

INTERROGATING MANHOOD: EXAMINING MASCULINITY IN ERNEST
HEMINGWAY'S SHORT FICTION AND JAMES BALDWIN'S *GIOVANNI'S ROOM*

by

Austin Lee McGrady

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Department of English

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Moira P. Baker

April 2017

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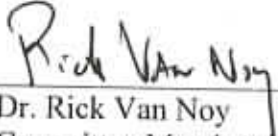
Dr. Moira P. Baker
Thesis Advisor

4/21/2017
Date



Dr. Tim Poland
Committee Member

4-21-17
Date



Dr. Rick Van Noy
Committee Member

4-21-17
Date

ABSTRACT

The central protagonists in the fiction of American authors James Baldwin and Ernest Hemingway provide readers an insightful critique of American hegemonic masculinity. By studying Hemingway's short stories, "Indian Camp" and "My Old Man," and Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room* using the lenses of masculinities studies and gender theory, this thesis examines the critical reflection these texts offer concerning manhood and American cultural prescriptions for masculinity. The discussion of hegemonic masculinity that each of these texts provokes offers ways to recognize how normative gender expectations deeply affect one's gender and sexual identity and how one comes to accept or reject the identities of others.

Austin Lee McGrady
Department of English, 2017
Radford University

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to Moira Baker who has been working with me since the beginning of my graduate career, helping me to focus and refine my work with masculinities studies and gender theory. I am truly indebted to her for encouraging my work in this subject and helping me to navigate a very difficult theoretical field that requires sensitive scholarly attention. Moira's advice and support have influenced my scholarship and my teaching; they have also had a great impact on my own world view. I owe Moira a great deal of thanks for her studious readings of all my drafts and her long, substantive conversations and emails with me about this thesis. She is a first-rate scholar and I will always consider her a dear friend.

I would also like to thank Tim Poland and Rick Van Noy for agreeing to be on my thesis committee and providing their support, expertise, and resources to me while working on this project. Both took the time to consider my thesis work during my graduate courses with them, and they always offered me help and critical feedback whenever I needed it of them. I want to thank them for being good professors and helpful mentors in my education.

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INTRODUCTION

THE FICTIONS OF MANHOOD: EXAMINING MASCULINITY IN EARNEST HEMINGWAY'S SHORT FICTION AND JAMES BALDWIN'S *GIOVANNI'S ROOM*

The power of social prescriptions to reinforce gender roles and define what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman in society has had an immense impact on American fiction. Recent trends in literary criticism are beginning to analyze how American authors examine aspects of the hegemonic, heteronormative brand of manhood that have so often been canonized as qualities of the archetypal “real man,” whose exploits are the driving force behind society’s masculinist values and morals. Masculinities scholar Michael Kimmel describes the space that these authors examine as “the tension between the multiplicity of masculinities that collectively define American men’s actual experiences and this singular hegemonic masculinity that is described as the norm” (4). In this thesis, I examine how Ernest Hemingway and James Baldwin explore the impact of the dominant ideology of American masculinity upon men and their relationships to others. Specifically, the thesis examines Hemingway’s short stories, “Indian Camp” and “My Old Man,” and Baldwin’s novel *Giovanni’s Room*.

Both Baldwin and Hemingway include white, male protagonists in their work whose narratives demonstrate the suffering created for themselves and others by their attempts to reach the impossible goal of the “real man” who perfectly fits the prescriptions and expectations of hegemonic, straight, white masculinity. Protagonists at the center of each writer’s fiction both suffer and cause suffering to others because they believe that there is a certain way to be “a real man,” keeping themselves and their loved ones from accepting any other form of manhood except the hegemonic form of masculinity that Kimmel analyzes in his sociological work. Both authors have very different approaches to dealing with manhood in their work, and both

interrogate and struggle with dominant American ideas of gender and masculinity. The most recent conversations occurring in the scholarship of both authors have considered questions of gender and masculinity in their fiction and in their lives.

Chapter one examines Hemingway's short stories "Indian Camp" and "My Old Man," both of which involve narratives in which a young boy is being brought up into manhood by his father, who is only concerned with bolstering his own sense of manhood and teaching his son how to "be a man." "Indian Camp" follows Hemingway's famed protagonist Nick Adams in a story in which his father tries to instruct him in his medical profession with an eye to initiating Nick in a passage from childhood into manhood; however, he ultimately fails to teach him anything about being a doctor or being a man. The story, along with "My Old Man," becomes what I call a "failed male tale," that is, a tale in which the protagonist suffers due to his own inability to cope with the expectations for hegemonic masculinity that are being forced upon him and that are unattainable except through the most robotic parody of hypermasculine behaviors.

"My Old Man" shares a similar experience of a failure of a father to model a satisfactory representation of manhood for his son, but from the perspective of the young boy. Joe, the narrator of the story, presents his father, Butler, as the kind of man he wishes he was, hoping that he can craft his own masculinity using his father's model of hegemonic masculinity. Again, however, Butler fails his son in trying to bring him into manhood and, like Nick, Joe is left perplexed in his ideas about his own masculinity and what it means to be "a man." This chapter is grounded in masculinities studies scholarship like the work of Michael Kimmel, James Messerschmidt, and Eric Anderson, as well as the gender theory of Eve Sedgwick. Viewed through these theoretical lenses, Hemingway's work in narratives like these two illuminates the

ways in which imposed hegemonic masculinity fails men in their relationships with each other, especially in the relation between fathers and sons.

Chapter two focuses on Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, which provides readers with a different kind of white American narrator who is also deeply afflicted in his life by his compulsion to perform the impossible ideal of hegemonic, heteronormative manhood. David, the protagonist-narrator of Baldwin's novel, sets up his narrative as a personal confession in which he explores the way his obsession with maintaining his manhood, as modeled by his father, has controlled the way he views himself and everyone else in his life; similarly, he explores his inability to love anyone at all because he has fled from his own same-sex desire in shame and fear. Primarily focused on David's inability to accept his same-sex desire for Giovanni because of his need to preserve his manhood, Baldwin's novel demonstrates the degree of suffering that one can endure simply to preserve society's compulsory heterosexual gender roles. Applying masculinities and gender studies theory to Baldwin's work in the same way I address Hemingway's narratives, I also examine several of Baldwin's non-fiction essays about masculinity and manhood in this chapter. This combination of scholarship when applied to Baldwin's novel reveals the extent to which certain views of masculinity affect the deepest dimensions of an individual's identity and, in turn, his relationships with everyone in his life.

Analyzing Hemingway's and Baldwin's work is the way this thesis provides readers with deeper insight into the cultural construction of hegemonic manhood and the damage it can cause. In the case of both authors, readers are invited to interrogate certain brands of hegemonic masculinity that have caused undue suffering in the lives of men and the lives of those whom they loved or attempted to love.

CHAPTER 1

TAKE IT LIKE A MAN: HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND FAILED MALE TALES IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S "INDIAN CAMP" AND "MY OLD MAN"

Ernest Hemingway's fiction is renowned for its supposedly dominant male protagonists whose "manliness" is typically accentuated by the author's terse style and sharp tone, creating a laconic "masculine" aesthetic. "'Love is a dunghill,' says Harry. 'And I'm the cock that gets on it to crow'" (43). These words, spoken by Hemingway's hypermasculine protagonist Harry in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," exemplify the sharp, "tough guise"¹ tone that Hemingway employs when writing the great majority of the central characters in his fiction (*Tough Guise: Violence, Media, And The Crisis In Masculinity*, 1999). Many of the popular beliefs about Hemingway's fiction view characters like Harry as reinforcing a form of powerful masculine privilege;² however, Harry's words require a kind of critical reflection that goes beyond accepting such beliefs about Hemingway's representation of masculinity, one that recognizes its complexity and its fragility. Harry's words, both self-degrading and assertive, do not unproblematically carve out

¹ This term is derived from writer Jackson Katz's film *Tough Guise: Men, Violence And The Crisis In Masculinity* (1999) discussing hypermasculinity in the modern day United States. Katz uses the term "tough guise" to describe a kind of hypermasculine mask that men use to hide their underlying, complex masculinities.

² Critics like Josep Armengol in his article "Race-ing Hemingway: Revisions of Masculinity and/as Whiteness in Ernest Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa* and *Under Kilimanjaro*" (2011) and Thomas Strychacz in his book *Hemingway's Theaters of Masculinity* (2003) both read Hemingway's characters in this way.

a privileged space for the white, male protagonist; instead, they ask the reader to reflect on Harry's character and what he can be understood to represent as a member of a dominant white, male social class that, metaphorically at least, engages in specious, ironic, or self-defeating conquests—a cock's ascent up a dung hill. Harry's cock on a dunghill metaphor exposes Harry's suffering and self-oppression created through the need to achieve a particular kind of masculine behavior and status that betrays its own futility.

Readers of Hemingway's work must resist notions that all of Hemingway's white, male protagonists represent romanticized models of dominant masculinities. Examining the suffering portrayed in Hemingway's representation of dominant masculine modes in his fiction through characters like Harry enables readers to do so. In fact, Hemingway's male protagonists at times represent something far from a picture of idealized manhood; rather, they represent failures of hegemonic brands of masculinity. Many scholars and critics have begun asking questions about what role Hemingway's fiction serves in its portrayal of masculinity. For example, in her book *Reading Desire: In Pursuit of Ernest Hemingway*, Debra Moddelmog asks the question, "Are we now 'putting [Hemingway] to use,' in the service of helping us to comprehend the meaning of white American manhood?" (10). This question and ones like it have become increasingly more pertinent in Hemingway scholarship, and I argue that this question is both worth examining and capable of shedding new light on Hemingway's fiction. I argue that Hemingway's canonized short fiction like "Indian Camp" and "My Old Man" offer critical representations of dominant forms of masculinity in the sense that the males central to each of these stories, in their attempt to achieve a form of dominant, hegemonic masculinity, ultimately achieve only personal failure. The male protagonists of these two stories embody what I call "failed male tales," in which readers are invited to problematize the hegemonic brands of masculinity that they represent.

