who specifically identify as transsexual and genetic females who feel comfortable with female masculinity. There are real and physical differences between female-born men who take hormones, have surgery, and live as men and female-born butches who live some version of gender ambiguity. But there are also many situations in which those differences are less clear than one might expect, and there are many butches who pass as

> men and many transsexuals who present as gender ambiguous and many bodies that cannot be classified by the options transsexual and butch. (*Female Masculinity* 153)

And so when the concept of female masculinity is used in the context of trans men, it is not to disparage their male masculine identity, but rather to put into context how trans men who were assigned female at birth at times face a different type of masculinity marginalisation than cis men who were assigned male at birth.

This concept will prove most relevant for *Boys Don't Cry*, as one of the main masculinities in the film relates extensively to Halberstam's work, but the thoughts surrounding how white masculinity is seen as an almost default state is also exceedingly relevant for *Fight Club* and how it captures masculinity.

Analysis

It's not the Size of the Fight in the Club, but the Size of the Club in the Fight

> We're sorry. It's not us. It's the monster. The bank isn't like a man.
> Yes, but the bank is only made of men.
> No, you're wrong there—quite wrong there. The bank is something else than men. It happens that every man in a bank hates what the bank does, and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men, I tell you. It's the monster. Men made it, but they can't control it (39)

Thus writes John Steinbeck in his seminal work *Grapes of Wrath* in 1939, a scathing critique pointed at the capitalist system and its inner workings, and sixty years later, at the turn of the century, not much seems to have ostensibly changed. David Fincher's film adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's book *Fight Club* tells the story of an unnamed man, who is simply referred to as 'Narrator' in the end credits, and his struggle against not only a consumerist society bent on commodifying each and every aspect of his life, but also a suppressed part of his psyche embodied by the violent and hypermasculine Tyler Durden. The Narrator starts out as a spineless cog in the capitalist machine, trying as best he can to reconcile with his harrowing job of reducing human suffering to numbers on a spreadsheet as an insurance adjuster. Cycling through various coping mechanisms, The Narrator eventually conjures up the character of Tyler Durden in his mind, who is everything The Narrator is not. Through Tyler, he starts an underground fight club. The fight club starts out as a way for The Narrator to release his pent up frustrations, but as time goes on, Tyler starts being more in control, and the fight club changes from a clandestine, violent, support group for men, to a full on paramilitary group with the goal of bringing capitalist society to its knees. This culminates in an operation dubbed Project Mayhem, where members of the fight club bomb various banks simultaneously, but The Narrator manages to wrest control back from Tyler through a struggle, ultimately shooting himself with a gun to exorcise Tyler from his consciousness. This master's thesis seeks to analyse the presence of hegemonic masculinity in *Fight Club*, and how identity categories such as class, gender and race play a role in the masculine hierarchical structure present in the film.

And *Fight Club* is rife with masculinity, from the full-blown machismo present in Tyler, to the soft-spoken and emotional Bob, there is a wide range of different

masculinities on display, and what most of them have in common is that they are in some way or shape unwanted by the hegemonic masculinity that is already present in the universe of Fight Club. Tyler's brand of masculinity, however, is peculiar, in the sense that he himself is not in possession of a masculinity that can oppose the hegemony, but is rather The Narrator's idealised form of masculinity, and so The Narrator fights the system through him. In that sense it echoes a lot of the notions of Jungian psychology that Connell touches upon in her book *Masculinities*: "Jung distinguished between the self constructed in transactions with the social environment, which he called the 'persona', and the self formed in the unconscious out of repressed elements, which he called the 'anima'" (12). As such, the persona would then be exemplified through the innocuous and passive Narrator, while the anima would be represented by the cantankerous and hypermasculine Tyler. This is interesting, as the concepts were originally used by Jung to refer to the inverse, with the feminine traits of a man being repressed while the masculine traits were being faced outward (Connell 12-13). This speaks to a hegemonic masculinity that does not value the hypermasculinity of yore, and instead prefers a more subdued masculinity.

Arguably, if one were to apply Connell's historical categorisation of masculinities, there are a lot of similarities between the developing masculinities of the 20th century and *Fight Club*: "only part of the working class was ever unionized, or commanded a family wage. The creation of this respectable, orderly masculinity had, as its dialectical opposite, the development of rough, disorderly masculinities among the marginalized 'dangerous classes'" (197). These rough disorderly masculinities can in the instance of *Fight Club* be understood as the ones Tyler is spearheading through the eponymous fight club, showcasing a clear desire to return

back to the days of the frontier, where men fought the beasts of the wild. This is best exemplified in Tyler's monologue, only with a post-apocalyptic twist: "In the world I see, you're stalking elk through the damp canyon forests around the ruins of Rockefeller Centre. You'll wear leather clothes that will last you the rest of your life. You'll climb the thick kudzu vines that wrap the Sears Tower. And when you look down, you'll see tiny figures pounding corn…" (*Fight Club* 01:41:25-01:41:55). This falls in line with a sort of mythologisation and reverence that the portrayal of the frontier enjoys in especially North American culture (Connell 185), where characters real and fictional, such as John Wayne and Paul Bunyan, are seen as the epitome of masculinity, as they brave the wilds in search of adventure and conquest. Furthermore, the respectable and orderly masculinity that is hegemonic in *Fight Club* takes its cues more from the present-time, hyper-corporate systems: "As the world capitalist order becomes more complete, as more local production systems are linked into global markets and local labour brought into wage systems, local versions of Western patriarchal institutions are installed. These include corporations, state bureaucracies, armies and mass education systems" (Connell 199). This more commodified masculinity is best exemplified through The Narrator's boss and the orderly and sterile environment he inhabits (Appendix 1), because even though his body is inferior to Tyler's and even The Narrator's in a strictly physical sense, he still enjoys greater power in large part due to his financial and corporate success. So where the corporatisation of America has led to a distinctly orderly, corporate hegemonic masculinity, Tyler's brand of masculinity is decidedly rugged, and in many ways reactionary, as evidenced through the fight club's methodology. What the two types of masculinity have in common, however, is the innate desire to subjugate one another, and the lesser masculinities.

Because complete emasculation is not acceptable in the hegemony either, as is best exemplified in the The Narrator's meeting with his doctor, and the subsequent support meeting for testicular cancer that the Narrator is recommended by his doctor to attend (*Fight Club* 00:05:38-00:09:30). As The Narrator's doctor tells him to go attend the meeting to see people who are really suffering, the viewers are being implicitly told that the men attending these meetings are in one of the lowest positions in the masculine hegemony, as they are even worse off than the already downtrodden Narrator. The doctor's dismissive attitude to The Narrator's concerns also speaks to how proper healthcare, i.e. the structural domain of power, is out of The Narrator's reach, in what can be construed to be due to an intersection of multiple identity categories. Because Tyler is a constructed personality The Narrator has conjured to cope with his depressive state, and one of the reasons it takes hold to such a strong degree throughout the film is because he does not get the help he needs. In that sense, The Narrator not getting help is due to an interplay of him being male and his disability being of the mental variety, and due to being part of a hegemonic masculinity where mental illness is not talked about openly, i.e. a toxic masculinity. Because The Narrator does realise that something is wrong with him, but he does not seek professional mental healthcare, and is instead begging his doctor for medicine to treat his symptoms rather than the root cause. He is also not redirected by his doctor, who merely writes him off as needing to get 'good, natural sleep', which speaks to a larger, systemic stigma on mental health issues in this hegemonic masculinity. And so when the systems governed by hegemonic masculinity fail to provide him with treatment, he finds a holdout in attending the support meetings of people with other, somatic, disabilities, of which the testicular cancer meeting is first and perhaps most relevant for this master's thesis.

First we are greeted by the congregation of men sitting despondently in a circle, with an incredibly poignant sign reading ‘REMAINING MEN TOGETHER’ off to the right side of the screen, indicating that these men are in a struggle to retain their masculinity on the hegemony’s premises (Appendix 2). And the main thing they are not able to provide to the hegemony is quite simply the capability to sire children, because a lot of the dialogue in this scene revolves around the idealisation of the nuclear family, and how this is now a closed off option to them. One of the members starts telling the others about how his ex-wife and he wanted three children, but because he was not able to conceive, she has now found another man. Bob’s woes are also in part centred around the destabilisation of his family unit, and how his family wants nothing to do with him: “And now I’m bankrupt, I’m divorced, my two grown kids won’t even return my phone calls” (*Fight Club* 00:08:18-00:08:30). The reason for this exalted status that the nuclear family enjoys can be linked to one of the most important factors of the hegemony, namely that of consumerism. Because the rampant consumption of products is one of the main reasons for Tyler’s eventual manifestation and resistance, as it also shows in Tyler’s aforementioned dialogue, where the ‘leather clothes that will last you a lifetime’ is a direct attack on the tendency of goods and services being of poor quality in a capitalist society, in order to facilitate more consumption of products down the line. This dominance of consumerism also shows from Coşkun Liktör’s reading of both *American Psycho* and *Fight Club*: “both of which are film adaptations of novels by contemporary American authors, are centred upon a protagonist who resorts to violence as a means of lashing out against the commodity-driven, commodified American society that is depicted as completely immersed in consumerism and dominated by the omnipresence of consumer goods” (372). The reason, then, for the nuclear family’s

importance is the fact that it is one of the most important consumer brackets in today's market (Ahmed 2), and by being unable to partake in the nuclear family, they are classified as subordinate in the hegemony. This in turn also affects the men's perception of themselves negatively, because the idea of being the 'breadwinner' of a family is oftentimes seen as a very masculine trait (Connell 90), and so part of their masculine identity is taken away, as there is no family left to win the bread for.

But the ability to provide is only second to something that is much more in focus throughout the whole film, namely male bodies. The male body is on full display in *Fight Club*, from passionate clashes of male bodies in the dingy basement of the eponymous fight club, to full-nudity and penises spliced into the very film roll itself (*Fight Club* 02:16:06-02:16:13), the male body is portrayed—and celebrated—in all manner of ways. The male body is such an important focal point that some queer readings have even read the fight club as a place for homoeroticism (Craine and Aitken), and fights such as Tyler versus the bar's owner, Lou, would certainly give such a reading merit, with Tyler almost sounding on the verge of climax at times during the one-sided fight (*Fight Club* 01:12:55-01:13:29). This would also fit well in the image of the members of the fight club being the outsiders of the hegemony, as homosexual men have often been subject to marginalisation throughout history. And it is in these marginals that most of the masculinities of the fight club reside, as is best exemplified by Bob. Because the image of Bob also plays into one of Connell's assertions regarding the loss of physical ability: "The constitution of masculinity through bodily performance means that gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained - for instance, as a result of physical disability" (Connell 54), and Bob is a perfect example of this in both his body and mannerisms. He is quick to tears, soft-spoken but with a high-pitched voice, and

his very visible gynecomastia, i.e. the presence of breast tissue in males, is in and of itself a transgression of the current hegemonic masculinity. In fact, this very visible, and feminine-coded, bodily trait seems to clash with the masculinity in *Fight Club* to such an extent that the fight club skirts the rule of 'no shoes, no shirt' when Bob is the one fighting (01:09:14-01:09:34). This would suggest that even among the marginalised masculinities there is a clear hierarchy and discrimination, as Connell suggests is due to 'further relationships' as mentioned in the theory section, and in this case the most apparent identity category that seems to draw attention is that of gender, or more specifically effeminate gender expression. Bob is the most apparent in this regard, as he is the most visibly distinct member of the fight club, with his large frame and distinctly incongruent gender characteristics. This gender incongruence being a negative is also solidified as Bob is the only named character that actually dies during the film's runtime. Granted, he dies because he was not meant to be part of the inner circle, as he would have failed the induction ritual had it not been for The Narrator's intervention, (*Fight Club* 01:29:22-01:29:45), but the fact that it is a man with feminine traits that is deemed unfit to participate in the narrative's conclusion, and ultimately dies because of it, speaks to what kind of masculinity best fits in Tyler's new world, and perhaps also how the film decides to frame masculinity.

