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That Way: An Examination of Male Relationships in Film During the Hays Code

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That Way:

An Examination of Male Relationships in Film During the Hays Code

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Abstract

The Hays Code (1934-1968) influenced the construct of United States masculinity and the discourse surrounding masculine presentation between the 1920s to the 1960s. The Hays Code and World War II affected the culture surrounding male/male relationships in the United States. Previous research done by David Lugowski (1999) and Jeffrey Suzik (1999) shows that both World Wars led to crises of masculinity in which the hegemonic ideal of masculinity was restructured to establish men as providers and warriors, and Code-era films reflected the discourse. To understand the gender roles in the 20th century, I analyzed the Hays code, male bonds, war in relation to masculinity, and the representation of these topics in film. I applied this research to four films: *Wings* (1927), *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), and *Midnight Cowboy* (1969). My analysis revealed that that films about masculinity made from the 1920s to the end of the Hays Code in 1968 have consistently presented stories involving intimacy. The presentation of male bonds in Code-era films shifted from unabashedly intimate to defensively supporting the hegemonic ideal to avoid implications of queerness, thus obfuscating homosexual desire that was accepted (albeit coded) before the Hays Code.

Keywords: Hays Code, masculinity, queer theory, film, World War II, homosociality, United States.

INTRODUCTION

Masculinity is a social construct that awards power and privilege to men in any patriarchy. Gender presentation in the general sense is something that hinges on performance, and performance includes not only appearance but behavior. Philosopher Judith Butler once said on the nature of gender and sexuality, "[T]he category of sex and the naturalized institution of heterosexuality are *constructs*, socially instituted and socially regulated fantasies or "fetishes," not *natural* categories, but *political* (categories that prove that recourse to the "natural" in such contexts is always political)" (italics in original) (Butler 161). Since masculinity is a patriarchal cultural construct instituted to ensure male superiority and power, the traits identified as ideally "masculine" change and shift depending on concurrent sociopolitical movements. This fluidity in how masculinity is defined is imbedded in ensuring the maintenance of the patriarchy. Something perceived as unequivocally "masculine" one year may be categorized as "effeminate" the next, and this could be due to any number of factors. For example, James Bond is a fictional character that constantly adapts to the "masculine ideal" of the time. The Bond featured in *Dr. No* (1962) appeals more to the image of a man who can successfully ravage women and engage in a battle of wits, while the Bond in *Casino Royale* (2006) appears as a brutalized killing machine with a cool façade.

A character like Bond, or like any of the various male stars of films and television throughout the twentieth century, could be said to adhere to the concept of the "hegemonic man." Coined by theorist R.W. Connell, the "hegemonic man" is a figure representing how a culture currently identifies and defines the masculine ideal. This figure is both constantly shifting and unattainable. Bond was characterized around the middle of the 20th century, a cultural moment that held reverence for the idea of a debonair, intelligent, strong, and sexually viable man—the

type of man who could feasibly fight a war. Connell describes, “At a society-wide level…there is a circulation of models of admired masculine conduct, which may be exalted by churches, narrated by mass media, or celebrated by the state. Such models refer to, but also in various ways distort, the everyday realities of social practice,” (Connell 10). It should be emphasized that the figures of hegemonic masculinity and femininity alike are defined by those in power which, under the patriarchal system of American culture, have consistently been wealthy white heterosexual men. This then adds to the futility of the effort to meet hegemonic standards.

Hays Code

When the construct of masculinity changes, so does the perception of masculine relationships—romantic or platonic. A good way to observe these changes is through popular culture, and particularly film, which not only functions as a snapshot of the current culture, but also of the current patriarchal desires. One event that had a major impact on both American culture and the American masculine construct was World War II. At the same time as World War II was the implementation of the Motion Picture Production Code (known colloquially as the Hays Code after William Hays, president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America). The Code was instituted to regulate what could and could not be shown on screen in accordance with the moral values of the time, done as a way to control what American audiences consumed while keeping their moral fiber intact. The Code was not only a reaction to the perceived debauchery onscreen, but the perceived debauchery of American culture—drinking, violence, casual sex, and “sex perversion” were all seen by these higher-ups as threats to the country’s moral code, especially in their appeal to rural America. An early version of the Code was written in 1930, though this was generally not enforced or followed. In 1934, the code was amended, and this amended document would be strictly enforced from 1934 to 1968. Films that

failed to meet the Hays Code's regulations would not be produced under the Motion Picture Distribution system. This document would become what was later known as the Hays Code. Given the time frame of these regulations, most of the Code era was affected greatly by the shift in the perception of the masculine construct that came after World War II. Masculinity portrayed in American film in the post-World War II era during the Hays Code was greatly affected by the perceived dichotomy between "acceptable" masculine relationships and relationships between men viewed or coded as queer (as in, a non-platonic dynamic existing between people of the same gender identity) , a dichotomy that constantly changed due to the changing cultural perceptions of "acceptable" intimacy (romantic and/or platonic) and the growing celebration of emotional detachment within the construct of masculinity.