To understand how the male protagonists central to Hemingway's short fiction can be understood to represent failed attempts at performing hegemonic masculinity,³ it is necessary to define that term. R.W. Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity is considered a bedrock definition among Gender Studies critics. Connell, writing about the way society constructs definitions of masculinity and femininity, argues that such definitions are "centered on a single structural fact, the global dominance of men over women" (Connell 183). Connell describes this structural fact as "the main basis for relationships among men that define a hegemonic form of masculinity in the society as a whole." "Hegemonic masculinity," Connell claims, "is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women. The interplay between different social forms of masculinity is an important part of how patriarchal social order works" (Connell 183). Thus, Connell describes the traits of a privileged man attempting to reap the social benefits of the "patriarchal social order" and doing so by imposing himself over women and other men. These traits can be seen in almost all of the male protagonists central to Hemingway's fiction. For example, in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," during a safari trip to Africa with his wife, the central male protagonist in the story, Harry, has given himself a minor cut on his leg; yet, in his attempt to bolster his masculine pride, he refuses to put iodine on his cut even after his wife Helen has urged him multiple times to do so. As a result, his wound becomes gangrenous, and he is about to die. Helen states to Harry, quite candidly, "Please tell me what I can do. There must be something I can do. There must be something I can do." Harry's reply is, "You can take off that leg and that might stop it, though I

³ Judith Butler, in her essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (1990), describes gender as a performative action, and gender itself as a performance.

doubt it. Or you can shoot me. You're a good shot now. I taught you how to shoot, didn't I?" (Hemingway 39). In his reply to his wife, Harry exemplifies the traits described in Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity. Harry is diminishing Helen by defining her only in terms of himself. Harry claims that the only useful thing she can do for him in his situation is shoot him, and the only reason she is capable of doing that well, according to Harry, is because he taught her how to shoot. Even though Helen is attempting to reach out to Harry empathetically, Harry is only able to act the role of a man asserting his dominance over a woman.

Harry's diminution of Helen and his refusal to put iodine on his wound are both examples of Harry's attempt to bolster his masculine pride by refusing to accept the advice of a woman or admit he is wrong about his own decisions to "take it like a man," going without treating his wound. In fact, the first symbol of Harry's character and his sense of masculinity is contained within the note Hemingway provides to introduce Kilimanjaro as a geographical setting for his story. Hemingway writes in the otherwise purely expository note, "Close to the western summit there is a dried and frozen carcass of a leopard. No one has explained what the leopard was seeking at that altitude" (39). Just like Harry, who has decided to climb Africa's tallest mountain to prove something to himself about the kind of man he is, only to suffer from a gangrenous infection, the leopard has attempted to reach exemplary heights for reasons unknown to others, only to lose its life in the process. Both Harry and the leopard become symbols of futility and self-defeating failure in the sense that the purpose of their struggles is unclear, yet they struggle to achieve useless heights that ultimately cause their eventual death. The frozen leopard's carcass, like Harry's character, represents the self-defeating nature of hegemonic masculinity. Harry's only goal in denying Helen's help, her advice, and even her friendship is to prove to

himself that he is the man he thinks he is, just as the leopard must prove its worth to itself in its icy death.

Along with Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity, central to understanding Hemingway's portrayal of masculinity in his fiction is Eric Anderson's concept of masculine capital. Anderson's concept illuminates how Hemingway portrays hegemonic masculinities in his fiction. In his text, *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities*, Anderson outlines what he describes as periods of social "homohysteria," arguing that "[i]n periods of high homohysteria, men's gendered terrains are severely limited, as is physical intimacy between men" (8-9). Anderson's discussion of masculinities highlights "the importance of segregating women and gay men in order to preserve heteromale privilege;" that is, Anderson's work demonstrates how "women and gay men grew to become the 'other' upon which heterosexual men are constructed and valued, and the manner in which heteromale men are given immense institutional and cultural privilege" (24). The heteromale masculinity that Anderson describes is achieved through what Anderson defines as masculine capital. Anderson employs the term "to describe the social currency that one uses to achieve orthodox status" [a brand of masculinity that Anderson deems hegemonic] (42). The masculine capital that Anderson describes helps readers of Hemingway's fiction understand some of the reasons why his male protagonists like Harry act and say some of the things they do—to preserve their masculine capital, thus assuring themselves of their own dominant mode of masculinity.

Applying Anderson's term masculine capital allows readers to track the behavior of Hemingway's male protagonists, but terms like Anderson's masculine capital and Connell's hegemonic masculinity were not accessible to Hemingway the same way they are to contemporary readers. For example, Anderson describes the importance of different male circles,

including those among young boys, and the value they place on the amount of masculine capital that one has acquired in social circles even at a very young age. Anderson writes, “Young boys who slip out, or are pushed out, of heavily-policed masculine zones may be able to recoup some of their masculinity and be reabsorbed back in to the masculine arena by deflecting the suspicion of homosexuality” (43). By avoiding any association with feminized or homosexual behavior, both boys and men alike are encouraged to gain masculine capital. The need to maintain the kind of masculine capital that Anderson describes here explains Harry’s attempt to undermine Helen’s usefulness in his dire situation, a situation that a man should be able to handle on his own according to the kind of hegemonic masculinity that Connell describes; otherwise, Harry risks looking effeminate and, thus, emasculated because he must rely on a woman’s help instead of asserting his dominance over her.

Connell’s definition of hegemonic masculinity and Anderson’s concept of masculine capital help illuminate the plight of the male protagonists central to Hemingway’s fiction. An analysis of “Indian Camp” using these concepts suggests that Dr. Adams and his son Nick, like other Hemingway male protagonists, attempt to attain a sense of dominant masculinity through the accumulation of masculine capital, but their attempts lead them to a sense of personal failure and/or suffering. In this short story from *In Our Time*, Hemingway invites readers to consider the connotations that are attached to masculinity portrayed by father and son in the story. Feminist critic Judith Fetterley refers to “Indian Camp” as an example of when Hemingway was “a writer who told the truth,” claiming that the story is one of “initiation” where “Nick Adams is given a lesson in the meaning of growing up male in America,” a lesson that reflects “guilt for the attitudes men have towards women and guilt for the consequences to women of male sexuality” (46). While Fetterley certainly does not read the bulk of Hemingway’s fiction in such a way, it is

important to note that recent critics of the story do not read it as Fetterly does and have praised Hemingway's portrayal of masculinity in the story. They claim that Dr. Adam's attempt to bring his son into manhood is positive and successful, ignoring the instances in which Dr. Adams perplexes his son in the attempt to educate him in the attitudes and behaviors requisite to a domineering, hegemonic white masculinity. A recent article in the *Hemingway Review* by critic Donald Darker suggests that, despite the aspects of failure and guilt described in Fetterley's account of the story, "the power of compassion and love and, above all, the example of grace under pressure" are the primary lessons that Dr. Adams instills in his son (Darker 55).

Interpretations like Darker's, I argue, ignore the fact that Hemingway's male protagonists are more concerned about their manhood and how others see their manhood than with compassion or love; moreover, their "grace under pressure" can be seen as nothing more than an attempt to assert their overwhelming masculine power. In "Indian Camp," Dr. Adams's "grace under pressure" is simply a display of his mastery and dominance over a woman, the whole process of birth, and the marginal or subordinated masculinity of the native husband.

"Indian Camp," when examined using Anderson's notion of masculine capital and Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity, allows readers to see how the male characters in Hemingway's fiction problematize, rather than reinforce, dominant masculinity. The story begins by introducing the reader to the doctor and his son on their way to help an Indian woman birth her child. The first three-quarters of the story exposes the reader to Dr. Adams's ritualistic, technology-driven didactic mode of conversation in his attempt to instruct his son in the practices of his medical profession. In a classic father/son combination, Nick, in this case, represents not only his father's pupil in medicine, but also his pupil in manhood. The short and direct sentence structure that Hemingway employs, interspersed with bits of snappy dialogue between Nick and

his father that are tantamount to question and answer sessions, works on the reader's building anticipation and places the reader in the same position that the doctor desires of his son Nick—a position in which one is ready to absorb the important “life lesson” that is about to occur.

“Indian Camp,” from the beginning, clearly focuses on Nick's tutelage—overtly as a kind of medical apprentice, but covertly as a boy becoming a man in the eyes of his father. The first words exchanged between Nick and his father involve Dr. Adams redefining Nick's understanding of the world around him: ““This lady is going to have a baby, Nick,”” Dr. Adams says to his son who replies, “I know,”” but the doctor quickly retorts, ““You don't know. ... Listen to me. What she is going through is called being in labor. The baby wants to be born and she wants it to be born. All her muscles are trying to get the baby born. That is what is happening when she screams”” (68). The doctor, in his conversation with his son, attempts to diminish the physical pain and emotion related to the Indian mother's experience. So, anything that Nick might have understood about child birth, women, or even his own father's work, is already being rewritten in some way by his father's tutelage, which teaches Nick the norms of what Connell defines as hegemonic masculinity.

Dr. Adams's need to appropriate the birthing experience of the Indian mother can be directly related to Anderson's term masculine capital in the sense that, by transforming the mother's physically and emotionally intense experience into a clinical form of medical jargon that he controls, the doctor is removing any descriptions that can be associated with femininity from Nick's lesson. For the doctor to use emotional language to describe the Indian mother's labor would be entering into what Anderson terms “feminized terrain,” in which the doctor is risking his masculine capital and his association with hegemonic masculinities by describing the process as sentimental, emotional, or feminized (50). Anderson writes, “The sexist and

misogynistic ethos associated with the presence of orthodox masculinity [this includes Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity] means the performance of femininity by men, or transgression of masculinized boundaries is deemed highly contentious. Feminized terrains are therefore heavily monitored and policed, and men are penalized for transgressing into them" (50). Dr. Adams is avoiding any transgression into feminized terrain because he wants to teach his son how to "take it like a man," depriving Nick of any full understanding of child birth and, arguably, any understanding of a woman's agency in birth or in anything else.

Dr. Adams's brother George also embodies an attempt to maintain masculine capital as he accompanies the doctor and Nick. George continually dehumanizes and devalues the perspectives of the non-Anglo "other" characters in the story, who are given no voice to articulate an alternative perspective on the experience of birth for a native woman and man. For example, Hemingway uses Nick's perspective to describe the moment when the Indian mother injures George during the birthing process: "She bit Uncle George on the arm and Uncle George said, 'Damn squaw bitch!' and the young Indian who had rowed Uncle George over laughed at him" (68). George's profane remark demeans the worth of the Indian mother's experience, again, not recognizing her pain and frustration in the company of his white, male cohort. George also models the kind of masculinity that Dr. Adams hopes Nick will emulate. The Indian characters in this story have no voice and, even with the laugh from George's indigenous escort, without any other dialogue the reader is left wondering whether he is laughing at George's getting hurt or reinforcing George's subjugation of the Indian mother's experience. At no point in the story does Dr. Adams attempt to scold his brother for his treatment of the Indian men or women because, among the three white men present, there is a need to gain and maintain masculine capital. For this reason, George demeans both the female and the other males in the room and it is for the

same reason that Dr. Adams does not correct his brother in front of his son. George's objectification of the Indian woman's body is just a cruder version of Dr. Adams's.