This concept of hierarchy among the marginalised is also further corroborated when The Narrator breaks one of the fundamental rules of fight club, namely not stopping when the other person yields. This breaking of the rules happens to the detriment of someone whose gender expression is decidedly effeminate, namely Angel Face, which is the lackey that is seen gaining favour with Tyler (*Fight Club* 01:35:11-01:35:30). The name Angel Face alone denotes something that is pure,

pleasant to look at and, perhaps most important of all in this context, feminine-coded. This is also corroborated by an exchange Tyler and The Narrator have after the fight: “Where did you go, psycho boy?” “I wanted to destroy something beautiful” (*Fight Club* 01:36:57-01:37:02). Not handsome or marvellous, but *beautiful,* a decidedly feminine-coded compliment. And as The Narrator is beating Angel Face bloody, none of the other club members come to his aid, further underlining the tenuous position people with a more feminine expression have in the marginalised masculinities’ hierarchy. But despite being marginalised by the marginalised themselves, Angel Face still follows Tyler and is loyal to a fault, much like how Connell asserts that the marginalised enforce hegemonic masculinity, some of the same mechanics are likewise observable between marginalised masculinities, only here they ostensibly draw a benefit from being marginalised, i.e. getting to be part of Tyler’s inner circle. But perhaps the clearest instance of sexism comes in the way Tyler treats Marla Singer, the only named female character in the film. Because at first Tyler tosses her aside when he has had sex with her, seeing no further use in keeping her around, but when he later learns that she knows about Project Mayhem, he tries to have her killed, which forces The Narrator to take action and get Marla to safety (*Fight Club* 01:52:56-2:00:18). This also marks a very important turning point in The Narrator’s inner struggle against Tyler.

Because the aspect of consumerism is a very important part of the Narrator’s inner struggle, and is a significant part of how his identity is formed. The Narrator works as an automobile recall coordinator, and it is quite literally his job to reduce human life and suffering to numbers and add it up to the cost it would take for insurance claims and lawsuits versus recalling vehicles (*Fight Club* 00:20:20-00:21:12). This commodification also seeps into The Narrator’s own

perception of self as we see him initially building his identity not through any intrinsic part of himself like his body or personality, but rather through the products he consumes: “I would look through the catalogues and wonder: What kind of dining set defines me as a person” (*Fight Club* 00:05:17-00:05:20). The Narrator even refers to his shopping sprees as ‘nest building’, which of course implies the starting of a nuclear family and the increased consumption of products that it would entail, but it is also a caring and a somewhat feminine-coded act. Henry Giroux even contends that the whole aspect of consumerism is in and of itself seen as a feminine-coded act in the *Fight Club* universe: “the critical commentary on consumerism presented throughout the film is really not a serious critique of capitalism as much as it is a criticism of the feminisation and domestication of men in a society driven by relations of buying and selling. Consumerism is criticised because it is womanish stuff” (38). This coupled with the prior analysis of effeminate men in the fight club would leave grounds to believe that there is an inherently sexist streak to many of the masculinities present in *Fight Club*, as much seems to be made clear by Tyler’s own words: “We’re a generation of men raised by women. I’m wondering if another woman is really the answer we need” (*Fight Club* 00:40:16-00:40:22).

These small tirades of Tyler’s also reveal the nature of one of the domains of power that is held by the hegemonic group, namely the cultural domain. Because throughout the film there has been presented a myth to men, as perpetuated by society and billboards, and as voiced by The Narrator: “I felt sorry for guys packed into gyms, trying to look like how Calvin Klein or Tommy Hilfiger said they should” (*Fight Club* 00:45:03-00:45:10). This myth that signifies that ‘consumption makes the man’ is being actively dealt with by Tyler and the fight club, but for that to happen, he needs to wrest control of The Narrator so he does not fall victim to the ‘ikea nesting

instinct'. Because this feminised commodification is of course something that is wholly incompatible with Tyler and so the way he gets control of The Narrator on his premises, is by way of demolishing The Narrator's apartment and all his earthly, materialistic possessions. The demolition of The Narrator's apartment in that regard marks his first explicit change from a complicit masculinity into a resisting, subordinate masculinity, and the deciding categories for this stratum change are most decidedly social class and mental health. The blowing up of his apartment forces The Narrator to live on Tyler's premises, entirely devoid of any luxury or comfort, which serves to isolate him further from the influence of the consumerist hegemonic masculinity, or as Craine and Aitken puts it: "Jack reacts to, and is mobilized by, his inability to exist in a masculinity society delineated by consumption – he becomes alienated, entering the homosocial and homoerotic world of Tyler, his monstrous doppelganger" (292). This gradual disconnect with hegemonic masculinity is also reflected in The Narrator's behaviour at work, where he goes from being docile and complying to being confrontational to being downright unhinged, ultimately leading to his very violent resignation (*Fight Club* 01:15:46-01:18:59). This self-destructing resignation yields a big paycheck for The Narrator, yet it also signifies a time where his subordinate masculinity managed to win against the hegemony, as signified by the words "We now had corporate sponsorship" (*Fight Club* 01:18:49-01:18:52). Thus, in an ironic twist, the hegemony has been made to sponsor the agents of its downfall, as this money is what keeps the fight club going.

These fights in the fight club are also a way of clandestine resistance against the hegemony, much in the vein of something Connell mentions from a study where men who fall short of meeting the hegemony's expectation due to physical ability have a range of options to consider: The first is to redouble their efforts to meet the

hegemonic standards, the second is to redefine masculinity to something that is closer to what they can achieve, and the third is to reject hegemonic masculinity altogether (Connell 55). In the case of *Fight Club* there is definitely a case to be made for the second option, as the snivelling and conflict-averse men progressively get turned into hardened soldiers as the film goes on. This redefinition of masculinity, however, does not end with the fight club sub group, as Tyler has ambitions to turn his concept global, and as such the fight club can be construed as an allegiance of sorts between a plethora of subordinated and marginalised masculinities. However, it is ironic, then, that the super squad that Tyler gathers for his Project Mayhem is built by stripping away each of the members' individuality, until they are nothing but loyal, and, ultimately, disposable soldiers. This stripping of individuality can be seen in its basest form by the way the men dress after having been inducted into the inner circle (Appendix 3), where all members of Project Mayhem are made to wear the same black uniform, but it also becomes apparent after a dialogue between some of the members and The Narrator after Bob's death: "Sir, in Project Mayhem, we have no names" (*Fight Club* 01:46:55-01:47:00). So much like how hegemonic masculinity strips away individual masculine expression by making the men define themselves by the things they consume, Tyler strips away their individual masculinity by making them define themselves by the cause they are fighting for.

This alliance is then tasked with the ultimate goal of upheaving the hegemony, as per Storey's reading on how hegemony is maintained (and overtaken):

> What the concept is meant to suggest is a society in which conflict is contained and channelled into ideologically safe harbours; that is, hegemony is maintained (and must be continually maintained: it is an ongoing process)

> by dominant groups and classes ‘negotiating’ with, and making concessions to, subordinate groups and classes (84).

And one of the main unifying categories of identity between all these masculinities is ostensibly social class, as is evident from Tyler’s warning to Police Commissioner Jacobs after having dragged him to the bathroom: “Look, the people you are after are the people you depend on. We cook your meals. We haul your trash. We connect your calls. We drive your ambulances. We guard you while you sleep. Do not fuck with us” (*Fight Club* 01:34:34-01:34:43). This is a great way to signify the underdog status of those who are resisting, while also showing that they are aware of their integral part in the hegemonic masculinity, and how easily they can overturn the hegemony if everyone who was downtrodden joined in. And the name of the game in the standing hegemony is, as mentioned before, consumerism, which is also reflected in the main character’s own personal fight.

This increasingly unhinged behaviour is of course also a signifier for the gradual control Tyler has assumed of The Narrator’s life, and Tyler is the one pulling the strings throughout most of the film, with a clear anti consumerist streak to his speeches: “Slaves with white collars. Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don’t need. We’re the middle children of history, men. [...] We’ve all been raised on TV to believe that one day we’d all be millionaires and film gods and rock stars. But we won’t. We’re slowly learning that fact” (*Fight Club* 01:10:22-01:11:12). With Tyler’s use of rhetoric, he is slowly but surely stoking the flames of revolution, which points to another facet of Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, namely what men do in times of crisis: “Such crisis tendencies will always implicate masculinities, though not necessarily by disrupting them. Crisis tendencies may, for instance, provoke attempts to restore a

dominant masculinity" (Connell 84). And Tyler is indeed set on restoring his type of masculinity as the hegemonic, and one of the ways he intends to reclaim his masculinity's right to the proverbial throne is through violence: "Violence can become a way of claiming or asserting masculinity in group struggles" (Connell 83). What is interesting, then, is *how* Tyler proceeds to resist those of the hegemony, because right after Tyler's aforementioned speech, he is interrupted by Lou, the bar's proprietor. Lou is in every sense of the word a caricature of what a rich fat-cat would be. He is clad in a suit and has a cold, calculating demeanour, with heavy gemstone-laden rings and a hired gun as his enforcer (Appendix 4). One of his first questions to Tyler is also how much money this club brings in (*Fight Club* 01:11:56-01:12:06), underlining his capitalist mindset. It would not be a far-fetched claim that Lou is more insulted by the fact that Tyler is not making any money off of the club than he is of Tyler taking advantage of his lodgings, as he only gets truly irate when Tyler tells him there is no money involved. But despite being the very antithesis to everything the Fight Club stands for, Tyler does not lay a finger on him, at least not at the start. Rather, Tyler chooses to assert his dominance through the use of non-violence, because he knows that using violence would give the bar owner all the reason for denying them access to the bar's basement, thus putting the two in a fight on the hegemony's capitalistic premises, which Tyler would no doubt lose. Instead, by opting to use non-violence intermingled with taunts in a twisted version of non-resistance, Tyler is forcing the bar owner to stoop to his level, to fight on his masculinity's premises. And so once Lou has been sufficiently drawn into Tyler's world, Tyler starts fighting back, showing off his unstable nature as a way of intimidating Lou into submission (*Fight Club* 01:13:29-01:14:13). And it ultimately ends with the proprietor yielding the basement to Tyler and his group.

This sort of self-destructive violence is a recurring theme in *Fight Club*, from The Narrator's resignation at his job mentioned earlier, to Tyler just taking Lou's hits on the chin. This can be construed as a form of resistance against the hegemony's disciplinary domain of power, as it flies counter to what the hegemonic masculinity needs from masculinities to partake in the capitalist system: "Ah, self-improvement is masturbation. Now self-destruction…" (*Fight Club* 00:49:09-00:49:15). Tyler is cut off before he finishes his thought, but the intent is clear, self-destruction is noble and plays on a field the hegemonic masculinity is not allowed on. Because the constant in this self-destruction is that those following the hegemonic masculinity do not know how to respond to it, as we saw in the way The Narrator's doctor swept his very real concerns about mental illness aside, the way Lou yielded to Tyler after having tried to fight on Tyler's premises, and the way The Narrator's boss gave him paid leave. And so Tyler and The Narrator avoid the disciplinary actions taken against them for being mentally unfit and of a lower class, simply by not playing into the hegemonic, capitalist systems and their equally capitalist punishments, by redefining what it means to be masculine and in charge, in part by virtue of being mentally unhinged, but also by not prescribing any "real", i.e. monetary, value to their own body. In other words, The Narrator has mobilised his mental illness as a means of resisting the hegemony. But The Narrator's mental disability is only one part of the systems of oppression and privilege present in *Fight Club*, and not all of them are to The Narrator's explicit disadvantage.