The value placed on hegemonic masculine traits compared to the devaluing of feminine traits or the traits associated with the native male's subordinated masculinity in "Indian Camp" can be related to what masculinities critic Pierre Orelus labels as "imperial conservatism." Orelus defines this term as an "overt oppressive system designed to legislate and control the sex, gender, race, the mind, the body, and the soul of people using a narrowed interpretation of the words of God and a fabricated form of democracy" (Orelus 168). It is a system, Orelus argues, that has primarily served "the interest of dominant men who have controlled the wealth of the world and have tried to dictate economic terms, social norms, and behavior to which people should conform," always defining what people consider to be "accepted as 'normal,' 'ethical,' 'true,' 'good,' or 'bad'" as it has been "fabricated and enacted by these imperial men who have portrayed themselves as architects of morality and democracy" (Orelus 168). Both George and Dr. Adams can be seen to embody this kind of "imperial conservatism" in that they want Nick to adopt their mode of manhood. Dr. Adams represents hegemonic forms of masculinity when his voice drowns out any voicing of femininity and/or an alternative masculinity.

The final scenes in "Indian Camp" begin by assuming a tone of hypermasculine elation and accomplishment, employing a brand of stereotypically "masculine" diction concerned with dominant control of detail and specificity that reinforces the central male characters' attempts to gain and preserve their masculine capital. As Dr. Adams finishes his operation, the narrator informs the reader that the doctor "was feeling exalted and talkative as football players are in the dressing room after a game," evoking a sense of masculine camaraderie that is initially meant to reflect the same sense of manhood and masculine victory that the doctor hopes will redound to

not only himself, but his brother George and his son Nick as well (69). The doctor's boast following his locker room feeling of accomplishment further accentuates the sense of masculine triumph in his work: "Doing a Caesarian with a jack-knife and sewing it up with nine-foot, tapered gut leaders," the doctor claims, is "one for the medical journal" (69). The raw and specific language used in these lines focuses on masculine objects and imagery such as the rough image of the "jack-knife" and the detailed description of the leaders used, explicitly connecting the images to the men's need to preserve masculine capital in front of one another. Hemingway's prose in this scene has immersed the reader in the language of manhood, connoting feelings of strength, roughness, and self-assurance until the doctor's accomplishment and sense of masculine pride are undercut by the tragedy that follows in the Indian father's suicide.

The role that the Indian father's masculinity plays in his suicide is one that Connell would deem the role of a marginalized masculinity. A more recent article that employs this concept by Connell and Messerschmidt titled "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept" describes how such marginalized masculinities are developed: "In the development of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, divisions among men—especially the exclusion and subordination of homosexual men—were quite central issues (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985). The policing of heterosexuality has been a major theme in discussion of hegemonic masculinity since then" (837). Messerschmidt and Connell go on to describe how this policing of heterosexuality works as "a concept of masculinity [that] marginalizes or naturalizes the body (837). Here both Messerschmidt and Connell point out the fact that masculinity can act as a tool for social stratification. In the case of the Indian father, Hemingway allows Dr. Adams to fully represent a model of hegemonic masculinity, while the man who has conceded to take his own

life without speaking a word is now forced to represent an assumed lesser model of masculinity, a marginalized masculinity.

As the doctor begins to embellish his sense of masculine pride to indoctrinate his son into the same kind of manhood he represents, Hemingway's prose dramatically shifts from a sense of masculine joviality to masculine despair. After George assures Dr. Adams that he is indeed "a great man" (an ironic statement in view of the subsequent decline of the doctor's mood), the doctor uses his sense of masculine accomplishment to make a joke when he states, "'Ought to have a look at the proud father. They're usually the worst sufferers in these little affairs'" (69). The doctor's joke embodies not only a sense of irony as the reader approaches the coming tragedy, but also expresses the first instance of masculine uncertainty and anxiety—hardly a true form of comic relief given the tension contained within the lines describing the doctor's operation, especially considering what follows as the doctor suggests checking up on the Indian father. While the tone at that moment seems light-hearted, the words "proud" and "worst," almost too late, foreshadow the fate of the newly born Indian child's father, who has been, according to the doctor, taking the scene "pretty quietly," until the reader discovers that, as the doctor has been working, the Indian father has cut his own throat "from ear to ear" (69). Hemingway's careful language uses the concept of masculine silence as the Indian father's quiet and gruesome death is juxtaposed to the chattering locker room feeling of masculine accomplishment that the doctor embellished just moments before. The Indian father, here, represents a brand of subordinated masculinity, enabling both Dr. Adams and George to maintain a position of masculine dominance, but this time, in a way that allows readers to see the suffering and tragedy attached to the diminution of marginalized masculinities.

Just as Hemingway's prose accentuates the doctor's hypermasculine description of his own success, Hemingway employs similar hypermasculine imagery and diction in the discovery of the Indian man's death in a different way. When the doctor goes to see what the Indian father has been up to, "[h]e mounted the edge of the lower bunk," which suggests the act of coitus that occurred between the Indian man and woman—except that the doctor is the one mounting the bunk in order to have access to the Indian male, not the female. However, the Indian man "lay with his face toward the wall"—thus guarding against any connotation of frontal intimacy between the two men, but leaving open the connotation of anal penetration (69). The language Hemingway uses is related to the doctor's preservation of masculine capital; the doctor must reject any kind of homosocial male bonding with the Indian father or stereotypically "effeminate" empathetic reactions to his death or to the woman's excruciating birth pangs. The scene is imbued with a hypermasculine overabundance of violent imagery, providing the reader with connotations related to the man's fertility that led to the birth of his child: "The blood had flowed down into a pool where his body sagged the bunk. ... The open razor lay, edge up, in the blankets" (69). The image of abundant bleeding that causes the man's body to sag the bunk and the "edge up" razor in the blankets seems to fuse images of death and violence ("blood" and "razor") with images of the phallic and sexual ("edge up, in the blankets" and "sagged the bunk"). Thus, the underlying sexual connotations stemming from Hemingway's diction are carefully juxtaposed with connotations of rejection, violence, and death. Any loving thoughts related to sex that Nick may have once had are now put to question and he, like his father and uncle, must also keep himself from being associated with the kind of marginalized masculinity that characters like the Indian father represent if he is to gain masculine capital and fulfill the prescriptions of hegemonic masculinities.

After the macabre discovery of the Indian man's death, the doctor's attempt to bring his son through a rite of passage into his own imperially conservative manhood, both by training him in his profession and providing him with an insensitive understanding of childbirth, has clearly failed: "'I'm terribly sorry I brought you along, Nickie,' ... 'It was an awful mess to put you through'" (69). These are the first words exchanged between Nick and his father since they were in the hut with the Indian woman and her dead husband, implying yet another instance of masculine silence, but this time between Nick and his father as they "walked along the logging road back toward the lake" (69). The doctor chooses to address his son as "Nickie," implying that he likely recognizes his own failure in bringing his son into manhood as Hemingway shifts from having him address his son formally as "Nick" throughout the story until this moment when he addresses him for the first time using a childish nickname. With the doctor's "post-operative exhilaration gone," the sense of masculine camaraderie he was experiencing before has been transformed into a sense of failure and an awareness of how self-defeating he has been in his attempt to school Nick in the ways of masculinity (69).

Dr. Adams's failure in his attempt to bring Nick through his rite of passage leads Nick to question the dynamics of the conventions involved in the conception of a child and, in turn, question the conventions of what it means to be a mother, what it means to be a father, and, most of all, what it means to be a man. Nick's first question to his father after the long silence is "Do ladies always have such a hard time having babies?" (69). Nick's initial question immediately sets up a gender dynamic in which his questions are all clearly concerned with the preservation of his manhood. As the doctor tells his son that such a birth is "exceptional," Nick interjects with his first question about the Indian man: "Why did he kill himself, Daddy?" The doctor replies, "I don't know Nick. He couldn't stand things, I guess" (19). The doctor's overwhelming sense of

uncertainty concerning the Indian man's reason for committing suicide is juxtaposed to the doctor's sense of self-assurance in his answers about the Indian woman's struggle with childbirth. Dr. Adams's claim that the Indian father "couldn't take it" is an attempt to subvert the alternative masculinity that the Indian father represents. Nick continues to question the Indian father's role in the situation he has just witnessed, asking, "Do many men kill themselves, Daddy?" (69). The doctor's reply, "Not very many, Nick," is juxtaposed to Nick's follow-up question when he asks the same question about women, to which the doctor replies, "[h]ardly ever" (69). The uncertainty in the doctor's answer about the suicidal tendencies in men compared to women in such situations becomes the crux of Nick's final question: "Is dying hard, Daddy?" (70). The doctor's rather unsatisfactory answer to his son—"No, I think it's pretty easy Nick. It all depends"—informs Nick's understanding of the situation in the sense that Nick now views this kind of suicide as something that may be seen as a kind of easy way out, suggesting that the Indian father does not properly represent the form of hegemonic masculinity that Dr. Adams represents (70).

Nick's eventual feeling that "he felt quite sure he would never die" is a complicated one that indicates that he does not wish to share the fate of the Indian father because his own father has cast such an action as existing outside of the acceptable realm of masculine behaviors (70). The hegemonic brand of masculinity that Dr. Adams attempts to instill in his son does not allow for the loss of masculine capital. Dr. Adams's goal to bring his son into a form of hegemonic manhood akin to Orelus's concept of imperial conservatism has come to the irrational conclusion that Nick will "never die." This sets Nick up for an unachievable model of manhood that pushes him not to express his emotions or to accept the ultimate end of all striving in death, which is the inevitable end of all human lives. This impossible, and ultimately futile, model of manhood

insists that Nick act as if he were invincible, in fact immortal. Nick must “take it like a man” to ensure he does not lose his masculine capital or deviate from the ideals of imperial conservatism.

Analyzing how Hemingway incorporates “dramatizations of manhood” into stories like “Indian Camp,” Thomas Strychacz discusses the way in which “Hemingway emphasizes the *theatrical representation* of masculinity” (8). Strychacz claims that “Hemingway’s narrative art constantly represents masculinity as temporary and subject to change rather than stable and permanent; as relational and contingent rather than self-determined” (8). That is, Strychacz argues that readers of Hemingway’s fiction should not simply read Hemingway as constantly reinforcing hegemonic masculine qualities, but as, in fact, representing masculinity as a performance in which the central male characters in his narratives must assert their manhood by acting out masculine codes that prescribe dominance. Strychacz, in his discussion of “Indian Camp,” recognizes the story as “the most remarkable” of the five Nick Adams stories, claiming that the story is “treating with extraordinary delicacy the cultural, familial, and gender conflicts so central to [*In Our Time*]” (55). Strychacz highlights the way in which the central male characters in the story “play several roles in succession or even simultaneously as the nature of their performance and the function of their audience changes” (58).

The discussion about masculine character performance that Strychacz provides reveals the way in which Hemingway demonstrates the function of hegemonic masculinities in his characters. For example, Dr. Adams often represents the quintessential hegemonic, white male and he overshadows the role of the Indian father in the story. Strychacz, while not overtly labeling Dr. Adams or George as hegemonic, writes that “the white doctor—the ‘great man,’ as Uncle George somewhat sarcastically labels Nick’s father—usurps the Indian father’s role. Even the father’s posture (he lies in the other bunk with a cut that prefigures his wife’s) physically

aligns him with his wife” (56). Strychacz demonstrates how Dr. Adams can be seen as representing a dominant form of hegemonic masculinity in the sense that he is able to perform a dramatization of manhood that overshadows the importance, function, and significance of both subordinate masculinities (the Indian father and, arguably, Nick) and femininity (the Indian mother who cannot give birth without the assistance of the doctor).

Given the fact that Nick has only learned that he needs to take measures to preserve his masculine capital and conform to imperial conservatism, it can easily be said that the story of Dr. Adams and his attempt to teach his son cannot be called a success, but instead must be read as a tale of masculine failure. Hemingway’s portrayal of hegemonic brands of masculinity allows readers to place such privileged social positions in a kind of critical suspension, giving readers the opportunity to question such dominant social perspectives by inviting them to consider the anxiety, suffering, and confusion that occur in characters like Nick Adams. The doctor has failed in teaching his son how to perform the role of hegemonic masculinity and Nick has failed to understand what his father is trying to teach him, resulting, overall, in what one could call a failed male tale.

Immersing readers, once again, into a world constructed by dominant social groups that critics like Orelus would deem imperially conservative, Hemingway’s short story “My Old Man” provides readers with another paradigmatic example of a failed male tale in the narrative about Joe and his father, Butler. The story begins with Joe’s compensating for his father’s less than admirable attributes: “I guess looking at it, now, my old man was cut out for a fat guy, one of those regular little roly fat guys you see around, but he sure never got that way” (151). The reader is immediately immersed in a kind of contradiction in which Joe is attempting to paint a heroic image of his father but is, in turn, forced to describe his father’s real qualities that most

readers would not find fitting for any kind of archetypal heroic father figure—qualities that risk both the loss of masculine capital and deviate from the prescriptions of imperial conservatism. The sheer amount of space that Joe spends in the narrative describing how much his father exercises in order to maintain his weight turns a rather typical struggle into a parody of heroic achievement that is questionable to both the reader and Joe himself. Butler's heroic challenge is to "bulk down" rather than bulk up as a man. Joe recounts, "I'd come back and sit down beside him and he'd pull a rope out of his pocket and start skipping rope out in the sun with the sweat pouring off his face. ... When I'd sit watching him working out in the hot sun I sure felt fond of him" (151-152). Joe's words make it easy to forget about the fact that he is describing his father's efforts to lose weight as a horse jockey because "he couldn't keep down his kilos without all that running" (152). That is, Joe is describing even his father's fault in a positive light, attempting to preserve his father's masculine capital in his own eyes.

To understand why Joe makes excuses for his father in the attempt to preserve his masculine capital, it is necessary to discuss the work of Gender Studies critic and sociologist James Messerschmidt. Messerschmidt's work recognizes the kind of dominance and power that the hegemonic father's view of manhood exercises over his son. In one of his case studies, Messerschmidt describes a relationship like the one between Joe and Butler when he discusses the relationship between a working-class boy named Sam and his father. "Sam's father," Messerschmidt writes, "embodied a localized hegemonic masculinity and Sam's mother [embodied] emphasized femininity, and these structured gender relations had a major discursive impact on Sam" (67). Messerschmidt highlights the significant impression that fathers have on the way their sons develop their own sense of manhood. Since boys like Sam, and Joe in Hemingway's story, have hegemonic models of manhood available in their fathers, they strive to

emulate the same kind of dominant masculinity. Messerschmidt writes, “Although Sam’s father constructed a hegemonic masculinity in relation to his mother’s emphasized femininity, in relation to Sam he practiced a dominating masculinity;” that is, “a subordinate masculinity” was constructed by Sam in relation to his father’s dominating masculinity (67). The subordinate masculinity that Messerschmidt recognizes in Sam helps to explain Joe’s relationship to his father. Joe strives to preserve Butler’s masculine capital because Joe, like Sam, has developed a form of subordinate masculinity in relation to his father’s. So, if Joe were to critique his father’s manhood rather than defend it, he risks also critiquing his own brand of masculinity since it is constructed in relation to his father’s.

Joe embodies the same kind of subordinate masculinity that Messerschmidt claims Sam’s father instills in his son. The influence of his father’s dominant brand of masculinity compels Joe to compensate for Butler’s personal failures and the loss of his masculine capital. When Joe hears one of his father’s jockey buddies, Holbrook, call his father a “son of a bitch,” he says, “My old man sat there and sort of smiled at me, but his face was white and he looked sick as hell and I was scared and felt sick inside because I knew something had happened and I didn’t see how anybody could call my old man a son of a bitch, and get away with it” (153). After Holbrook’s attempt to diminish Butler’s masculine capital, Joe describes his father as looking and feeling sick. The outrage displayed in Joe’s reaction to Holbrook’s comment stems from the fact that Joe, still standing in the shadow of his father’s looming brand of manhood, understands his own manhood as connected to his father’s. In instances such as this one, Hemingway allows readers to see that, while Joe’s father is clearly touting the world of masculine capital as the way to truly be “a man,” he does not reveal to Joe what it means to gain masculine capital and the ways in which one can get into trouble in this social space created by and for men. While the

reader does not know exactly what has happened between Holbrook and Butler, the reader sees that Butler has kept something from Joe in his own performance of dominant manhood.

Joe defines all his experiences only in terms of his father's perspective, focusing his thoughts solely on Butler's interests. Joe allows the time he and his father spend in France early in the story to represent a romanticized space in which Joe can fulfill his subordinate masculinity. Joe's description of Paris indicates his mixed emotions to the reader:

We got into Paris early in the morning in a long, dirty station the man told me was the Gare de Lyon. Paris was an awful big town after Milan. Seems like in Milan everybody is going somewhere and all the trams run somewhere and there ain't any sort of a mix-up, but Paris is all balled up and they never do straighten it out. I got to like it though, part of it, anyway, and say, it's got the best race courses in the world. (154)

Despite Joe's clear aversion to the hustle and bustle of the Parisian lifestyle and French aesthetics, Joe attempts to justify his place in France because "it's got the best race courses in the world," a reflection of Butler's values and his manhood. Joe calls the Gare de Lyon a "dirty station" and Paris an "awful big town" that is "all balled up," yet he comes to like being there. The subordinate masculinity that Joe possesses is based on his Father's understanding of how to gain his own masculine capital. For Butler, the way to bolster his own masculine currency is to be the best jockey he can be, and that means doing anything he must to stay around what Joe calls "the best race courses in the world." Joe's exuberance over the many things Paris has to offer a jockey like his father stems from his own attempt to bolster his own masculine currency by increasing his father's. It is a classic father/son narrative: for a son to prove his worth he must live up to his father's expectations and prove himself a "man" in his father's eyes, and yet his father must also at least appear to embody a dominant model of masculinity.

Hemingway, despite his subtle, direct writing style in the story, makes it clear that Joe and his father have a troubled relationship and that Joe's perception of his own success is defined by his father's sense of manhood and his attempt to defend his masculine capital among his bettor and jockey peers. Joe says, "I was glad when the horses came back from Deauville in the summer. Even though it meant no more bumming in the woods, 'cause then we'd ride to Enghien or Tremblay or St. Cloud and watch for the trainers' and jockeys' stand" (155). Joe has no idea that "bumming in the woods" and a life lived primarily at the race track and around competitive jockeys and bettors means that his father has never really "made it" in the racing world and might not be the best way for a young child to grow up. Oblivious to the marginality and fragility of his own and his father's lifestyle, Joe is concerned only with emulating his father's brand of hegemonic masculinity that has dominated his young life. Joe's perception of manhood is a subordinate one constructed in relation to Butler's masculine capital. Joe is not concerned with having a secure lifestyle; instead, he strives to imitate his father, demonstrating his own ability to "take it like a man."

However, Hemingway problematizes Butler's brand of dominant, hegemonic masculinity by suggesting that Joe is privy to the failures and mistakes that lead to the loss of his father's masculine capital. After Butler sits down beside a supposed friend, George Gardner, Joe describes the exchange that goes on between them when his father asks George, "What's the dope George?" trying to get him to tell him how to bet at the racetrack (155). Joe hears George tell his father the odds of each horse's winning and realizes that George is only trying to get his father to participate in a fixed race. When George tells Butler that Kircubbin will surely win, Joe says, "But I knew something big was up because George is Kzar's jockey." Later he notes the difference in the two horses as his father happily shows Joe the horse he placed his bets on: "My

old man said the black one was Kircubbin and I took a good look at him and he was a nice-looking horse, all right, but nothing like Kzar” (155-156). Joe knows his father is being convinced to do something morally wrong, but is unwilling to reveal this fact to Butler because his subordinate masculinity disallows him from challenging his father.

When Kircubbin turns out to be the winner of the race, Butler, rather than celebrating his win, is only able to focus on his own sense of manhood. Joe says to Butler, ““Wasn’t it a swell race, Dad?”” and Butler replies, ““George Gardner’s a swell jockey, all right. ... It sure took a great jock to keep that Kzar horse from winning”” (157). Rather than keeping the fixed race a secret from his son, he reveals it without explaining to him why he chose to listen to George. While Joe is trying to prove himself to his father by praising the race, Butler shuts Joe down in his reflection on George’s throwing of the race and his own willingness to participate in a fixed race. That is, Butler is preoccupied with George’s sense of manhood, holding it in comparison to his own. The cycle that Joe and Butler represent in this tale is not one that represents idyllic father/son bonding; rather, it is a cycle that shows the reader the failure of principles of dominant, hegemonic masculinity. As Joe tries to make an honest attempt to understand and relate to his father’s sense of manhood, Butler is only able to focus on bolstering his own masculine image.

Despite the distance that Butler’s imperially conservative, hegemonic masculinity creates between him and his son, Joe’s commitment to maintaining his own subordinate masculinity remains strong. For example, even though the Kircubbin race leaves Butler with money, Joe still refuses to admit when Butler is being looked at as a loser or a failure. Joe recounts the “[g]irls around supper time looking for somebody to take them out to eat,” remembering that “they’d speak to my old man and he’d make some joke at them in French and they’d pat me on the head

and go on” (157). The fact that the women pass over Butler and simply leave by patting Joe on the head indicates that the women are not interested in Butler, likely because he is not the “man” that Joe needs to see him as. Even though Joe has a perfect opportunity in the story to discuss relationships that Butler may have had with the French girls, he chooses to focus on a story of his own lost love. Joe tells the brief story of a girl he meets and her mother’s eating ices, saying that “she was awfully good looking and I smiled at her and she smiled at me but that was all that ever came of it” (157). Like his account of his father’s interactions with women, his too, is cut short, but Joe claims, “Anyway, I guess it wouldn’t have been any good, anyway, because looking back on it I remember the way I thought out would be best to speak to her was to say, ‘Pardon me, but perhaps I can give you a winner at Enghien today?’ and, after all, maybe she would have thought I was a tout instead of trying to give her a winner” (158). Joe’s inability to frame his interactions with a woman with anything other than the jockey lingo he has learned from Butler reflects Butler’s own struggles with women and how that has affected his son’s understanding of interactions with women but does not explain them. The central issue in this section of the story is, in fact, Joe’s inability to learn anything useful about manhood from his father, and the constant problematizing of hegemonic brands of masculinity.