Because in terms of systems of oppression and privilege, there is in an intersectional framework always a desire to connect the dots with as many relevant categories of identity as possible, but sometimes these categories are not readily apparent, and therefore need rooting out. This can be done by posing Mary

Matsuda's 'other question' (Lutz 41), a question to be posed when all avenues of overt oppression have been covered, and this often opens up for new avenues of analysis. And so in this decidedly patriarchal, and overtly classist depiction of masculinities, I pose the question: Where is the racism in this? And it is in the absence of others, that the racism becomes apparent. Because *Fight Club* is an overwhelmingly white film, featuring an overrepresentation of white people in what should be a decidedly multi-racial context, i.e. the corporatisation of America and the effects it has on masculinities. And it is this normalisation of whiteness that is so innocuous at first glance, as King expounds on in her reading of *Fight Club*: "Just as the men of Fight Club—especially The Narrator (Edward Norton) and Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt)—experience pleasure and privilege from their ability to transgress and cross borders, hegemonic white masculinity benefits from its ability to remain amalgamated and diffuse" (367). This idea that white masculinity is seen as the 'default state' permeates the film, and the underlying mechanics of this are revealed through Halberstam's thoughts surrounding the depiction of male bodies:

> Arguments about excessive masculinity tend to focus on black bodies (male and female), latino/a bodies, or working-class bodies, and insufficient masculinity is all too often figured by Asian bodies or upper-class bodies; these stereotypical constructions of variable masculinity mark the process by which masculinity becomes dominant in the sphere of white middle-class maleness. (*Female Masculinity* 2)

First is the class aspect, which is overtly decipherable, as Tyler's hypermasculinity is in part framed by his squalid living conditions and general lack of money and material wealth throughout the film, which makes him seem imposing to the more subdued Narrator. The upper-class body, on the other hand, is best signified through

the interactions with his boss, as Brian Locke mentions in his reading: “The film represents Jack’s boss, the figure that most represents the corporation, as a deficiently virile man. Jack’s voiceover ridicules his boss for his effeminate vanity and robotic lack of imagination” (69). And so The Narrator is centred by these two polar opposites as the sympathetic middle-class guy who is just trying to survive the hellish conditions his own mindscape has landed him in.

The aspect of race, however, is a bit more opaque in *Fight Club*, yet the mechanics of centring remain much the same as in the class aspect, only this time it is at the cost of the masculinity of men of other races, as Locke mentions in his reading of *Fight Club*: “By taking into account both the literal and the metaphorical modes, one may understand how the Asian and the black serve as foils that signify either too little or too much virility, which in turn defines normative masculinity by delimiting its bounds. [...] the film represents nonwhite masculinity as fragmented in order to represent white masculinity as whole” (Locke 65). Locke goes on to further contend that Tyler’s brand of hypermasculinity is co-opted from black masculinity, partially from the way he dresses in often very distinct outfits such as the fur coat at the end of the film (Appendix 5), which resembles the extravagant outfits worn by predominantly black pimps. Locke surmises that this is done in a bid to mimic blackness without being explicitly perceived as black: “white male mimicry of blackness allows white men to acquire the cool of the fantastic black male body while at the same time ‘skirt the pollution and degradation’ associated with the black body” (77). In that sense, it can be construed that in order to stand out and fight against a commodified masculinity, Tyler himself actually commodifies masculinity, in this case black masculinity. Locke further contends that it is in part due to this co-opting of black traits that Tyler has to die at the end of the film (77), much like how

the gender transgressing Bob also had to die for being an outlier in masculine gender expression. On the other end of the spectrum, Locke contends that the only Asian character with a speaking part, Raymond K Hessel, plays the submasculine foil to in part make white masculinity seem more masculine than what it really is when compared to black masculinity (62-63), effectively creating a middle-ground where it is white masculinity that is acceptable and hegemonic. This also plays into how King views hegemony, as it "'disrupts identity, system, order' through its constant composition, compromise, and contradiction. In its attempts to survive, the hegemonic must 'not respect borders, positions, rules' and instead must remain 'in-between, the ambiguous, the composite'" (King 370). Locke also specifically mentions Bob as another such submasculine foil for The Narrator (69), but only in passing, and not as a part of his conclusion. However, I contend that this comparison to Asian masculinity as a ways to put white masculinity in a more masculine light is only partially correct, as the gender-nonconforming white men that were marginalised by the hands of The Narrator fulfil much the same role in elevating The Narrator's own form of masculinity in the hegemonic hierarchy. Thus The Narrator achieves a balance in his masculinity by incorporating the more acceptable parts of the hypermasculine, lower class, and black-coded, Tyler. By contrasting himself with the more effeminate white and asian masculinities, The Narrator makes it so that hegemony is restored with him at the helm, an equilibrium that is attained in large part at the cost of other, subordinate, masculinities, but also former hegemonic masculinities such as his former boss'.

But what, then, is the message that *Fight Club* is trying to convey? That entirely depends on how you read the story of *Fight Club*, for in the case of Giroux, who ostensibly reads *Fight Club* as a work that takes itself entirely serious, there is

not much substance to the film: “As much as the film invites cultural critics, art house sophisticates, and academics to read it against the grain, in the end, Fight Club has nothing substantive to say about the structural violence of unemployment, job insecurity, cuts in public spending, and the destruction of institutions capable of defending social provisions and the public good” (33). That is, however, not the only reading, as Grønstad sees Giroux’s interpretation as naïve: “What Giroux’s criticism fatally neglects to take into account, however, is [...] the extent to which Fincher parodies not only the socially emasculated everyman enslaved by his ‘nesting instinct’ but also the bruised and bloodied—in other words remasculinized—members of Jack’s Fight Clubs” (9). And the reading as a parody certainly lends itself well to this master’s thesis’ analysis. Because even though Tyler and especially The Narrator are played off as the protagonists of the film, they are not always sympathetic characters, as has been well established throughout this chapter. Their idealised form of masculinity is regressive, sexist and violent, and they break their own established rules whenever it suits them. The ironic nature of much of their resistance cannot be understated either, with Tyler and The Narrator constantly employing domination and incorporation in much the same way the already established hegemonic masculinity employs it. This also leads to speculation as to whether this new hegemony with The Narrator’s type of masculinity at the helm would be any different from the previously established one. However, that is not to say that the moniker of parody completely absolves *Fight Club* of criticism. The marginalisation of gender-nonconforming characters and the co-opting of other races’ masculinity bleed into territory that is hard to just handwave as parody, and speaks more to the biases of the time.

Thus it can be surmised that the masculinities in *Fight Club* are situated in a masculinity hegemony that values capitalism and consumerism above all else. This hegemony's masculinities are then divided into ranks based mainly on the stratum of social class, but also mental and physical ability plays a key role in the upwards and downwards movement in the hierarchy. This can be seen in examples such as The Narrator's fall from complicitness to subordination due to Tyler's manifestiation and thus due to his mental disorder, and Bob's loss of male physical qualities leading to ostracisation. However, that does not mean that hypermasculinity is the ideal in this hegemony either, as Tyler's type of masculinity faces the same subordination by the capitalist hegemony. These subordinations prompt The Narrator to ally with other marginalised and subordinate masculinities through a secret fight club, first as a means of surviving the capitalistic hegemony, but then as a means of resisting it, and, ultimately, overthrowing it. Through a close study of the film read through an intersectional lens, a dimension of race is also revealed to *Fight Club*, as The Narrator centres himself and his masculinity through the co-opting and subordination of other races' masculinity. This centring also happens at the cost of other marginal, albeit white, masculinities such as Bob and Angel Face's, in turn revealing how *Fight Club* frames these more effeminate masculinities in a negative light. This centring is also apparent in the identity marker of class, as The Narrator is centred by his rich, but unmasculine boss, and the destitute but hyper masculine Tyler. *Fight Club* is then read as a parody of not only capitalist society and its penchant for rampant consumerism as a means for constructing, in this context, masculine identity, but also a parody of the gruff frontier hero masculinities that were supposed to save society from its clutches, by showcasing that their modus operandi is no different. And so despite Tyler's grand talks of reforming society, it is still a society with an

overwhelmingly white, middle class, and heterosexual masculinity at the helm, as exemplified by The Narrator taking over during the film's conclusion. This is in stark contrast to the masculinity which the main character in the next text possesses. A masculinity that well and truly breaks the boundaries of heteronormative masculinities, and is, in fact, subordinated to such an extent that the hegemony set in place often questions whether it is a masculinity at all.

Boys Do Cry

> "Da 20-årige Brandon Teena flytter til en lille by i Nebraska, bliver han hurtigt populær. Brandon hænger ud med mændene og bedårer kvinderne, der aldrig før har mødt så omsorgsfuld en mand. Men der er noget, Brandon ikke har fortalt. Han er i virkeligheden en kvinde" (Appendix 6)

So reads the official Danish infotext on *Boys Don't Cry*, a film directed by Kimberly Peirce from 1999, as one of the first things that shows up when looking the film up on Google, and it speaks to the general populace's fundamental lack of understanding of transgender identity both at the time of the film's release, and, ostensibly, at the time of this writing. Because *Boys Don't Cry* is based on the real story of the life and death of Brandon Teena, a trans man who tried to live his life in rural Nebraska, but was killed after his gender identity is revealed, by the hands of some of the very people he once called friends.

After trying, and failing, to make his luck in his home town of Lincoln, Nebraska, Brandon is forced to move location to escape persecution both from the law and former boyfriends of some of the girls he has courted. During an altercation in a bar, he becomes fast friends with a group of young adults including two troubled

boys named John and Tom, and his future love interest, Lana. As Brandon slowly connects with the group, he becomes more and more accepted, even going so far as being inducted into the ragtag group as part of the family, and starting a romance with Lana. This all changes, however, when John and Tom find out that Brandon is in fact a trans man, and they rape him in a twisted attempt at “setting him straight”. After the incident, Brandon reports the rape, but is met with suspicion and ridicule by the local law enforcement, which gives John and Tom enough time to visit Brandon once more, this time to kill him. The film ends with Brandon being shot, and Lana reading his farewell letter after the fact. This master’s thesis seeks to analyse the presence and shape of hegemonic masculinity in *Boys Don’t Cry*, and how identity categories such as gender, sexuality and class play a role in shaping the masculine hierarchy present in the film.

From the title of the film, the viewers are clued in on one of the types of masculinity present in *Boys Don’t Cry*, as the title suggests a very stereotypical depiction of an unfeeling male who is not allowed to express emotions, unless they are ones of anger (Kupers 714). And this depiction fits the main antagonists, John and Tom, very well, as they are shown to be aggressive, violent, and impulsive throughout the film’s runtime. This closed off emotional status is best exemplified through a conversation Brandon has with Tom, where it is revealed that Tom cuts himself: “What about this? You ever do this? [...] Some people punch holes in walls. This helps me snap back into reality. Gets a control of this thing inside of me so I don’t, you know, lash out at someone. Me and John used to do it to ourselves all the time in lockup. I could always go deeper than him. He’s such a wuss (*Boys Don’t Cry* 00:45:27-00:46:00). Tom then tries to get Brandon to cut himself, but he refuses. This speaks to a hegemonic masculinity that does not value sensitive men, and the

subordination of Brandon is palpable in the gendered insult he himself uses to defuse the situation: “God, I guess I am a pussy compared to you” (*Boys Don’t Cry* 00:46:19-00:46:22). But this also leads to an interesting question as to whether Tom and John are considered complicit masculinities, or if they themselves are also marginalised, because their outward-facing masculine and aggressive behaviour belies a stunted and at times infantile perception of emotions. They are very likely not part of the hegemonic masculinity subgroup, as their lower social class and mental disabilities most certainly disqualify them from having any wide-reaching influence, but they do possess one trait that is seemingly valued highest by the hegemony present in *Boys Don’t Cry*, namely that they are cisgender men. Because the hegemonic masculinity present in the Nebraskan heartlands of *Boys Don’t Cry* is one that weighs the status of being a cis man considerably higher than everything else. This can be seen through the discrimination Brandon faces almost constantly throughout the film, and this discrimination is best made manifest by examining the domains of power in *Boys Don’t Cry* and the deciding identity categories for this discrimination.