The culmination of Joe’s failure to learn about manhood from his father and his inability to legitimate his subordinate masculinity occurs at the end of the story when Butler chooses to race with Gilford, a race horse that, according to Joe, was “Irish bred and a nice, sweet jumper” (158). Joe, at first attempting to legitimize his father’s attempt to go back to participating as a jockey, praises Butler’s decision with hope and optimism: “My old man figured that training him and riding him, himself, [Gilford] was a good investment. I was proud of everything and I thought Gilford was as good a horse as Kzar” (159). Gilford becomes a symbol of Butler’s

masculinity and even becomes the focus for Joe's affection. Joe says, "Gee, I was fond of him. The first time he started with my old man up, he finished in a 2500 meter hurdle race and when my old man got off him, all sweating and happy in the place stall, and went in to weigh, I was proud of him as through it was the first race he'd ever placed in" (159). Joe perfectly blends his praise of Gilford into his praise for his father, but that is diminished by the fact that Gilford only placed, and did not win; this, apparently, is not the first time that Gilford—or his old man, the pronoun referent being significantly ambiguous—came in second. Gilford is now the object of Joe's adoration, even though he and his father only came in second, or placed, in the race. However, because Gilford only placed, this undercuts the horse's and Butler's masculine dominance, but Joe cannot let himself see that. Nor does Joe seem to register the fact that Gilford—the stand-in for his father's masculinity—has "placed" more than once, suggesting to the reader, though not to Joe, that Gilford's and his old man's real role at the track is to participate in the fixed races and to "place" when the fix is in. Joe's reliance on his father's masculine capital, and his blindness to how "rigged" it is, ends in suffering a tragedy.

In the final scenes of "My Old Man," Hemingway shows Joe and Butler's relationship fall apart on the same stage on which it occurred—the racetrack. As Joe begins to describe Butler's race at Auteuil in the Prix du Marat, he starts with a tone of excitement and elation saying, "Gosh, I was so excited, I was afraid to look at them, but I fixed the glasses on the place where they would come out" (159). Much like the way in which Joe focuses only on Butler's masculinity, Joe can only look ahead to see where his father will inevitably emerge from the gate. But, as the race progresses, Butler's masculinity takes the ultimate blow. Joe describes the final words that he speaks to his father: "I saw them coming and hollered at my old man as he went by, and he was leading by about a length and riding way out. ... They took off over the big

hedge of the water-jump in a pack and then there was a crash, and two horses pulled sideways out of it, and kept on going, and three others were piled up. I couldn't see my old man anywhere" (159). During a paradigmatic moment for Joe's subordinate masculinity, something goes wrong. As Joe yells out to his father, Butler is involved in a gruesome racing accident: "There was my old man," Joe says, "laying on the grass flat out with his face up and blood all over the side of his head. ... My old man was dead when they brought him in and while a doctor was listening to his heart with a thing plugged in his ears, I heard a shot up the track that meant they'd killed Gilford" (160).

In a single moment, Joe sees both his father and the ultimate symbol of his father's masculinity, Gilford, taken from him. The comments that Joe hears from the other bettors and jockeys as he is leaving further diminish Butler's masculine capital even after he has died. One gentleman says, "Well, Butler got his, all right," to which another man replies, "I don't give a good goddamn if he did, the crook. He had it coming to him on the stuff he's pulled" (160). Even though George Gardener tells Joe not to listen to what others say about his father, his final thoughts in the story are: "Seems like when they get started they don't leave a guy nothing" (160). Joe is now left in the world without the only thing he had to focus on, his father's manhood. Now Joe is left with a fragile, subordinate brand of masculinity that is threatened and vulnerable in an incomprehensible world of competing males. Joe is now left without a father and without a clear sense of manhood. Hemingway's story about the tragedy of Joe's losing his father problematizes the hegemonic brand of masculinity that is the bedrock of Joe and Butler's relationship. In his attempt to "take it like a man," Butler only creates another failed male tale.

Like Harry in Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," both Butler and Dr. Adams attempt to perform the social prescriptions of a hegemonic masculinity like that theorized by

Connell. Both fathers possess a form of hegemonic masculinity that conforms to imperially conservative values, as defined by Orelus, and leads to these characters' masculine failure. Both Dr. Adams and Butler are attempting to achieve a romanticized notion of hegemonic masculinity that is unattainable and, in their attempt to gain masculine capital, have left their sons with a confused and incomplete form of subordinate masculinity. Concepts afforded by the fields of Sociology and Gender Studies illuminate how Hemingway's short fiction works to problematize dominant, hegemonic constructions of masculinity. Once again, though these theoretical terms would not be available to Hemingway himself, the fact that he problematizes rather than reinforces the imperially conservative values associated with hegemonic masculinities as defined by contemporary gender theory is significant to the study of all of his fiction.

Examining how masculinity and other gender-related issues are represented in Hemingway's work has become a popular way for critics to study Hemingway's fiction. Well-known literary critics of Hemingway's work like Thomas Strychaz and Debra Modellmog have examined the intersections between gender issues and Hemingway's fiction with a special concern for Hemingway's portrayal of masculinity. Their work, along with the work on Masculinity Studies by scholars like Connell and Messerschmidt, allows readers to see how Hemingway's work can be understood as problematizing dominant modes of masculinity.

The central male protagonists in these two Hemingway short stories from *In Our Time* suggest that Hemingway is problematizing hegemonic masculinity grounded in an imperial conservatism that asserts masculine capital in order to construct "real men" who can "take it like a man." However, the outcome of their narratives is "a failed male tale." Using the terminology and concepts from the work of critics like Connell, Anderson, and Orelus, readers can better understand the complexity of Hemingway's central male characters and what they represent.

Once readers have made connections between the social and cultural theories that describe hegemonic masculinity and Hemingway's male protagonists, it becomes clear that the male characters central to much of Hemingway's fiction most often represent men who, in their attempt not to deviate from the prescriptions of hegemonic masculinities, have failed their family, friends, and themselves in the sense that they are each left confused, suffering, or dead.

CHAPTER 2

PRESERVING “IMMACULATE MANHOOD”: EXAMINING MANHOOD AND MASCULINITY IN JAMES BALDWIN’S *GIOVANNI’S ROOM*

The work of author, public intellectual, and activist James Baldwin is currently experiencing a new phase of distinction. Scholars and critics have begun to bolster a Baldwin renaissance as the current political and social climate of the United States has once again demanded that we take heed to the wisdom and insight that Baldwin’s fiction and essays offer readers in their discussion of race, gender, and more recently, masculinity. Gender studies critic Michael Kimmel in *Manhood in America* writes that “Baldwin’s powerful essays and best-selling novels focused a tormented rage on white men’s projections of their fears and longings on black men, a cultural psychosis that means that the black man was ‘forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it’” (196). Kimmel’s recognition that Baldwin writings engage questions of masculinity highlights the central importance of manhood in all of Baldwin’s work. Baldwin critic D. Quentin Miller suggests that “the themes that were coalescing in all of his work” can be understood by reading Baldwin’s own words at the beginning of his essay “Falkner and Desegregation”: “Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety” (Miller 75). The “loss of all that gave one an identity” that Baldwin refers to here is the central experience of Baldwin’s protagonist and narrator, David, in his novel *Giovanni’s Room*. Analysis of Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* and his essays about masculinity, using the theoretical lens of gender and masculinities studies, clarifies Baldwin’s insightful critique of the heteronormative modes of American manhood that dominated the society of his day. In this chapter, I examine Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*, specifically the character of David and his

intimate relationships and friendships throughout the novel. I am primarily concerned with how David perceives his sense of masculinity in these relationships and how 1950s American society's compulsory heterosexuality, engrained in him through his heteronormative upbringing, guides his decisions in the novel. I argue that David's plight demonstrates the anxiety produced by his failed attempt to embody heteronormative white masculinity and to preserve his manhood. Further, David's internalization of 1950s homophobia distorts his capacity to embrace his own flesh and love others.

The perspective offered by David's character allows readers to question and challenge heteronormative modes of masculinity because it exposes the destruction that ensues from denying one's natural passions in order to fit societal, cultural, and political "norms." Characters like David allow readers to recognize the central role that masculinities play in Baldwin's important discussion about race, gender, sexuality, and identity. I will begin my analysis of David's character by looking closely at his relationship with his father and the way in which David's childhood has solidified his understanding of the kind of masculinity he is expected to embody. I will then examine how David shapes and attempts to maintain this type of manhood, looking at David's relationship with Joey as the moment in which David chooses to adopt the kind of masculinity that causes him and everyone else involved in the novel to suffer. Finally, I will look at how David's obsession with dominant masculinity traps him in his own male prison, leaving him unable to have honest and loving relationships with neither men nor women.

By framing the narrative as David's all-night interior monologue from evening until morning of the next day when Giovanni, the lover he has abandoned, is to be executed, Baldwin begins the novel in a way that tells the reader that what they are about to experience is confessional and raw. David begins by recognizing in his image reflected in the darkening

window pane his identity as an American whose ancestors—male conquerors—established their own identities through a genocidal campaign to subjugate the racially “other” native inhabitants of a continent: “My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past” (221). Here David points to his ancestors’ need to distinguish themselves culturally from Europe and their darker, native “others,” suggesting that his ancestors faced “away from a darker past” in denial of the savageness of their imperial endeavors.

From the very beginning of his tortured confession, David shows readers that he is attempting to acknowledge and grapple with his inherited identity along with the many prescriptions that come with it. One must remember that David’s story is a confessional tale that reflects on what aspects of his life—from childhood onward—have led to the day of Giovanni’s execution. Viewing the novel this way allows the reader to see that David’s narrative serves as not only an examination of his conscience, but also a critique of the culture and, more specifically, the culture’s dominant mode of masculinity, which have so distorted David’s sense of himself that he cannot accept his homoerotic desires and his own flesh. Consequently, he can love no one—neither himself nor anyone else. The mode of manhood conferred upon David through his heritage has kept him from embracing his relationship with Giovanni and that has poisoned his relationship with other men and women.

The sense that David must preserve his manhood from anything that threatens its sense of heteronormative dominance is inherited from his father’s own understanding of masculinity. Masculinities critic James Messerschmidt’s recognition that children develop their understanding of gender using the structures provided by their parents illuminates how David came to a sense of manhood under the mentorship of his father. Messerschmidt writes that “early gender

development in childhood occurs through an interactive process between child and parents, other children, and other adults. ... Children (for the most part) undertake to practice what is being preached, represented, and structured” (42). Messerschmidt’s discussion of how children are imprinted with the gender expectations that adults provide them very much explains the degree to which David feels besieged by the obligation to perform heterosexual masculinity.

Very early in the novel, David reveals the extent to which his father’s manhood has affected him, saying that at the time, he was “desperate to conquer his [father’s] attention” to such a degree that he “sometime so annoyed him” when their “duel” ended with David crying (228). The image of his father that David provides in his confession describes a man who is “slow to anger” but, “when it comes,” his anger “is all the more impressive” (228). These descriptions communicate the sense that David’s father embodies a “tough-guy” personality that uses anger as a tool to exert power.

Apart from the overt themes concerning sexuality and masculinity in his fiction, Baldwin writes extensively about the issue of manhood and masculinity in his non-fiction essays, which shed light on David’s struggles in *Giovanni’s Room*. For example, in his essay “Preservation of Innocence,” Baldwin characterizes 1950s American, hegemonic masculinity:

In the truly awesome attempt of the American to at once preserve his innocence and arrive at a man’s estate, that mindless monster, the tough guy, has been created and perfected; whose masculinity is found in the most infantile and elementary externals and whose attitudes towards women is the wedding of the most abysmal romanticism and the most implacable distrust. (591)

Baldwin's description of the "tough guy" very much parallels the heteronormative mode of masculinity that David's father represents and with which David struggles, causing him and others so much suffering.

David's father's social behavior with both men and women reveals the central place of heteronormative American manhood in the way he has raised David. "At his best," David says, his father was "boyish, expansive, moving about through the crowded room with a glass in his hand, refilling people's drinks" (229). David notes that his father handled "all the men as though they were his brothers," while still "flirting with the women" to such an extent that David describes it as "strutting like a cock before them" (229). In memories like this one, David outlines the kind of strutting, dominant heteromasculine behavior that underlies a specifically American mode of white masculinity as described in Baldwin's essay that David's father embodies.

Eric Anderson's text *Inclusive Masculinities: The Changing Nature of Masculinities* defines the concept of "masculine capital" as a trading commodity meant to be exchanged between males, often determining a man's sense of self-worth based on the extent of his store of "manhood." Anderson writes, "While *some* might strategize to keep women and gay men out, it is much more likely that the gatekeepers choose individuals that have social and masculine capital—factors they assume will make a *heterosexual and sporting man*, 'the best man' for the job" (63). When David considers his father "at his best," he admires the same traits that Anderson says are a sign of his masculine capital—he is a hard-drinking, womanizing man. Anderson's discussion of "masculine capital" allows readers to trace David's behavior directly back to his father's model of manhood.

David seems to prize those moments in which his father's behavior is meant to demonstrate what Anderson would call his masculine capital. David confesses that he had "seen him drunk many times," admitting that his father "sometimes had a great charm when he was drunk" (230). However, it seems that David, even early on, was beginning to recognize the problems that such behavior entails. When he describes a night in which his aunt, Ellen, and his father get into a serious fight after David's father has come home drunk again, David recalls, "there was something in him, to be despised" (230). Only now, during his night-long reflection, can David look back at his own boyhood with such clarity and admit that, even early on, he felt incompatible with the kind of manhood his father modeled.

In his essay "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood," Baldwin discusses the way in which men shaped by specifically American ideas of manhood attempt to reject any hint of queerness or effeminacy in their behavior. In this essay, Baldwin attempts to understand how American categories of male and female really operate, arguing that once one has discerned the meanings of homophobic labels, they "may seem to define you for others, but [they do] not have the power to define you to yourself" (819). Baldwin tries to understand why, as he was growing up, all of the boys around him called him a "sissy," determining that such categories only serve to solidify hegemonic definitions of what it means to be a man by defining him as less of one. Baldwin writes,

The condition that is now called gay was then called queer. The operative word was *faggot* and, later, pussy, but those epithets really had nothing to do with the question of sexual preference: You were being told simply that you had no balls. (819)

Baldwin's critique in his essays of 1950s American dominant or hegemonic masculinities reinforces the claim that David's character operates as a critique of heteronormative

masculinities like the kind represented by David's father. Also, Baldwin's emphasis on the artificiality and constructedness of "tough guy" masculinity invites readers to see David not as a man forever stuck in self-denial, but as a man who now has the courage to acknowledge his own internalized homophobia that has led to his suffering, Giovanni's death, and the suffering of others.

The confrontation between Ellen and David's father also reveals the impact that David's father has had on his treatment of women. During this scene, she accuses him of going out with a girl, Beatrice, accusing him of drunken, woman-chasing escapades (230). David says that, due to his father's philandering and treatment of women, he can now "scarcely ever face a woman" (231). Near the end of his argument with Ellen, David's father says that all he wants "'is for David to grow up to be a man,'" who is not like a "'Sunday school teacher'" (231). Here, David's father makes clear that his idea of "a man" is one that preserves an image of "toughness,"—a man unable to love or express emotion in front of others. Ellen, at the close of their heated argument, tells David's father that "'a man is not a bull'" (231), directly highlighting the hypermasculine behaviors David's father models for his son, behaviors that David acknowledges he "hates."

David's confession moves from his reflection upon his father's masculinity to his own internalized homophobia when he discusses his first homosexual relationship with his childhood friend, Joey. Because David has been reared under the influence of his father's masculinity, he flees from his love for Joey, filled with shame about his own same-sex desire. David's relationship with Joey is what gender studies critic and sociologist R. W. Connell refers to as "the moment of engagement," a moment when a child chooses to assume the masculinity or femininity represented to him or her by a father figure, a mother figure, or other figure to which

the child has access (Connell 122). Connell's work becomes useful in tracing David's internalized homophobia in that his relationship with Joey is his "moment of engagement," the moment he chooses to assume his father's masculinity and, in turn, hate his own same-sex desire. If his father was unable to accept a "Sunday school teacher," surely neither he nor David can accept his desire for other men.

David metaphorically describes the internalized homophobia that causes him such intense panic during his relationship with Joey and throughout his adult life. David says that in attempting to escape his struggles by fleeing to Paris, he has "run so far, so hard, across the ocean," only to "find myself brought up short once more before the bulldog in my own backyard—the yard, in the meantime having grown smaller and the bulldog bigger" (223). The recurring "bulldog" in David's life that has caused him so much pain is his internalized homophobia, which he is only now beginning to acknowledge to himself during his introspective narrative.

Confessing that he has not thought of Joey "for many years" but sees him clearly tonight, the night of Giovanni's execution, David traces how his own internalized homophobia and fear of losing his manhood led to him hurting a boy with whom he shared his first sexual experience and whom he loved. David says that he and Joey were out "watching the near-naked girls pass, whistling at them, and laughing" (223). In this space of homosocial male bonding, David realizes "how fond" he felt for Joey that night, but these feelings quickly erode due to his obsession with preserving his manhood and his choice to reject homosexuality, even if that includes rejecting himself and someone else he loves (224).

At first, David's story about his relationship with Joey details some of David's initial discoveries concerning his own sexuality; however, even in seeing what could be true love,

David is unable to describe his feelings in any other way than through strained, symbolic language. “I think it began in the shower,” he says, “I know I felt something—as we were horsing around in that small steamy room, stinging each other with wet towels—which I had not felt before” (224). David describes the beginnings of his sexual relationship with Joey as “horsing around” and later describes his first kiss with Joey as occurring “as it were, by accident” (225). David’s narration emphasizes the degree to which his need to preserve his manhood has affected his psyche and has damaged his capacity to love others. In fact, David’s initial obsession with his father’s masculinity has caused him to fear his desire for men and its potential to deplete his masculine capital. Just as David begins to understand his sexuality, he begins experiencing intense internalized homophobia.

Eve Sedgwick’s discussion of homophobia clarifies how David’s encounter with Joey provokes this internalized homophobia. In *Between Men* Sedgwick writes, “Much of the most useful writing about patriarchal structures suggest that ‘obligatory heterosexuality’ [also known as compulsory heterosexuality] is built into male-dominated kinship systems, [and] that homophobia is a *necessary* consequence of such patriarchal institutions such as heterosexual marriage” (3). Due to the pervasive compulsory heterosexuality surrounding David and modeled by his father, David struggles with internalized homophobia that has a corrosive effect on his relationship.

David’s recollection of his sexual experience with Joey reveals the intense panic and fear that he begins to feel whenever he confronts his own desires. David says, “But out of this astounding, intolerable pain came joy, we gave each other joy that night” (225). Admitting that “a lifetime would not be long enough for me to act with Joey the act of love,” David indicates that he is now aware of the relationship he could have had with Joey but, as David quickly notes,

“that lifetime was short, bounded by that night—it ended in the morning” (225). Here, David’s unsparing self-reflection highlights his choice to reject queerness and/or effeminacy. The “brown,” “sweaty” body that, to David, is “the most beautiful creation” he had ever seen, eventually leads David to becoming “suddenly afraid” because, as David admits, “the desire which was rising” in him seemed “monstrous” (225-226). It is clear David fears his same-sex desire not only because it threatens his sense of masculinity, but also because he is aware of society’s harsh stigma, and its view of homosexuals as perverse, corrupt, or even criminal. David explicitly reveals the fact that it is Joey’s gender that causes issues with his acceptance of their relationship— “It was borne in on me: But Joey is a *boy*” (226).

David recalls that he was seized with panic and a sense of revulsion after their lovemaking: “That body [Joey’s] suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood. . . . The very bed, in its sweet disorder, testified to vileness” (226). The abhorrent language David uses to describe Joey’s body, a body he actually saw as most beautiful, betrays his internalized homophobia, which forces him to see both Joey and himself as vile; David’s obsession with maintaining hegemonic manhood and his fear of homosexuality have driven him to a denial of his own identity and rendered him incapable of loving this boy with whom he had just experienced “joy” as they experienced “the act of love.”

The fear of homosexuality that has been reinforced by his father’s sense of masculinity has caused David to fall into a trap—a socially produced trap that Baldwin himself has elsewhere called the “male prison.” David confirms that he had “made [his] decision,” his decision to leave Joey for fear that he will have to confront his own desire for other men. In rejecting Joey’s love, David is entering the “male prison,” a concept that Baldwin describes in his 1954 essay with the

same title (*Giovanni's Room* 226). In the essay, Baldwin argues that for society to consider homosexuality as “normal,” society would have to “rob the normal—who are simply the many—of their very necessary sense of security and order, of their sense, perhaps, that the race is and should be devoted to outwitting oblivion—and will surely manage to do so (“The Male Prison” 232). David’s own attempt to “outwit oblivion” by pursuing heterosexuality and denying his desire for Joey, he now confesses, is indeed the grand failure Baldwin mentions here.