The most deciding factor is definitely gender, but class also plays a big part in the marginalisation at play. Because Brandon’s status as a trans man is not even recognised by the authorities until he has undergone extensive, and expensive, therapy: “What about those doctors?” asks Lonny. To which Brandon responds: “I went. That shit’s insane! You gotta see shrinks, gotta shoot hormones up your butt. It costs a fuckin’ fortune! I’m gonna be an old man by the time I get that kind of money” (*Boys Don’t Cry* 00:12:12-00:12:23). Due to Brandon’s economic status he is not able to transition the “right” way, in the sense that the structural domains of power will not recognise him as male, and will therefore bar him access to official

institutions as a male. This echoes the notions put forth by Connell on trans women trying to escape masculinity: “The medicalization of gender dissidence makes a surgical procedure the criterion of seriousness. Straight doctors become the arbiters of elegance: it is their gender ideology to which 'trans sexuals' must conform to win the prize of surgical castration and genital remodelling. Hegemonic masculinity regulates even the exit from masculinity” (223). However, for trans men the process is in reverse, because the entrance to masculinity is most definitely regulated in much the same fashion as the exit is, and as Halberstam mentions, the process is very much gatekept on the grounds of overlapping systems of oppression: “Radical interventions come from careful consideration of racial and class constructions of sexual identities and gender identities and from a consideration of the politics of mobility outlined by that potent prefix ‘trans.’ Who, in other words, can afford transition,[...]?” (*Female Masculinity* 173). But there is one caveat to this hegemonic regulation, and that is for those who are already capable of “passing” as cisgender without medical intervention, as is the case for Brandon, as evidenced by him making friends with bigots, i.e. John and Tom, at first. And so Brandon’s status as a masculine subject in the film is in a state of what Jennifer Esposito refers to as the “borderlands”:

> Michaelsen and Johnson (1997) conceptualized a border as a site of a problematic intersection between a dominant culture and a resistant one. Brandon’s body, as re-presented [sic] in Boys Don’t Cry, is such a problematic. His material body as well as the conflicting discourses rooted within his body rendered him a contested site. Issues of gender, sexuality, class, and race played themselves out on a body that was always already (mis)recognized. (232)

The “borderlands” is then understood by Esposito as a place Brandon inhabits whenever he is able to live his experienced identity, but is taken out of whenever he is misgendered (229). This, in part, happens whenever he interacts with the structural domain of power, as is observable when Brandon is summoned to court (*Boys Don’t Cry* 00:52:47-00:53:24). It is not explicitly stated why Brandon chooses to flee his court hearing, but the montage filled with close-ups of legal documents and mugshots would suggest that the constant misgendering and confrontation with his past misdeeds triggers a flight response in Brandon, which also seems to be emblematic of how Brandon goes about his problems for most of the film. This idea of Brandon inhabiting the borderlands being a clash between “a dominant culture and a resistant one” is also very reminiscent of the hierarchical differences between hegemonic and subordinate masculinity. Brandon is able to pass as a cis male, and is afforded many of the privileges that cis males enjoy, such as being considered “one of the guys”, as is shown through casual conversation with John, “What happened?”, asks John. To which Brandon answers: “I’m in the doghouse again, you know what I mean?” “I’ve been there my whole life” “Women, right?” (*Boys Don’t Cry* 00:32:33-00:32:39). But because Brandon is a somewhat effeminate man, he still gets afforded less respect in other contexts, such as when a stranger moves in on Candace (*Boys Don’t Cry* 00:08:07-00:09:06). Brandon tries to defuse the situation amicably at first, but because of his smaller and scrawnier stature, he is not afforded any respect from the interloper. It is only with the allegiance of more hegemonically acceptable males–i.e. John and the other bar patrons–that Brandon is able to keep Candace’s unwanted suitor at bay.

This more feminine side to Brandon also has an effect, perhaps unconsciously, on John and Tom, because they open up to him at certain times

during the film's runtime. Tom, as mentioned earlier, tells Brandon how he deals with his pent up emotions, and John is even emotionally vulnerable at times (*Boys Don't Cry* 00:33:08-00:34:03). In this scene, John tells Brandon about his tense relationship with his blood relatives, and how he owes a great deal to Lana and her mom, however, at the end of the conversation he gives Brandon a somewhat playful slap on the back of his head, almost as if he catches himself being too vulnerable to Brandon, and defuses the situation the only way he knows how. This can be attributed to this "borderlands" state that Brandon is in, with his inquisitive and caring remarks about John's daughter making him drop his guard, before he realises that he is talking to another male, i.e. a "competitor". However, Esposito's idea of "borderlands" seems to be a subversion of a concept by theorist Jay Prosser, which through Halberstam's reading of Prosser is portrayed as quite the opposite of being a positive place for Brandon to be: "For Prosser, such a move leaves the transsexual man with no place to go and leaves him languishing in the 'uninhabitable space—the borderlands in between, where passing as either gender might prove quite a challenge'" (*Female Masculinity* 163). To Prosser, the "borderlands" are not the end point, as he imagines the "home" to be when the trans person has finally settled into the comfort of their true and authentic gender (*Female Masculinity* 163). And Brandon has definitely not settled in the "borderlands", as his wish to transition seems to be hampered most of all due to his lower class and economic status, as discussed earlier, but also due to his trouble with the legal system. Not to mention that we see him shape his masculinity in a gradual process throughout the film.

Because right from the onset of the film we see Brandon, quite literally, in the process of shaping his own masculinity with the help of his cousin Lonny (*Boys Don't Cry* 00:01:41-00:02:27), as he is adjusting the size of his packer, an object some

trans masculine people use to give the impression of a bulge in their pants. After Brandon's preparations are complete, Lonny and Brandon have this exchange: "If you was a guy, I might even wanna fuck you", says Lonny. To which Brandon responds: "You mean if *you* was a guy, you might even wanna fuck me" (*Boys Don't Cry* 00:02:15-00:02:20). Although this banter between them is somewhat good-natured, the misgendering still plays into a myth perpetuated by the cultural domain of power present in *Boys Don't Cry*, namely that trans men are just confused lesbians, and the women that are attracted to them are lesbians as well, as is made clear in large part by John and Tom's remarks to Lana: "We're just taking care of a couple of dykes. Are you one of them?" (01:47:26-01:47:30). This myth, then, targets not only the identity marker of the gender, but also the sexuality of the subordinated individual, in this case Brandon and to a lesser extent Lana. But this myth is also perpetuated by what in some respects have been an allied subordinate masculinity to Brandon's, as evidenced by Lonny's remark: "Then why don't you admit that you're a dyke?" To which Brandon answers: "Because I'm not a dyke!" (*Boys Don't Cry* 00:06:10-00:06:15). The fact that Lonny, a homosexual man, i.e. a member of an already very low ranking subordinate masculinity, would feel confident in invalidating Brandon's male identity speaks to just how lowly transgender men are regarded in the hegemonic masculinity present in *Boys Don't Cry*. Esposito also purports that we as an audience are in a sense made to invalidate Brandon's masculine identity, because due to the way we are presented to Brandon forming his masculinity, we are unconsciously lesbianising Brandon due to the way the film "reinscribes the normative nature of White masculinity by showcasing Brandon's "failed" performance as a performance whereas allowing the "biological men" to just "be" men. Their masculinity is portrayed as "natural" because the film does not guide the viewer into

the ways in which John and Tom were also performing" (239). This idea of "natural" men being held in higher regard is also enforced by Brandon himself, as we see him deferring to the judgement of other cis males, even when their judgement is decidedly bad, as is evidenced in the scene where Brandon and the others are caught speeding (*Boys Don't Cry* 00:38:39-00:41:14). During the chase, John urges Brandon to keep speeding, on a road which the policeman later reveals leads to a sharp drop, which would have ultimately killed them all. Although this crisis is averted, Brandon lands himself a speeding ticket instead, and though this is primarily due to the egging on done by John and Tom, John tries to put the blame for all of it squarely on Brandon's shoulders, and so Brandon chooses to talk back. This, however, sets John off, prompting him to eject all the other passengers, save for Lana and Katie, and leave them stranded on a road miles from civilisation (*Boys Don't Cry* 00:42:32-00:44:55). This scene serves to underline not only John's erratic behaviour but also the power relations in the group, for although the masculinities present are all marginalised in some shape or form, they are still capable of subordination, as is made evident when Brandon is punished for trying to assert himself.

However, the perhaps clearest examples of marginalisation happen when they are systemic in nature, and these happen whenever Brandon is engaging the disciplinary domain of power, and no scene is more clear in its marginalisation than when Brandon reports his rape to the police. First of all, it is only with the allegiance of other subordinated subjects, i.e. the women consisting of Lana and Lana's mom, that Brandon is even able to report the rape to the authorities. And secondly, when the rape does get reported, the policeman seems more interested in hiding Brandon away than confronting John and Tom, prompting Lana to insist: "What're you talking

about? It'd be better for everyone if you locked up Tom and John" (*Boys Don't Cry* 01:24:41-01:24:45). Lana's outburst reveals a privilege that both Tom and John enjoy from the hegemonic masculinity, a privilege that proves fatal for Brandon. Because John and Tom are afforded the benefit of doubt, even with clear evidence of rape, and they are not brought in on these charges the moment Brandon filed these rape allegations. Instead, the sheriff seems more concerned with Brandon's sexual proclivities: "Why do you run around with guys, bein' you're a girl yourself? Why do you go around kissin' every girl?" (*Boys Don't Cry* 01:34:12-01:34:16). With the sheriff being an official representative of the state, it gives him ample influence and power, ranking him highly in the hegemonic masculinity, and so when he interrogates Brandon, and proceeds to invalidate Brandon's masculinity, Brandon has no choice but to humiliate himself in a bid to explain his situation. The mishandling of the case is so egregious that shots from the rape scene are mixed in with shots of Brandon sitting shellshocked while making his report to the police (*Boys Don't Cry* 01:25:03-01:30:26), implying that Brandon is getting sexually assaulted a second time by the sheriff's exceedingly insensitive and dehumanising interrogation: "After they pulled your pants down and seen you was a girl, what'd he do? He fondle you any? [...] Didn't that get your attention somehow? That he wouldn't put his hands in your pants and play with you a little bit?" (*Boys Don't Cry* 01:25:15-01:25:49). This again plays into the way Brandon's masculinity is showcased as a "performance", as Esposito claims, but this also showcases the hegemonic bias, and puts it in a negative light. John and Tom are not under scrutiny, and neither are their masculinities, and thus they are afforded the benefit of doubt, which ultimately leads to Brandon's undoing.

However, where Esposito asserts that *Boys Don't Cry* enforces the hegemonic structures at play, even going so far as to asserting that viewers themselves help in the act of 'lesbianising' Brandon, Brenda Cooper on the other hand sees the film as a subversion of the hegemonic structures at play: "This analysis argues that Kimberly Peirce's film Boys Don't Cry can be read as a liberatory narrative that queers the centers of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity by privileging female masculinity and celebrating its differences from heterosexual norms" (44). This subversion of heteronormativity is best exemplified in the "reveal" scene, where Tom and John forcefully take Brandon to the bathroom and strip him of his clothes (*Boys Don't Cry* 01:22:05-01:24:07). Because a lot of the ways this scene is depicted in are in complete opposition to a decidedly transphobic tendency Julia Serano observes in contemporary films of the time, and their depiction of trans women:

> Even though 'deceivers' successfully 'pass' as women, [...] these characters are never intended to challenge our assumptions about gender itself. On the contrary, they are positioned as 'fake' women, and their 'secret' trans status is revealed in a dramatic moment of 'truth'. At this moment, the 'deceiver''s appearance (her femaleness) is reduced to mere illusion, and her secret (her maleness) becomes the real identity. In a tactic that emphasizes their 'true' maleness, 'deceivers' are most often used as pawns to provoke male homophobia in other characters, as well as in the audience itself. (37)

Although Serano's assertions pertain to depictions of trans women in films and them being perceived as deceivers due to their ability to "pass" as cis women until they are revealed, many of the underlying dynamics of transphobia and homophobia hold true in much the same fashion when applied to trans men. Because John and Tom most

decidedly do strip Brandon with the intent to “dispel the illusion” of Brandon’s maleness and emphasise Brandon’s “true” femaleness to Lana and the others, with Tom even remarking that it: “Don’t look like no sexual identity crisis to me” (*Boys Don’t Cry* 01:22:59-01:23:02), reading Brandon not as a heterosexual trans man, but rather as a lesbian cis woman. But *Boys Don’t Cry* diverges from the films Serano touched upon in her analysis—those being *The Crying Game* from 1992 and *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* from 1994—and it does so by not treating the reveal of Brandon’s transness as a joke or a “shocking” upheaval of a heteronormative masculine hegemony. Instead, it is portrayed as a tragedy, and a gross overreach on Brandon’s bodily autonomy, and this is in part reflected in the way other characters react to the reveal. For where the other characters in *Ace Ventura* react with shock and disgust after finding out that Finkle is a trans woman (Binge Society 00:02:19-00:02:42), presumably because they have had intimate relations with her, Lana reacts in the completely opposite way, going so far as to reaffirm Brandon’s masculine identity by shouting “Leave him alone!” (*Boys Don’t Cry* 01:23:21-01:23:23). This outburst also prompts one of the strongest scenes in the film, a scene that is also heavily stylised, bordering on being trance-like. Brandon watches himself from afar, with a shot that stylistically would not feel out of place in a baroque crucifixion painting (Appendix 7), and is meant to impart in the audience a sense of the grave injustice that is being committed. Halberstam seems to agree, as his reading of the scene reveals a strong presence of what he calls the “transgender gaze”:

> A slow-motion sequence interrupts the fast and furious quasi-medical scrutiny of Brandon's body, and shots from Brandon's point of view reveal him to be in the grips of an 'out of body" experience [...] The crowd now includes a

> fully-clothed Brandon, a double, who impassively returns the gaze of the tortured Brandon. In this shot/reverse-shot sequence between the castrated and the transgender Brandons, the transgender gaze is constituted as a look divided within itself, a point of view that comes from (at least) two places at once one clothed and one naked. (“The Transgender Gaze”, 295-296)

The transgender gaze is Halberstam’s way of describing the audience’s mode of looking at the world through Brandon’s eyes, seeing and feeling what he feels, and his constant struggle against the heteronormative female and male gazes that otherwise inhabit the film through characters such as John, Tom and Lana’s mom (“The transgender gaze”, 294). In other words, it is a representation of Brandon’s female masculinity clashing with the heteronormative and hegemonic masculinity that is set on taking him back out of the “borderlands” and branding him a lesbian woman. Instead of this happening, however, John and Tom’s actions subvert the myth manifested in the cultural domain of power that trans people are dangerous and deceptive in an effort to entrap heterosexual cis people, by turning the very reasons for deception on its head, as Cooper also posits: “The film’s depiction of John and Tom’s heteromasculinity as pathologically violent and brutally enacted has the effect of making it more difficult to see their response to Brandon’s ‘deception’ as some kind of ‘panic’ and thus somehow ‘defensible,’ or to condemn Brandon’s masculine performance as ‘sick’” (52). This is observable by the very virtue of Brandon’s being revealed as trans being much more of a danger to him than to any of the cis men in the film, and Lana being already aware of Brandon’s gender identity. But where *Boys Don’t Cry* invokes a sympathetic response in its audience, *Ace Ventura* provokes a most decidedly transphobic response in its audience—a cursory glance at the video’s comment section will attest as much (Appendix 8).

There is of course a stark difference in the roles Brandon and Finkle inhabit in each of their films, with Finkle being the antagonist of a comedy film and Brandon being the protagonist in a drama based on real events. However, this still speaks to a problematic aspect that real-life trans people who run afoul of the law often experience, in that their “privilege” of being perceived as their experienced gender is taken away from them, even by so-called “good guys”. This even goes so far as trans people having their access to hormone replacement therapy denied while in police custody in some cases (Maruri), even if the crimes they commit have nothing to do with them in some way “misusing” their gender identity to break the law.

The same happens in *Boys Don’t Cry,* because when Brandon’s forgery charges show up in the system as he tries to cash in his first paycheck (01:07:50-01:08:54), he is instantly misgendered, and brought into a female holding cell while he waits for Lana to post bail. This speaks to a hegemonic masculinity that is very binary in its thinking, as Brandon’s existence is in and of itself perceived as an affront to the hegemonic masculinity present in *Boys Don’t Cry*, and so his attempts at manifesting his new masculine identity within the confines of the law are seen, in part, as attempts at forgery, because he has committed forgery before. The main reason for that is this “borderlands” aspect that forces the hegemony to either actively confront its own heteronormative biases or enforce its views on the subordinated, as brought forth by Serano: “[Trans people] can wreak havoc on such taken-for-granted concepts as *woman* and *man*, *homosexual* and *heterosexual*” (Serano 36). And in this case the hegemony chooses to undermine Brandon’s masculine identity, and categorise him as female. This is, again, in part due to his lower social class and economic status, which prevents him from changing his gender the “right” way, but also his prior run-ins with the law have an effect on how

he is perceived. This could also be argued to have had an effect on the expediency, or lack thereof, by which Brandon's rape allegations were given merit to warrant John and Tom's arrest. And because of this failure on behalf of the disciplinary domain of power, the most egregious example of subordination happens when John and Tom decide to take Brandon's life.

The scene leading up to the murder, however, is also a topic for great discussion, as Peirce chooses to have a scene where a recently raped Brandon engages in sex with Lana (*Boys Don't Cry* 01:41:44-01:44:02). This is jarring for multiple reasons, but the most contested one is how it serves to "lesbianise" Brandon and Lana's relationship, as Esposito posits: "Not only does this scene trivialize the brutality of the rape, sodomy, and beating Brandon experienced, it also works to display Brandon to the viewers through the eyes of his rapists/murderers. Brandon is not a boy. Brandon is a dyke after all" (237). This is because Brandon now forgoes the things he has used throughout the film to shape his masculinity. Gone is the masculine clothing, the binder, and the packer that he used in the earlier sex scene (*Boys Don't Cry* 00:57:36-01:00:20), and what remains are two female-coded bodies engaging in sex, seemingly without much regard to Brandon's transgender identity. Halberstam seems to agree with this sentiment as his reading of the scene is much the same: "abruptly, towards the end of the film, Peirce suddenly and catastrophically divests her character of his transgender gaze and converts it to a lesbian and therefore female gaze" ("The Transgender Gaze" 297). It is, however, somewhat reductive to merely ascribe Brandon's masculinity to the trappings he possesses, and it should rather be Brandon's own self-identification and Lana's assent to sex with knowledge of this identification that should mark the gaze by which they are

viewed. If the scene is read as such, then the final sex scene can be construed somewhat differently, as Cooper contends:

> depicting Lana and Brandon engaging in sexual relations even when she has acknowledged Brandon's biological sex can be read as a liberatory strategy that works to blur the dichotomous distinctions between female and male. Rather than denying Brandon's sense of his sexual identity, the final love-making scene between Brandon and Lana has the effect of directing the gaze *away* from Brandon's transsexuality, allowing the scene to be read as affirming multiple sexual identities. (56-57)

Although it still washes out Brandon's transgender identity, it does so in an attempt to encompass more explanations for Brandon's identity. For despite "trans man" being the label most fitting for Brandon considering the circumstances, the real Brandon Teena is not able to deny nor confirm any one specific attempt at putting a label on him. All attempts at identifying Brandon are mere approximations based on secondary sources, which in turn illustrates the precarious position Brandon's masculinity is situated in as a part of a subordinated group in a hegemonic masculinity. And so when Brandon—and his type of masculinity—is violently ripped away by the more hegemonically acceptable John and Tom (*Boys Don't Cry* 01:48:26-01:50:19), there is no one left to fight his fight, signifying that the hegemonic masculinity has "won". However, the film ends with Brandon narrating his farewell letter (*Boys Don't Cry* 01:52:47-01:53:23), which in turn compels Lana to fulfil the things Brandon never got to do. This can be construed as a "victory" in the sense that Brandon got to tell at least one part of his story, of his masculinity, to a crowd of millions, as the whole film *Boys Don't Cry* is evidence of.

Thus it can be concluded that the hegemonic masculinity in *Boys Don't Cry* values being cisgender more than anything, as the rape and subsequent violent killing of Brandon by the hands of cisgender men attest. However, social class and economic status are also important factors, as these are what hamper Brandon from attaining a "true" gender transition with the help of the structural domain of power. These deficiencies place Brandon in a state of "borderlands" that at times brand him a fully accepted cis male, and other times as an effeminate outlier. This state of borderlands is construed to be at times a refuge for Brandon, but also a source of great sorrow. Ultimately, it is also the reason for Brandon's death, as he is pulled from the borderlands into an identity of a female lesbian by those who seek to demean him, before he has reached the home of his true experienced gender. However, due to the way the characters are portrayed, this transgression of Brandon's autonomy serves to frame the hegemonic masculinity in a negative light, and make the transgender Brandon the hero, despite the myth of the "deceptive transsexual" being perpetuated by the cultural domain of power. And so despite the fact that the hegemonic masculinity manages to subordinate Brandon's masculinity completely, by way of erasing his masculinity with violence, Brandon is still the hero whose story lives on, and the ones in possession of hegemonic masculinity are made to be the villains. However, the next text's hegemony is not always so clear cut. For even though it is built on homophobia, those singled out by it are made to abide by it. This homophobia is further complicated by a dimension of race, and what better way to illustrate this than through a conversation between one of the world's most critically acclaimed rappers and his transgender cousin?

Makeshift Moonlight in a Time of Hegemonic Darkness

> I said them F-bombs, I ain't know any better
> Mistakenly, I ain't think that you'd know any different
> See, I was taught words was nothing more than a sound
> If ever they was pronounced without any intentions
> The very second you challenged the shit I was kicking
> Reminded me about a show I did out the city
> That time I brung a fan on stage to rap
> But disapproved the word that she couldn't say with me
> You said, ‘Kendrick, ain't no room for contradiction
> To truly understand love, switch position
> 'Faggot, faggot, faggot,' we can say it together
> But only if you let a white girl say 'Nigga'' (Lamar 04:12-04:41)

These are the last lines of “Auntie Diaries” a track off of Kendrick Lamar’s newest album at the time of this writing: *Mr. Morale & The Big Steppers* from the year 2022. It is a track in which Lamar puts a spotlight on the casual transphobia and homophobia that is prevalent in the black community, of which he himself was also a purveyor of. In the song, he has a dialogue with his transgender cousin, Mary-Ann, who helps him realise just how harmful words can be. The crux of the argument lies in Lamar’s realisation that the term “faggot” is as appropriating and harmful to queer people when uttered by straight people, as “nigga” and its variations are to black people when uttered by non-black people. And just as the word “faggot” is a central device used in framing the homophobia in “Auntie Diaries,” it, too, is central in *Moonlight*, a film from 2016 directed by Barry Jenkins. *Moonlight* is a film which tells

the tale of Chiron, a gay, black man, who the audience follows through three distinct acts that catalogue Chiron's life from childhood to early adulthood. In the first act, Chiron is dubbed "Little" due to his smaller stature compared to the other boys. This combined with his more quiet demeanour gets him singled out by his peers, who bully him relentlessly, save for his only friend and future love interest Kevin. Little also meets Juan and his girlfriend Teresa in this act, who take over the roles of father and mother figures to Little, as his real father is absent, and his mother, Paula, is a barely functioning drug addict. Little, however, finds out that Juan is one of the very same drug dealers that supply his mother with drugs, compelling him to cut all ties with Juan. The second act is dubbed "Chiron". Chiron is now a teenager, but the bullying continues from the first act. Juan is dead, presumably as a result of his criminal activities, but Chiron still stays over at Teresa from time to time. Despite Chiron's social ostracisation, Kevin and Chiron initiate an intimate relationship, but this budding romance is cut short when Kevin is pressured into fighting Chiron the day after by Terrel, the main bully. Following this betrayal, Chiron snaps, and the next day he beats Terrel bloody, to the point of hospitalisation. This lands Chiron in jail, and the film switches to the third and final act, "Black". Here, we see a fully grown Chiron, having followed in the footsteps of Juan and become a drug dealer. He has become a figure that enjoys a great deal of respect in his community, but he is still troubled by his past, as daily nightmares dredge up memories of his mother's treatment of him. This new Chiron's routine is then broken by a phone call from Kevin, who wants to reconnect. Despite his initial recalcitrance to meeting up with Kevin, Chiron makes the many hour drive to meet him, and as the two finally reconnect, barriers start breaking down. The film then ends with them in the early stages of a new budding romance, embracing each other in calm silence. This

master's thesis aims to analyse the presence and shape of hegemonic masculinity in *Moonlight* and how the identity categories of sexuality, race, class and age affect the hierarchy present in the film.