Baldwin’s “The Male Prison” was a review of André Gide’s memoir *Madeline*, yet it seems more accurate to call this essay an analysis of Gide’s rejection of his desire for other men and his consequent sterile relationship with his wife. Gide’s internalized homophobia and self-loathing very much mirror David’s. “The great problem,” Baldwin writes, “is how to be—in the best sense of that kaleidoscopic word—a man”—not a heterosexual, just a man (232). Both Gide and David suffer within their heteronormative male prison because they cannot accept their love for other men. Baldwin warns those who might choose to follow the same path: “[T]oday’s unlucky deviate can only save himself by the most tremendous exertion of all his forces from falling into an underworld in which he never meets with either men or women, where it is impossible to have either a lover or a friend” (234). Baldwin claims that Gide’s self-loathing and rejection of his own homosexual desire led him into a loveless, celibate marriage with his wife Madeline, whose only function was to keep him from seeking relations with men.

The reality of David’s male prison and his internalized homophobia becomes more apparent in his relationships with others in the novel, especially during the time David spends in Paris. During his conversation with his gay male friend Jacques in Guillaume’s bar, David highlights the fear and anxiety that overcomes him when he is around feminine-presenting gay men. David discloses his disdainful attitude toward the queer men in the bar who dress in drag,

saying that he had “always found it difficult to believe that they ever went to bed with anybody” (241). David continues, “[A] man who wanted a woman would certainly rather have had a real one and a man who wanted a man would certainly not want one of *them*” (241). David confesses that Guillaume, the bar’s owner who is himself a member of the *les folles*, and others like him seem to possess an “utter grotesqueness which made [him] uneasy,” comparing their personages to “the sight of monkeys eating their own excrement” (241). David sees these feminine-presenting gay men as he has been taught to see them—a threat to his sense of masculinity. In them, David sees the same homoerotic desire that he possesses and, due to his internalized homophobia and fear of compromising his masculinity by associating with feminine-presenting men, he is unable to accept both their and his humanity.

In this bar scene, David also confesses that he feels he is being judged by those around him, highlighting his deep-seated fear that others might think that he is one of *les folles*, or even that he has, in his past, had same-sex desires. “But my face was known,” David recalls, “and I had the feeling that people were taking bets about me. Or, as though they were the elders of some strange and austere holy order and were watching me in order to discover by means of signs I made but which only they could read, whether or not I had a true vocation” (241). David is terrified and paranoid of any discovery of his own same-sex desires to a such an extreme degree that he believes that everyone in the bar has turned him into a kind of spectacle over which to be wagered. David describes the way he and Jacques move into the bar as “moving into the field of a magnet or like approaching a small circle of heat” as they both move closer to their first encounter with the barman, Giovanni (241).

When Jacques tries flirting with Giovanni, but instead notices the chemistry between David and Giovanni, Jacques initiates a conversation with David about his sense of masculinity

and the internalized homophobia it has caused him. When Jacques tells David to invite Giovanni to the table for a drink, David tells him he is “sort of queer for girls” and that he “[doesn’t] spend money on men.” Jacques retorts by saying, ““I was not suggesting that you jeopardize, even for a moment, that’—he paused— ‘that *immaculate* manhood which is your pride and joy’” (244). David then negotiates with Jacques to invite Giovanni to the table himself, but only if Jacques will clear up any “confusion” Giovanni might have concerning who is “lusting after his body” (244). Jacques, David confesses, knew that David was afraid of his own same-sex desires, and so, allows David to triangulate him and get closer to Giovanni so that he might take an opportunity to get over his internalized homophobia and truly love another person. Sadly, however, David has learned this too late.

Jacques, during a later conversation with David about his interests in Giovanni, confronts David directly concerning his revulsion with his own same-sex desires, revealing the internal struggle that David is grappling with in dealing with his internalized homophobia and the preservation of his manhood. When Jacques attempts to encourage David to pursue his relationship with Giovanni by getting him to embrace, rather than reject, his romantic and sexual interest in Giovanni, Jacques says,

Love him. ... Love him and let him love you. Do you think anything else under heaven really matters? ... And if you think of [your relations with Giovanni] as dirty, then they *will* be dirty—they will be dirty because you will be giving nothing, you will be despising your flesh and his...you can give each other something which will make both of you better. (267)

Jacques asks David to break down his resistance to his relationship with Giovanni and, in turn, the preservation of the heteronormative masculinity that forces him into this resistance. Jacques

attempts to convince David that the reason he views his own same-sex desire as “dirty” is that he is denying the validity of such desires, “giving nothing” in terms of loving or affectional reciprocation with others. Jacques specifically refers to David’s “flesh,” highlighting that David’s problem is his rejection of his own flesh and its same-sex desires. Jacques attempts to confront David with his internalized homophobia, but at that moment, fails to get through to him.

The masculinity that has led David to this severe form of internalized homophobia is described in Baldwin’s essay “Freaks and the Ideal of American Manhood,” originally published in *Playboy* magazine in 1985. In this essay, Baldwin explicitly highlights the specific connections that white, American masculinity have to homophobia and the rejection of queerness and/or effeminacy. “The American ideal, then, of sexuality,” Baldwin writes, “appears to be rooted in the American ideal of masculinity” (815). American manhood, Baldwin argues, relies upon and perpetuates the socially created binaries of the “cowboys and Indians, good guys and bad guys, punks and studs, tough guys and softies, butch and faggot, black and white” (815). Baldwin highlights that American masculinity is a force that shapes “the mores, morals and morality” of the space in which it exists; he further calls this kind of masculinity “exclusively white” and “heterosexual” (816; 820).

While David does develop a deep love for Giovanni, it does not last, and even after their first meeting, David is consumed with his internalized homophobia when he realizes he likes another male. A man, who David describes in horrifying terms as a “a mummy or a zombie” or “something walking after it had been put to death,” confronts David about his interest in Giovanni and David responds with both immense anger and startling fright. ““You like him—the barman,”” the man says and David is unable to speak only wanting to “hit him,” but eventually trying to tell him to mind his own business (252). David tells the man to “get the hell away [from

him]” and to “go to hell.” The man, however, continues to let David know that he is aware of his desire for Giovanni as well as his internalized homophobia (252).

The “zombie’s” response to David’s panic that someone has recognized his homosexual desires reveals to David what he now knows: he will suffer in his attempt to reject who he really is and the man he loves. “I go not to hell,” the man says while gripping a crucifix hanging from his neck, “But you my friend—I fear that you shall burn in a very hot fire. ... Oh, such fire” (252). The man touches his head and heart, indicating to David that he will suffer in these places for the way he feels about himself and for how he will treat others. “You will be very unhappy,” he says, “Remember that I told you so,” foreshadowing the long, panicked suffering that David has endured, he now confesses, because he fled from his desire for men (253).

While, for a brief period, David’s relationship with Giovanni flourishes, even as David is given the opportunity to truly love another person, he is still unable to escape his internalized homophobia. David recalls positive scenes in their relationship, yet still remembers being unable to be honest with Giovanni: “We made coffee and sometimes we drank cognac with it; we sat on the bed and talked and smoked. We seemed to have a great deal to tell—or Giovanni did. Even at my most candid,” David confesses, “even when I tried hardest to give myself to him as he gave himself to me, I was holding something back” (283). David is specifically referring here to Hella, his heterosexual girlfriend whom he does not really love and has promised to marry although he has not told that to Giovanni. David is also expressing his inability to fully accept a sexual relationship with another man. Reflecting back on this time, David realizes what his fear of “jeopardiz[ing]...that *immaculate* manhood” has done to his sense of identity and his relationships with others.

As David recounts the events leading to his and Giovanni's relationship falling apart, David's confession becomes more explicit in admitting the love he felt for Giovanni. "My executioners are here with me. ... They are everywhere I turn," David says, revealing that it would help him if he could feel guilty for what his internalized homophobia has caused him, but "the end of innocence," for David, "is also the end of guilt" (*Giovanni's Room* 311). Baldwin, in his essay "Preservation of Innocence," writes that "the American dream of love insists that the Boy get the girl...we are always told this is what he *really* wants" (598). This is this same formula for the American man that ignites David's internalized homophobia, and this formula also keeps David from being able to love Giovanni. Now, David can confess, "I loved him," and admit the fact that he will "never love anyone like that again;" however, it is too late to save Giovanni's life (*Giovanni's Room* 311). David even intimates that he is trapped in the male prison that Baldwin analyzes in his 1954 essay: "I walk up and down this house—up and down this house," David says, "I think of prison" (*Giovanni's Room* 311).

David's final recollections of his relationship with Giovanni before it ends further reveal the extent to which he now realizes his internalized homophobia has affected him. "Now—now of course," David professes, "I see something very beautiful in those days, which was torture then. I felt then that Giovanni was dragging me to the bottom of the sea" (313-314). David admits that he knows that he is the only person that cared for Giovanni—the only person in the world that Giovanni had to rely on because they had, for a long while, relied lovingly upon one another. "The burden of his salvation," David says, "seemed to be on me and I could not endure it" (314). David knows he could not permit Giovanni's dependency on him because of his internalized homophobia; he knows he cannot commit to Giovanni and truly reciprocate his love no matter how intricately connected he and Giovanni became.

When David ends his relationship with Giovanni, Giovanni confronts David about his internalized homophobia and his concern with preserving his masculinity. Giovanni tells David that he does not “love anyone,” and accuses him of never having loved anyone except his “mirror,” calling him a “little virgin” and likening the way he values his masculinity to having “some precious metal, gold, silver, rubies, maybe *diamonds* down there between your [David’s] legs!” (336). Giovanni makes it clear to David that he can pretend his heteronormativity in a relationship with Hella when David says to him, “I—I cannot have a life with you,” and Giovanni replies with sarcasm: But you can have a life with Hella. With that moon-faced little girl who thinks babies come out of cabbages—or frigidares, I am not acquainted with the mythology of your country. You can have a life with her. (337) Giovanni both recognizes and labels David’s sense of masculinity and internalized homophobia as a *mythos* that has been self-imposed. David explicitly asks Giovanni the question, “What kind of life can two men have together, anyway?” revealing that he is afraid that a same-sex relationship with another man could damage his manhood. Giovanni tells David that he is “[n]ot trying to make him a little girl. If I wanted a little girl,” Giovanni asserts, “I would be *with* a little girl” (337). David, in response, cries out, “But I’m a man, a man! What do you think can *happen* between us?” (338). When David tells Giovanni he “won’t be back,” Giovanni simply tells David that Americans have “no sense of doom” (338). David’s final thought after leaving Giovanni’s presence is “*One day I’ll weep for this. One of these days I’ll start to cry,*” foreshadowing the immense guilt he now admits to feeling in his reflection (340).