As mentioned previously, the use of the word "faggot" is used liberally to frame the homophobia Chiron experiences, especially in the first two parts of the film. In fact, "faggot" is such an important word that it is one of the first words uttered to Chiron in the film's runtime: "Goin' around with that faggot ass, bro!" (*Moonlight* 00:02:23-00:02:25). And yet, at the start of the chase, Chiron and the ones chasing him are not even the focus of the shot, and the casual use of the word "faggot" is just that, casual, unworthy of further scrutiny in the millieu established in the shot, as is also exemplified by Juan doing nothing to stop those who are chasing Chiron, as he seemingly goes about his day. This phenomenon is touched upon in C. J. Pascoe's book *Dude, You're a Fag* from 2011 in what she dubs a "fag discourse", where the use of words like faggot have been trivialised: "and one yelled, 'Fucking faggot!' at no one in particular. None of the other students paid them any mind, since this sort of thing happened so frequently" (52-53). But the reason for this constant use of the word "faggot" is, in part, to reaffirm their own masculinity: "boys reminded themselves and each other that at any moment they could become fags if they were not sufficiently masculine" (Pascoe 53). Which plays well into Connell's thoughts about homophobia: ""Homophobia is not just an attitude. Straight men's hostility to gay men involves real social practice, ranging from job discrimination through media vilification to imprisonment and sometimes murder [...] It is also to draw social boundaries, defining 'real' masculinity by its distance from the rejected" (40). But the word "faggot" is anything but trivial to Chiron, as the audience feels when the camera shifts to Chiron and his chasers (*Moonlight* 00:02:33-00:03:33). Chiron seeks shelter

in an abandoned apartment building, and the stream of slurs and expletives changes to a frantic pounding, a constant barrage on the senses, much like how the stream of slurs are felt by those who are singled out by them. And then comes the quiet, followed by an inquisitive knocking, and when noone answers, the barricades get removed, as Juan breaks through to Chiron literally and, in due time, figuratively.

But the use of the word “faggot” in *Moonlight* also invokes a spectre from a long line of black, queer cinema, dating at the very least back to black, queer filmmaker Marlon T. Riggs’ seminal article on black gay masculinity called “Black Macho Revisited: Reflections of a Snap! Queen” from 1991. In the article, Riggs decries the entertainment industry’s portrayal of black gay men at the time, and how the industry relies solely on deriding the caricature of the effeminate black gay man in a bid to shore up “authentic”, black—and namely heterosexual—masculinity as its counter, or as Riggs himself puts it: “Negro faggotry is the rage! Black gay men are not” (782). This observation is still relevant today, and much of what Riggs laments can be applied to a hegemonic masculinity framework: “What strikes me as most insidious, and paradoxical, is the degree to which popular African-American depictions of us as Black Gay Men so keenly resonate American majority depictions of us, as Black people” (Riggs, 784). This statement mirrors the idea of, in this case, black, marginalised masculinities upholding white hegemonic masculinity by enforcing the white hegemonic group’s ideals on subordinate masculinities, without drawing much perceived benefit themselves, as has also been discussed earlier in this master’s thesis in other contexts. But when applied to the microcosmos of *Moonlight*, the marginalised become hegemonic, at least ostensibly, because in terms of any overt representations of white masculinity, there is none. And yet there are hints strewn throughout that seem to suggest that all the masculinities featured in

the film share some form of oppression, such as when Kevin talks to Chiron about the breeze at the beach: “That breeze feel good as hell, man [...] Sometimes, ‘round the way where we live, you can catch that same breeze. It just come through the hood and it’s like everything stop for a second… ‘cause everyone just wanna feel it” (*Moonlight* 00:52:02-00:52:22). The talks of a breeze affecting all inhabitants of the hood could allude to being granted a small reprieve from a constant oppression felt throughout all layers of the predominantly African-American society of Liberty City, in which much of the film is set. This white ghost of hegemony is also alluded to through intersectional analysis, as made clear by Jordan Shannon: “The intersection[sic] of racial identity, heteronormativity, and socioeconomic status impact each character on a level that results in further marginalization. Terrance, for example, continued to bully Chiron for being queer and yet both individuals would be marginalized from society at large for being young Black males from the ghettoes of Liberty City, Miami” (539). Although Shannon confuses Terrel with another character from the film, Terrance, his observations regarding the marginalisation of both Chiron and Terrel are very apt. A lot of Terrel’s bullying also hinges on undermining Chiron’s more hegemonically acceptable performance of masculinity by equating his homosexuality to femininity: “Hey, yo, that nigga forgot to change his tampon. I’m sorry Mr. Pierce. He just having woman problems today” (*Moonlight,* 00:36:26-00:36:33). These observations all mirror Connell’s notion of how homosexual masculine individuals are often subordinated further by hegemonic masculinity due to their preconceived close proximity to femininity:

> Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity, the items

> ranging from fastidious taste in home decoration to receptive anal pleasure. Hence, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity (Connell 78)

And yet the queer characters portrayed in *Moonlight* are decidedly masculine, with no explicitly feminine qualities shown to neither the hegemonically acceptable masculinities, nor the audience. Granted, things like Chiron's recalcitrance towards sports (*Moonlight* 00:13:17-00:14:21), and Kevin's penchant for cooking (*Moonlight* 01:26:06-01:27:23) can in some contexts be construed as feminine-coded, but these examples are few and far between compared to the more stereotypically masculine behaviour, such as grandstanding (*Moonlight* 00:37:41-00:38:50) and trying to block out emotions (*Moonlight* 01:01:18-01:03:37). Jenkins can be seen as trying to avoid this spectre of "negro faggotry", by choosing to portray black gay men with no overtly effete mannerisms. In that sense, Chiron is not subordinated by the hegemony because his masculine performance *is* effeminate, but rather because the expectation of his masculinity is to be effeminate, due to his sexuality. And yet by avoiding feminine expression in gay men, Jenkins ends up eschewing a very real part of black gay masculinity, and this is one of the main criticisms in Lamonda Horton-Stallings article "Am I a faggot?" from 2019.

In the article, Stallings compares *Moonlight* to black queer cinema of yore, and finds Jenkins' attempt ultimately lacking in portraying actual, queer, black masculinity when he chooses not to highlight the feminine aspects of such masculinity. Stallings contends that the motive for this doing away with "negro faggotry" is an attempt at making the film more digestible for a wider, non-black, heterosexual audience: "In Moonlight, Jenkins's attempt to replace Negro faggotry with Black gay masculinity happens so as to make the film accessible to a wider

audience (e.g., not gay, not Black)" (342). Stallings also attributes this lacking representation to a 'heterosexual melancholia', which is a term borrowed from Judith Butler's book *Bodies That Matter*, which, in a masculine context, describes "the melancholy by which a masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love" (235). In other words, heterosexual melancholy stems from a heterosexual individual's inability to act on homosexual desire, and Stallings attributes much of this heterosexual melancholy shining through *Moonlight* to Jenkins, as he is heterosexual (344). This term applied to *Moonlight* could allude to scenes such as the final one, where Chiron and Kevin share a tender moment, but never actually kiss (*Moonlight* 01:45:42-01:46:02), as Stallings observes: "viewers never see two black men kiss in the film. Kissing was represented as adolescent sexual exploration, but in the greater narrative of Black masculinity (in the film), grown Black men do not kiss each other" (350). Stallings even accuses Jenkins of upholding stereotypical masculine hegemony through his avoidance of "negro faggotry": "What remains are updated versions of hegemonic blackness and masculine hegemony in various tones and color gradations that maintain gender binaries in which the feminine and femininity continue to be violently devalued" (342). The choice to do away with the kiss is definitely an unconventional decision, even Jenkins himself admits as much in an interview: "'You normally do get a kiss in this situation,' acknowledged Jenkins, who is straight. 'But I feel like that wasn't realistic for this character at this moment. I think that these two men don't fall into this happily-ever-after relationship [...] I don't think Chiron is now extremely comfortable with his sexuality, and I don't think he's ready'" (Buchanan). While these statements could definitely apply to Chiron and Kevin, a clarifying statement later in the interview reveals some of the director's misconceptions: "I was looking for the most concrete

image possible to show that he would allow someone to show him intimacy. To me, that was a caress, and not an overt sexual experience" (Buchanan). Jenkins seems to equate a kiss to sexual intimacy, at least when it is between two males, as much is evident from the film, where the only kiss between Chiron and Kevin happens during the handjob scene (*Moonlight* 00:54:19-00:55-51). This notion of sexualising aspects of queer love relations that are not decidedly sexual in nature is not a new invention (Lock), some people even equate the very state of being homosexual to something sexual and perverse in and of itself, seeking to divert children away from any mentions or depictions of same-sex love relations on unfounded grounds (Billson). That is not to say that Jenkins harbours any views to that extreme, but hesitancy to show two grown men kissing on screen can certainly be explained by some of the same underlying notions of prejudice. That is not to say that Stallings hits the mark on every point, especially in the lack of portrayal of "negro faggotry".

Although many of Stallings' points are entirely valid, there is still more to be said about the reason for this portrayal of a more masculine, black gay masculinity, because, as E. Patrick Johnson contends, both Chiron and Kevin are very much sublimating their real selves throughout much, if not all, of the film:

> Kevin and Little exist within a world in which heteronormative society frames their existence from their early childhood through adulthood. Their responses to that entrapment vis-à-vis their gender expression and their sexuality is very different. Kevin's response is to embrace—at least outwardly—a more traditional or hegemonic form of masculinity, one that manifests most dramatically when Kevin assaults Chiron on the school yard to prove his masculinity. Chiron's response, ultimately, is also to embrace a traditional masculinity, but in both instances, the performance is a mask for a much

> deeper and more complex masculinity—what I would call a makeshift masculinity, which I define as a masculinity created from the scraps of one's life and grounded in a working-class epistemology or queerness that does not privilege "outness" or visibility (71)

And especially the last part is pertinent to Stallings arguments, because if we read Chiron and Kevin as characters with the *potential* for developing more outwards feminine characteristics if their circumstances had been different, then the notion of makeshift masculinity marks a critique of hegemonic black masculinity in *Moonlight* that remains pointedly pro-femininity. And these signs of budding feminine characteristics are visible in *Moonlight*, e.g. in one short scene where we see Chiron dancing his heart out, being all smiles and in an environment where the girls are dancing decidedly more enthusiastically than most of the other boys (*Moonlight* 00:22:53-00:23:22). However, the scene of happiness is book-ended by scenes showcasing the harsh realities of Chiron's lower class neighbourhood on one end (*Moonlight* 00:21:57-00:22:44), where Chiron meets one of his mother's johns, and on the other end is perhaps one of the basest displays of establishing hegemonic masculinity, featuring a literal dick-measuring contest between Chiron, Kevin, and some of the other boys from school (*Moonlight* 00:23:22-00:24:18). And this sequence of scenes is emblematic of how makeshift masculinity comes into being, because as we follow Chiron through the three acts, as we see him being subjected to the harsh realities of his home life, as he ages, he becomes gradually more hegemonically masculine, at least outwardly.

In the first act we see Chiron struggling with himself, and yet we still see him engaging in unmasculine things that bring him joy more openly, such as the aforementioned dance scene. But through interactions with Juan, and Kevin

especially, he learns, implicitly, that he has to hide who he really is, as Kevin asks “Why do you always let people pick on you, man?” To which Chiron answers: “What you mean?” “You always letting them pick on you” “So? What I gotta do?” “All you gotta do is show these niggas you ain’t soft” “But I ain’t soft” “I know, I know. But it don’t mean nothing if they don’t know” (*Moonlight* 00:15:07-00:15:27). Chiron is taught to be hard, i.e. uncaring, and willing to fight back if pushed, as the subsequent play-wrestling between Chiron and Kevin underlines. It could be argued that he is being told to emulate hegemonic masculinity in a bid to avoid being singled out as a subordinate masculinity. But as the next act illustrates, Chiron has not learned to emulate hegemonic masculinity sufficiently yet. Because Chiron sits with the girls during class (Appendix 9), which could be explained as a measure to prevent him from being bullied in class, but it is also implying that he is perceived as effeminate by the hegemony, further singling him out. Despite him trying to avoid the other boys in his class, Chiron still gets relentlessly bullied during his teenage years, and he does not fight back, as is seen when the bullies confront him outside of school (*Moonlight* 00:46:54-00:47:58). In this altercation with Terrel, Terrel remarks that Chiron’s pants are very tight, implying that Chiron dresses like a queer, and although tight pants are often worn by gay men, the more logical explanation would be that he can simply not afford new pants, because he has to pay his mother to fuel her drug addiction, and must therefore wear older ones that do not fit him. This illustrates how a knock-on effect brought about by lower social standing and less money leads to Chiron’s queer identity coming under even further scrutiny by more hegemonically accepted males. In other words, due to Chiron’s sexual identity being singled out by myths perpetuated by the cultural domain of power, he experiences even more

marginalisation for his sexuality in the interpersonal domain due to his other identity markers such as social class and physical ability.

And Chiron definitely tries to hide his sexuality as much as possible. He never does anything that could be perceived as outwardly feminine in the second act, and queer acts are relegated primarily to his dreamscape (*Moonlight* 00:42:54-00:43:19), where Chiron dreams about Kevin having sex with a woman. Although the dream portrays a heterosexual sex act, the camera's focus reveals the true object of desire, as the woman is never directly in focus, only Kevin and Chiron. Kevin is also the instigator for Chiron's first, and only, sexual encounter. This also happens clandestinely, in the dark of night. And after the sexual act, a very laconic, yet impactful, exchange is had: "Chiron: I'm sorry. Kevin: What you gotta be sorry for?" (*Moonlight* 00:55:34-00:56:40). There are multiple ways to interpret this, one of course being that Chiron is sorry for finishing too early, but it could also denote that he is sorry for being gay, uttering the phrase to noone in particular. And so, somewhat hypocritically, the one who taught Chiron to be hard and outwardly hegemonically masculine now tells him not to be ashamed of being gay. This might have put Chiron on track to be more true to himself and about who he loves, had it not been for Kevin's subsequent betrayal.

The reason for Kevin's betrayal is due to hegemonic power relations, because he is just as much in possession of a makeshift masculinity as Chiron is, and so when Terrel sparks up conversation about an old, barbaric game they used to play in middle school and asks whether he is in or not, Kevin's acquiescence ultimately seals the fate of both him and Chiron (*Moonlight* 00:58:47-01.00:11). For although Kevin enjoys a higher position in the hegemony established in the schoolyard, he is still very much in danger of losing this position if there is any

suspicion of him being anything but hegemonically masculine, which in this context is tied to being violent, and, most importantly, heterosexual. This is most likely also the reason for Kevin being overly braggadocious when regaling his tale of how he had sex with a woman to Chiron (*Moonlight* 00:37:41-00:38:50). This can be construed as a way for Kevin to assert his outwards perceived heterosexuality, and, as we later find out, Kevin also has a son with someone named Samantha (*Moonlight* 01:29:54-01:30:48). It would be remiss to attribute these actions to mere performative acts in a bid to divert attention from Kevin being homosexual, because there is just as much reason to read Kevin as a bisexual man on the grounds of these acts. Kevin never explicitly states that he is homosexual, nor bisexual, and this leads to many writers on the subject either directly assuming Kevin's homosexuality, or failing to mention the possibility for Kevin being bisexual, as Hameed Sharif Williams laments in his article: "Kevin's sexual fluidity is evident in the dialogue throughout the film yet few critics and general conversations engage Kevin as a Black bisexual male" (Williams). And although bisexual people are capable of "straight-passing", as Kevin seemingly enjoys the privilege of during the film's runtime, they face some unique challenges of their own, such as, in this instance having Kevin's bisexual identity erased in favour of being portrayed as a homosexual man with a "beard", i.e. a female partner used either knowingly or unknowingly to conceal a homosexual man's real sexual orientation. We also see Kevin, much like Chiron, sit with the girls during lunch (Appendix 10), perhaps to signify that despite their different standings in the hegemony, their actual masculinities would be perceived quite the same by the hegemony if the truth came out. This looming danger of subordination of course leads to Kevin being forced to fight Chiron in a bid to secure his own outwards perceived hegemonic qualities (*Moonlight*

01:01:00-01:02:00). But after the fight, Chiron is offered a way out, as he gets called into the principal's office, and if he tells her who did it, she will punish those responsible. However, Chiron is not *able* to accept help from the disciplinary domain of power, and the reasons are twofold. Firstly, the fact that this was an old game they used to play, and are happy to bring out again, would suggest that those who engaged in it prior were never sufficiently punished, and thus the retaliation and loss of status for being a snitch would make it even less of an option for Chiron. Secondly, the one who committed the actual deed is someone Chiron still harbours feelings for despite the betrayal. And so, because of his identity as a homosexual man, he is not able to engage with the disciplinary domain of power due to even more loss in status, and because the target of his affection would be punished as well. This is what finally pushes Chiron into a corner, with his home life ruined, his best friend turned lover turned enemy, and the prospect of having to endure even more bullying, he has no way left to resist subordination save for fighting on the hegemony's premises. This harkens back to Gershick and Miller's proposed strategies for when men fail to meet the hegemonic standard as highlighted by Connell (54-55), and in this instance, the strategy is for Chiron to redouble his efforts in order to meet hegemonic standards. And the name of the game in this hegemony is violence. What follows is Chiron mentally and physically hardening himself by, almost ritualistically, submerging himself in ice water, as he psyches himself up to confront Terrel (*Moonlight* 01:03:38-01:06:00). This ends with Chiron being brought away in a police car, signifying that the hegemonic group in the hood and schoolyard still has to answer to the higher disciplinary domain of power if their transgressions are too severe.

And so we are brought into the final act, with a new and decidedly more, acceptably, masculine Chiron, as he himself explains: “When we got to Atlanta… I started over. Built myself from the ground up. Built myself hard” (*Moonlight* 01:42:44-01:42:53). And that is how Chiron, or Black as he is called in this act, conducts himself at the start of the final act. Chiron has taken on the nickname that Kevin had given him in their teenage years, perhaps, unconsciously on his part, to signify that he still harbours feelings for Kevin, or that he has taken Kevin’s lessons about showing outwards toughness to heart. We see a repeat of the ice bath Chiron took to toughen himself up before the second act’s climax, and his car and dashboard crown ornament emulate the ones Juan possessed (*Moonlight* 01:06:49-01:07:10), signifying that the respect Chiron now commands in the hegemony is much like the one Juan enjoyed, marking Black as part of the hegemonic group. His social class has also gone up, as his hegemonically acceptable lifestyle has afforded him with plenty of disposable income, as seen through the way he dresses, and the domicile he inhabit. This is also reflected in the way he treats his street-level dealers, as he physically eclipses the scrawny looking dealer under his employ, staring him down and making fun of him for the hell of it, which is in stark contrast to the shy and non-confrontational Chiron of the previous acts (*Moonlight* 01:09:00-01:10:33). This also decidedly marks a dimension of physicality to the systems of oppression present in the hegemony, as we see Chiron going from the small and easily subordinated Little, to the taller, but still lanky and easily bullied Chiron, to the buff and imposing Black, who now partakes in the bullying himself. But Chiron’s hegemonic performance is disrupted when Kevin suddenly calls him up, wanting to reconnect. During the phone call, the first outwards cracks begin to show in Chiron’s performance, as Kevin’s apology for how he treated

him moves him to the verge of tears (*Moonlight* 01:13:01-01:13:17). This phone call even leads to Chiron having a wet dream about Kevin (*Moonlight* 01:15:20-01:16:29), reigniting his latent, queer, passions. This phone call also spurs him on to actually reconcile with his mother, whose prior mistreatment of him in his formative years have manifested as nightmares in adulthood (*Moonlight* 01:06:12-01:06:31).

In the scene between Paula and Chiron, she is entirely apologetic, realising that she has failed in raising Chiron with the love he needed: “I love you, Chiron [...] I mean, you ain’t gotta love me. Lord knows I did not have love for you when you needed it, I know that. So you ain’t gotta love me. But you gon’ know that I love you” (*Moonlight* 01:19:04-01:19:30). Paula’s mea culpa moment is, implicitly, also a lamentation of the loss of the vibrant and more outgoing—perhaps even out and proud—Chiron that could have been, had he had a proper support system. But the one receiving the apology is the Chiron that has been battered and hardened by a hostile hegemony, the Chiron in possession of a makeshift masculinity. And so even though the scene ends in a touching embrace, there are still some loose ends, as per Stallings reading of Paula and Chiron’s reconciliation: “Black/Chiron, as hard as he appears to be, is still burdened by the weakness and femininity represented by Paula, who remains a part of him. The ending, in which she asks forgiveness and proclaims her love for him, does not resolve this weakness and fear of embracing her—femininity” (349). Stallings contends that the reconciliation fails to elicit a reawakening of Chiron’s effeminate side, and though Stallings sees this as a failure to portray femininity in black men—and therefore a reinforcement of a more hegemonically acceptable black gay masculinity—there is still something to be said about the process of the failure itself. Because if we read Chiron’s failure to express

femininity not as the mark of heterosexual melancholy brought about by a straight film director, but rather as a result of the constant browbeating brought about by an increasingly hostile hegemonic masculinity as Chiron ages, then the critique of the hegemonically acceptable masculinity in *Moonlight* remains pointed. It can then be construed that Chiron and Paula's reconciliation marks only the beginning of a period of healing for Chiron, and more than two decades of heteronormative abuse is not likely to be remedied in the span of a few minutes.

There is also something to be said about the bias in wanting Chiron's true expression of masculinity to be markedly feminine only because he is homosexual. Why should heterosexual men in *Moonlight* not be under the same scrutiny? Juan would be an obvious contender for showcasing feminine qualities in heterosexual men, as he already takes on a father role for Little, but the feminine qualities that could be expressed by Juan are instead placed in another character, which is that of Juan's girlfriend Teresa. It would have made for an interesting dynamic if Juan had to act both the part of father and mother, or if two heterosexual men had to act as parental figures for Little. Of course, this type of family dynamic has been well and truly warped by mainstream shows, to the point where even seriously suggesting such a family dynamic is marred with associations to comedy, such as Charles Michael Lorre's show *Two and a Half Men*, where two heterosexual brothers, Alan and Charlie, look after Alan's child Jake with comedic shenanigans to follow, but this could warrant a study all on its own.

However, in terms of biases in *Moonlight*, there are also some held by the characters themselves, some even mirroring Stallings' biases, which is partly corroborated by Johnson's remarks in the reading of the scene where Chiron and Kevin meet again, because as the two of them finally meet, their outwards perceived

hegemonic masculinities, and biases, start to unravel: “Kevin understands that Black is a mask for the vulnerable young boy that he befriended twenty years prior. The appearance of “Black” also shatters Kevin’s perhaps stereotypical expectations of how Chiron’s queerness would manifest—as effeminacy (Johnson 79). Their meeting is slow to pick up, having to go through all the steps one normally takes when reuniting with anyone they have held dear once, and it is not until near the film’s conclusion that Kevin finally addresses Chiron’s transformation: “Who is you, man? [...] I’m saying, man, them fronts, that Car. Who is you Chiron? [...] It’s just… I ain’t seen you in a minute, and it’s not what I expected” (*Moonlight* 01:41:38-01:42:05). It is not made explicitly clear what Kevin expected, but as Johnson contends, there is a very real possibility that he expected Chiron to display a more effeminate masculinity. These assumptions are dispelled, however, and Chiron and Kevin both lament how they ended up as they did (*Moonlight* 01:42:30-01:43:26), and one of the commonalities is that they both behaved as they were expected to do, by a hegemonic masculinity that values hardness, violence, and criminality. This has landed them both in jail at various times, but where Chiron seems to be set on continuing his hegemonic performance, Kevin has put it all behind him. Kevin is in a sense further ahead than Chiron, as he has taken to a new life, an honest one: “Now I got li’l Kev. Got this job. Another 18 months of probation. [...] Nah, man, it’s a life. You know? I ain’t never had that before. Like, I am tired as hell right now, man, and I ain’t making no more than shoe money, but… I ain’t got no worries man. Not them kind what I had before” (*Moonlight* 01:43:38-01:44:09). Kevin has chosen one of the other strategies outlined in an earlier chapter, namely to reject the hegemonic masculinity found in *Moonlight* altogether, and live a life removed from the expectations of hardness, violence and criminality. This repudiation of hegemonic

masculinity is in a sense what inspires Chiron to finally be honest, not only with Kevin, but also himself: “You the only man that’s ever touched me. You’re the only one. I haven’t really touched anyone since” (*Moonlight* 01:44:34-01:44:54). This prompts a wordless exchange between Chiron and Kevin, and as the two embrace, Chiron is being pulled away from the expectations of hegemonic masculinity, and into Kevin’s world. The final shot of the film depicts Chiron when he was Little, looking first at the vast ocean and then back at the camera (*Moonlight* 01:46:02-01:46:24), perhaps to signify that Chiron is returning back to a state where his masculinity was not so restricted, making him now free to explore his sexuality and gender expression the way he sees fit, without the yoke of hegemonic, heteronormative, masculinity to limit him.