Beyond the pain and anguish that David causes Giovanni and himself by ending their relationship, David’s internalized homophobia has also driven him to hurt others, like an American expatriate named Sue. David seeks out Sue for a quick sexual hook-up before his

fiancé Hella returns from Spain, where she has been deciding whether to accept David's marriage proposal. David meets Sue as he is trying to seek out a woman to have sex with in order to reaffirm his heteronormative masculinity after his love affair with Giovanni. "I wanted to find a girl," David says, "any girl at all" (297). Attempting to convince Sue to have sex with him, David banter with her back and forth, yet, he cannot purge his mind of his relationship with Giovanni. When Sue finally consents, "snapping her fingers," saying "'come along'" and "'I'm certain to regret it,'" David recalls that he, then, has a feeling of "a dreadful holding back," which suggests that David has serious reservations about having sex with a woman (301). David says, "[W]hat I did with Giovanni could not possibly be more immoral than what I was about to do with Sue," revealing that he now realizes that the need to preserve his manhood and his fear of his same-sex desires have rendered him incapable of loving both men and women alike (301).

David also uses his heteronormative relationship with Hella to deny the reality of his same-sex relationship with Giovanni. When David gets Hella's letter from Spain professing her desire to be with him and potentially start a family, he recalls,

I felt a certain relief. It seemed that the necessity for decision had been taken away from my hands. I told myself that we had both always known, Giovanni and myself, that our idyll could not last forever. . . . Now she would be coming back and my life with Giovanni would be finished. It would be something that happened to me once—it would be something that had happened to many men once. (297)

In this moment of reflection, David recalls that he felt relieved of his burden to decide how to end his relationship with Giovanni, claiming that his decision had been taken away from him. He now recognizes that he was refusing to deal with his own feelings and that this kind of internalized homophobia and denial of same-sex attraction is experienced by many men.

David's relationship with Hella, even when the two spend time together in Paris, is completely passionless and only serves as a way for David to deal with his same-sex desires. When David gets Hella's letter, he describes his mood as "some grotesque spirit of celebration," highlighting David's reservations about having to face his escapist relationship with Hella, but also that he, at the time, feels better equipped to deal with his heteronormative fantasy than admit the truth about his feelings for Giovanni (296). Even when David discusses his relationship with Giovanni to Hella, he is only interested in finding ways to convey his love for Giovanni without compromising his heterosexual manhood. David tells Hella directly that he "is very fond of Giovanni," saying that he "loves him" in a way (330). David codes his expressions of love for Giovanni because he is trapped by the male prison created by his need to confirm his heterosexual manhood.

When David is caught betraying Hella with a sailor he has picked up for a weekend fling, his confession confirms that he has repressed his desire for men, but she has somehow sensed it: "Well," David says to Hella, "now you know," but she replies by saying that she believes she has "known it for a long time" (354). In this scene, David realizes that his own internalized homophobia has caused Hella suffering. "I knew it [David's desire for men] every time we went to bed," Hella says, "If only you had told me the truth *then*. Don't you see how unjust it was to wait for *me* to find it out? To put all the burden on *me*?" (355). Hella expects, as do others in David's life, for David to meet a model of American masculinity; however, David is unable to do so, and he finally seems to acknowledge that to strive for that "immaculate manhood" any longer would bring only more misery for himself and others.

Giovanni's fate, as well as Hella's departure after learning the truth from David, highlights the real consequences of David's internalized homophobia. David learns from reading

Parisian newspapers that Giovanni has murdered Guillaume after David abandoned him, and will be executed for his crime (357). “Giovanni’s fate swings before me,” David says, “like an unexpected lantern on a dark, dark night. . . . He knows that beyond the door which comes so deliberately closer, the knife is waiting. That door is the gateway he has sought so long out of this dirty world, this dirty body” (359). David now realizes that his internalized homophobia has had the largest hand in Giovanni’s social downfall and execution. David also realizes that Giovanni now faces execution because he lived in a world filled with people like himself who keep themselves and others from loving because they refuse to accept themselves.

The end of Baldwin’s novel highlights David’s realizations about how his obsession with his American brand of white, heteronormative masculinity and his consequent internalized homophobia have limited his ability to love others. Staring at his naked body in the mirror, David says, “I do not know what moves in this body, what this body is searching. It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time and it hurries towards revelation” (*Giovanni’s Room* 359). David then quotes from 1 Corinthians 13: “*When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things*” (*Giovanni’s Room* 359). Quoting this verse, David attempts to recognize his need to grow into full manhood—not just heterosexuality, but full humanity—by shedding the infantile brand of masculinity he has learned as well as the consequent internalized homophobia that has kept him from loving Giovanni and others. The part of the verse following the quote that Baldwin includes here is equally significant: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known” (*King James Bible*, I Cor. 13:12-13). Following this verse Paul then goes on to urge that the greatest of all gifts is the gift of love. Though unspoken by David, these words of Paul resonate for any reader who recognizes the

passage that is directly quoted. David has—as Paul’s prophecy suggests—viewed himself and others through the lens of his internalized homophobia; he has viewed himself “through a glass, darkly,” seeing mirrored back at him only a distorted version of himself, seeing only the hegemonic, heteronormative manhood with which, he confesses, he has become obsessed. This false mirroring, along with David’s attempts to achieve the “American ideal of manhood” that Baldwin critiques so effectively in his essays, have kept David from loving anyone at all—man or woman.

The final pages of the novel signal that David no longer wants to remain in the male prison that traps him in his own internalized homophobia. He admits, finally, that he wants to accept, not reject, who he really is. David says he “longs to” make Paul’s prophecy come true, to “crack that mirror and be free,” claiming that the “key to [his] salvation” is “hidden in [his] flesh” (359). David wishes to crack the mirror that reflects back at him only distorted versions of manhood shaped by hegemonic ideas of heterosexual masculinity. David says, “I move at last from the mirror and begin to cover that nakedness which I must hold sacred, though it be never so vile, which must be sourced perpetually with the salt of my life. I must believe, I must believe that the heavy grace of God, which has brought me to this place, is all that can carry me out of it” (359-360). That is, David now recognizes that he must accept his own flesh and scour it with the “salt of [his] life,” with his actions and deeds, loving others and himself in the flesh. David now knows how important it is for him to accept who he is and to accept the responsibility for those whom he loves with his flesh. Only through these actions, David realizes, may he potentially escape the male prison and the internalized homophobia that have, up to this point, ensnared his very being.

When David finally leaves the Parisian apartment that he and Hella shared, in which he has been narrating his confession, he describes his exit in a way that suggests he, in fact, now has the potential to overcome the social and cultural prescriptions that have made him hate himself and do such damage to others. As he holds the letter announcing Giovanni's execution hour, in the now present moment of the narrative, David says, "The morning weighs on my shoulders with the dreadful weight of hope and I take the blue envelope which Jacques has sent me and tear it slowly into many pieces, watching them dance in the wind, watching the wind carry them away. Yet...the wind blows some of them back on me" (360). The "dreadful weight of hope" David describes here embodies the struggle that David has gone through with his internalized homophobia, and initially, his understanding of manhood. While David is now better equipped to move on and accept who he has been, there is still the possibility that his internalized homophobia may continue to haunt him, like the pieces of Jacques's letter, blowing back onto him. David recognizes how difficult his struggle has been and that is what makes this hope "dreadful;" David is under no illusion that overcoming his internalized homophobia and remaining outside the "male prison" of white American masculinity is easily accomplished.

Baldwin's work is groundbreaking in its discussion of the dangers of the American ideology of heteronormative, white masculinity in which David confesses he has been trapped. While many critics of Baldwin's work have recognized his focus on themes of race, sexuality, and identity, many of them fail to highlight Baldwin's direct emphasis on masculinity and manhood. In *The Critical Reception of James Baldwin, 1963-2010*, Conesula Francis includes a chapter titled "Retheorizing James Baldwin: 1988-2000," noting the way in which critics and scholars of Baldwin's work began to shift the focus of their concerns. Francis writes that scholars felt that "a major aspect of Baldwin's work, his exploration of homosexuality and the influence

of sexual identity on human society, gets lost in the critical shuffle,” explaining that a later emphasis upon this subject changed Baldwin scholarship (63). For example, scholars like Aliyyah Abur-Rahman now argue that the purpose of Baldwin’s work, his activism, and his fiction is to promote the same kind of self-discovery that David must endure in his confession. Abur-Rahman writes, “Baldwin’s life project was to locate, or if necessary to forge, a place for the black, the impoverished, the artist, the gay—the oppressed and weary ‘outsider’—in his *own* country” (447).

It would be far too easy for a reader of *Giovanni’s Room* to conclude that David, at the end of his revealing and tormented confession, has learned nothing from his reflections. However, if one considers the raw admissions that David includes in attempting to detail how his internalized homophobia has kept him from loving others, it is clear that he has learned a great deal about how his obsession with manhood has caused suffering, not only to himself, but also the many other loved ones involved in his life. Like David, we must all pursue a similar reflection by taking on the challenges that Baldwin poses to his readers concerning the role and function of masculinity in our society. We need to more seriously examine how certain prescriptions of manhood and masculinity often drive the forces that control our social, cultural, and political existences, especially since, as Baldwin himself recognizes, those forces have been institutionalized to benefit those who are “simply the many” at the expense of those who are not.

CONCLUSION

REDEFINING MANHOOD THROUGH FICTION

Hemingway's fiction closely examines the way in which views of masculinity control a father's relationship with his son and the way in which an obsession with performing hegemonic manhood can lead to failure. Like the cougar frozen atop the African peak in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," Hemingway's male protagonists invite readers to question the purpose of such seemingly pointless brute displays of raw masculine strength when they lead to suffering and death. Both Nick and Joe experience failed rites of passage that leave them, like the reader, questioning the possibilities and true functions of the manhood projected by their fathers.

Similarly, Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* acts as a powerful account of how deeply interwoven one's view of manhood can be with one's identity. David, afraid of losing his prized manhood, internalizes the homophobia encouraged by a society that enforces heteronormative, hegemonic masculinity. David's confession reveals how his view of masculinity has kept him from accepting himself, and up until the final moments of his narrative, has rendered him incapable of loving others. Fewer texts do more to highlight the suffering and regret caused by men's obsession with maintaining society's prescription for ideal heteronormative manhood.

An analysis of these authors' works using masculinities studies and gender theory is only a smaller part of a much larger conversation still to be had concerning American masculinities. Many more pieces of American fiction provide a similar critique of hegemonic American manhood and the way in which it subverts alternative models of manhood through social and cultural prescriptions. Also, this conversation need not be limited to literary analysis, but can be engaged in an interdisciplinary context to suggest the importance of allowing all types of masculinity and femininity to coexist.

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