And so the hegemonic masculinity present in *Moonlight* is one that values a masculinity built on hardness, violence and criminality. This is observable in the more hegemonically acceptable men such as Terrel, and to a lesser extent Juan. This masculinity also devalues homosexuality, in large part due to a preconceived notion brought forth by the cultural domain of power that homosexuality is adjacent to—or at times equated to—femininity, as much of the bullying that happens to Chiron showcases. This sets sexuality, and to a lesser extent gender expression as some of the biggest identity markers that lead to subordination in this hegemony. Gender expression is only a subordinating factor to a lesser extent, because this subordination happens despite Chiron’s attempts to hide any and all signs of deviance from hegemonically acceptable masculinity. This is done in part by Jenkins choosing to never portray Chiron as overtly effeminate, which in turn sends a message that can be construed as any femininity in gay men is deemed unacceptable, as Stallings contends. However, another reading by Johnson purports

that Chiron and Kevin's eschewing of femininity comes as a result of the hegemonic masculinity bearing down upon them from an early age, and so in a bid to survive, they never openly flaunt femininity. This makeshift masculinity is then in part a hegemonically masculine performance made to divert suspicion away from their sexuality, as Kevin shows in the first two acts, and as Chiron showcases in the third. Chiron's struggle with the hegemony also showcases how power struggles are handled, as it is only when he chooses to fight on the hegemonic masculinity's premises, with violence, that the subordination stops. However, this hegemonic masculinity always leads to being at odds with society at large, as both Chiron and Kevin's incarcerations will attest. This also alludes to a larger, ostensibly white hegemonic order within *Moonlight*, as made clear in part by Jordan Shannon's intersectional analysis, but also alluded to through hints at crucial points throughout the film, which also marks the identity marker of race having an impact on one's standing in the hegemonic masculinity. And so at the film's conclusion, Kevin makes it clear that he has left that life, and by extension that hegemonic masculinity, behind. This prompts Chiron to confess his feelings for Kevin, and the two embrace. The film ends with a final scene that hints at Chiron being on a path to redefine his masculinity once more without a heteronormative hegemonic masculinity to bear down on him.

Discussion

The Disappearance of Phillip DeVine

When dealing with the text of *Boys Don't Cry*, it is important to note that it is a text based on real events. Real events, that, when scrutinised, reveals a dimension of

racial erasure to *Boys Don't Cry*, as Halberstam observes when he makes note of Philip DeVine's absence in the narrative:

> it is no surprise that she also sacrificed the racial complexity of the narrative by erasing the story of the other victim who died alongside Brandon Teena and Lisa Lambert Philip DeVine, a disabled African-American man has received scant coverage in media accounts of the case, despite the connections of at least one of the murderers to a white supremacist group. "The Transgender Gaze" 298

The inclusion of Phillip DeVine would have made new dimensions of marginalisation and subordination present in the hegemonic masculinity observed in *Boys Don't Cry*. This also further corroborates that racial erasure usually happens in a way to privilege white masculinity and white narratives, as has been previously observed and analysed in this master's thesis' *Fight Club* chapter.

And so when an already exceptionally marginalised and subordinated masculinity such as Brandon's ostensibly draws the benefit of magnification at the cost of Phillip DeVine's masculinity, what does that say about society's framing of black, disabled, masculinity? Phillip DeVine is not even mentioned in the "in memoriam" section of the film's end credits (*Boys Don't Cry* 01:53:38-01:54:13). This makes him the only one of the three murder victims to be completely removed from not only the film, but also reality through the lens of *Boys Don't Cry*, as Lisa Lambert, the third murder victim, is in part represented through the role of Candace. Jennifer Devere Brody contends that this racial erasure happens in a bid to magnify white queerness "what is it about the historical erasure of blackness that appears to make some queer texts queerer? In short, I examine how the white forms of queerness are achieved in the film *Boys Don't Cry*" (298). And the white form of queerness is in part

magnified by limiting the scope of the main antagonists' bigotry. By removing the dimension of race, John and Tom are made to be more innocent than they really are, and what could have showcased a multi-faceted hatred for any and all not hegemonically masculine, i.e. white, straight and cis, is instead reduced to a sort of "gay panic" that does not truly highlight the dynamics of subordination and marginalisation that *could* have been present in *Boys Don't Cry*, as Halberstam agrees: "Peirce claimed that this subplot would have complicated her film and made the plot too cumbersome, but race is a narrative trajectory that is absolutely central to the meaning of the Brandon murder" (*In a Queer Time and Place* 149). Brody even contends that this erasure marks Phillip as a criminal: "the film's inability to show DeVine as violated rather than violator perpetuates the myth of the black man as always already a perpetrator of crime" (96). This in the sense that because only Brandon and Candace are shot and killed, the erasure of Phillip's murder indicates that black men are not capable of being victims of crime, enforcing the myth that black men can only be perpetrators of crime. This is reflected in society when white victims of crime are recognised and signal boosted to a far greater extent than black victims of crime (Ishisaka).

And so when the dimension of racial erasure is revealed, a new dimension of systems of marginalisation and subordination is also revealed, which in turn opens up for questions to the validity of Peirce's retelling of Brandon Teena's life and murder.

The Absence of Fathers

Throughout all three movies, a pattern has emerged in regards to missing paternal figures. The Narrator in *Fight Club* mentions how his dad left at an early age, and

how that makes him want to fight him: Tyler says: “I’d fight my dad” to which The Narrator responds: “I don’t know my dad. I mean I know him, but he left when I was like six years old” (00:39:38-00:39:45). Note that although Tyler and The Narrator are having a conversation, due to the nature of Tyler’s manifestation, The Narrator is both the one harbouring indifference and antipathy towards his dad. Brandon’s family is never mentioned in any meaningful capacity, and his cousin Lonny is the only familial bond that is featured in the film. Chiron’s biological father is also absent, leaving only his mother to raise him. This absence, then, leads all these protagonists out in search for meaningful mentor relationships. We see it in The Narrator’s conjuring up of Tyler, which is his idealised form of masculinity, and how The Narrator eventually ends up conducting himself like him to such an extent that Tyler almost takes over. We see it in Brandon, when he looks up to the questionable, but cisgender, man, John, and Brandon follows his lead on many bad calls, perhaps in part due to a wild spirit, but also because he simply does not know how to conduct himself better. This also leads Brandon to forming a makeshift family with Lana’s mom and John sort of playing the role of mom and dad (*Boys Don’t Cry* 01:00:33-01:01:22). We especially see it in Chiron’s story, as Juan explicitly takes over the role of his father, teaching him how to swim, and even semi-baptises him (*Moonlight* 00:17:56-00:19:27). Another thing all these relationships have in common, however, is their instability. The Narrator’s relationship with Tyler begets a fight for control of The Narrator’s body, ultimately forcing The Narrator to exorcise Tyler through a gunshot to the head. Brandon’s relationship with John is constantly on edge due to John’s mental instability, which also ends up being one of the factors leading to Brandon’s death. Chiron’s father figure is unceremoniously killed

off-screen between acts one and two, which further serves to isolate him from his peers.

This tendency is not a new one, as Mike Chopra-Gant outlines in his article: “the fact that there has in recent years been a rash of publications relating to the effects of absent fathers on the development of masculine identities suggests that the figure of the absent father persists—or otherwise has returned—as a key trope concerning the formation and maintenance of masculine identities” (88). And this absence is seen as an inherently negative when forming masculine identity, as the examples above have shown how an absent biological father have lead to an instability in masculine identity, and the search for a mentor to fulfil that role always ending in failure, as Chopra-Gant contends through his reading of Guy Corneau: “Corneau suggests that paternal absence inhibits the development of mature masculinities by denying men access to the rituals of manhood that are a distinctive feature of preindustrial societies in which fathers are more involved with their sons” (90). This lack of maturity is palpable in all the films, from the rash and violent Narrator, the wild and impressionable Brandon, and the violent and bullying Chiron that he becomes in the third act. However, this begs to question as to whether a biological, paternal role model in the context of each of the films’ hegemonic masculinities would entail a reinforcement or a repudiation of hegemonically masculine qualities. In each of the three films, the hegemonic masculinity has always taken the form of an adversary, intent on subordinating the protagonists’ form of masculinity. Would a paternal reinforcement that bid Brandon conceal his masculine identity in an attempt to keep him safe from subordination and subsequent destruction be construed as positive? Would a paternal figure that cheered Chiron on

to embrace his sexuality lead to a harsher, perhaps even fatal response from the hegemonic masculinity, and thus be a negative reinforcement?

These are of course mere hypotheticals, but the insertion of stable paternal figures would certainly make for very marked changes in each of the protagonists' masculine identities, and by extension their interactions with hegemonic masculinity.

Conclusion

And so this master's thesis reaches its conclusion, having analysed three distinct works where masculinity is at the forefront.

Through an intersectional analysis of texts where a hegemonic masculinity framework has been applied, distinct masculinity hierarchies have been observed in each of the texts' universes. Each of the three protagonists' resistance to their respective hegemonic masculinity feature differing outcomes, for where The Narrator of *Fight Club* manages to overturn the hegemonic masculinity in his text universe, Brandon fails to resist the hegemonic masculinity in his microcosm, ultimately leading to his subordination and death. Chiron, on the other hand, is able to eschew hegemonic masculinity altogether, opting to remove himself from a hegemonic masculinity that values violence in a bid to explore and construct his own masculinity free from hegemonic influence. These struggles are of course also dependent on what shape the hegemonic masculinity takes in each of the respective universes. In *Fight Club* the hegemonic masculinity values consumerism above all else, in *Moonlight* it is hardness, violence and criminality that is valued, and in *Boys Don't Cry* the property of being cisgender, or at least perceived as being cisgender is rated the highest. These hegemonies then interact differently with the protagonists depending on their identity markers, and one of the most recurring identity markers

in all three texts is decidedly social class. The way this identity marker interacts with other markers was fascinating to ascertain. Social class in *Fight Club* serves to illustrate a drop in the hegemonic hierarchy for The Narrator when it is compounded by his mental disability, it serves much the same function in *Moonlight* for Chiron, as his social class compounded with his sexuality lands him in situations that often gets him subordinated. It is only when Chiron shows adherence to hegemonic norms, and hides the marker of his sexuality, that it lands him in a higher social class. Brandon's expression of masculinity is perhaps the one that is most hampered by social class, as his gender identity and expression of sexuality is hinging on a privilege he is not afforded by the structural domain of power because of his lower social class. Race, however, was a decidedly opaque identity marker to discern in all three texts, and yet the different texts all share some of the same devaluing of black masculinity. The Narrator is seen co-opting different races through a near-study of the text, marking black masculinity as hypermasculine and, in the end, disposable as a method to centre white masculinity. In *Boys Don't Cry* it is the doing away entirely with a black masculinity that should have been there in the form of Phillip DeVine that marks devaluement, and this happens as a strategy to empower the white queer narrative that the film is centred around. In *Moonlight*, effeminate gender expression clashes with the hegemonic black masculinity to such an extent that this facet of black masculinity is devalued entirely. The protagonists' respective proximity to femininity is also a clear indicator of oppression and privilege, as The Narrator is the one that enjoys the most success in resisting the hegemony, due in part to his distance to femininity, and how other effeminate masculinities in *Fight Club* are the ones that are made to suffer in a bid to secure The Narrator's position as part of the new hegemonic masculinity. Chiron's proximity to femininity is affected by his sexuality,

and how it is perceived by the hegemonic masculinity to be in close proximity to femininity, despite his best attempts at hiding his sexuality. And it is only when he successfully hides his sexuality that he is considered part of the hegemonic masculinity in *Moonlight*. Brandon's masculinity is decidedly the one that is closest to femininity, as his masculinity is often located in a state of borderlands, a place where Brandon is sometimes read not as a heterosexual trans man, but as a lesbian cis woman. This proximity is then in the end what reveals Brandon to the more hegemonically acceptable men, John and Tom, who ultimately kills Brandon for his "trespass" into masculinity.

All these intersections, and many more not brought up in this analysis, serve to underline the complexity of power relations in masculine hierarchies, and how masculine identity is formed under these circumstances.

An interesting facet that has not been touched on much in this analysis, is how these works are all adapted from other works and events, and it would have been interesting to analyse not only these three films, but also contextualise them with the works and events they are based on, analysing how different modes of media relates to different portrayals of intersecting identity markers and hierarchies.

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