The Hays Code states in its first section that motion picture has "moral obligations" (Doherty 349). The document is concerned that films are widely distributed and the public is porous, taking in and adopting the values represented. One thing done deliberately in the Code is ruling that "evil is not presented alluringly…evil and good are never confused and…evil is always recognized as evil" (Doherty 351) before cementing what constitutes evil. Later on in the document is a list of evils to avoid. Within the list is the rule that "sex perversion or any inference to it is forbidden" (Doherty 363). The phrase "sex perversion," supplied with no elaboration or guidance, is vague enough that anything could fall under it: adultery, pedophilia, bestiality, and homosexuality can all be seen as equal evils.

Before the institution of the Code, eastern American culture in the 1920s saw somewhat of a queer revolution, or a general celebration of queer life, which was then reflected in film. As defined by George Chauncey, the "pansy craze" was a time in the Prohibition years in which gay men "acquired unprecedented prominence throughout [New York City], taking a central place in

its culture" (Chauncey 301). The craze was then reflected in film with the surge of queer coded characters, like the character roles portrayed by Franklin Pangborn in the films *The Half-Naked Truth* (1932), *Only Yesterday* (1933), and *Professional Sweetheart* (1933), among many others. Barrios states "The millions of spectators going to movies in the early Depression years were frequently, even regularly, exposed to gay and lesbian characters on the screen. A number of those spectators in America as well as abroad knew plainly who those characters were and what they were about" (Barrios 59). Although Barrios states that a number of audience members during the time knew what was being hinted at, it was during this time that the language and representations were so coded and buried that, by the time the weights of censorship were removed, filmmakers didn't know how to present these characters, and filmgoers didn't know how to spot them.

By 1968, the Hays Code was abandoned in favor of the Motion Picture Association of America's rating system, which was originally G (general audiences), M (mature audiences), R (restricted), and X (no persons under 16 years old). This measure was taken both as a response to accusations of censorship and as a means of appeasing the directors who had been pushing the envelope on restricted material into the 1960s. What came post-1968 was backlash, an effort to make up for lost time and ensure that the audience truly understood what was being intimated in clear terms, and to characterize beyond a doubt who the real men, defined by fulfilling expectations of being physically strong providers, were and how they felt about the men projecting effeminacy. Any man less than the ideal was considered a pseudo-man. This overcompensation didn't only result from the censorship codes being broken. It also came from the ongoing shift in how masculinity was viewed in America, and the growing idea that it was being continually threatened. Of course, the 1960s was a time of great political upheaval.

The emerging Civil Rights discourse and anti-war effort both led to a wave of anti-establishment sentiment in the culture that was then recognized and reflected in the media. This created a tension between the media that used the loosened constraints of film censorship to uphold a midcentury traditionalist doctrine and the media that used its newfound freedom to critique the outmoded masculine paradigm of strong, stoic, silent providers. John Wayne starred in *The Undefeated* (1969) in the same year that he derided *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) for its queer themes. The two films utilized similar images of masculinity, although one aimed to uphold tradition while the other aimed to subvert it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Hays Code was, at its heart, a means of combatting subversion and upholding traditionalism. In the United States, the decade following World War I was one that did not align with "ideal" moral values. The Prohibition Era was fraught with violence, sexuality, and illegal behavior—things that would later be condemned and forbidden under the Hays Code. While Prohibition functioned as an effort to curb debauchery, it only exacerbated it, which led to new efforts in the 1930s to end this age of wild hedonism and return to the mythic moral righteousness that apparently existed and strengthened the country before the 1920s. The popularized moral values did not necessarily encourage goodwill or freedom of expression, but the perpetuation of a system that kept the powerful in power and refused those not in power the opportunity to gain equality. A valuable culture was one that adhered to a capitalist, colonialist view of human relations, and the goal of the Hays Code was to have media reflect this culture while also rejecting anything that had the possibility of offending those who promoted this culture. As stated in the code, "No picture should lower the moral standards of those who see it" (Doherty 351). This line, opening the "Working Principles" of the document, is deliberately

vague. When the phrase "moral standards" is unclear, that means that anything the MPPDA dislikes could be seen as a transgression, and therefore dangerous to the public. "Moral standards" and "evil" do not exist as abstract constructs, but things with fluid definitions decided by men in power. Vague language was in their best interests because it allowed for easily defensible regulation. One of the biggest things to be regulated in the interest of upholding the 1930s patriarchy was the presentation of "correct" masculinity.

Before the Hays Code was implemented, the depictions of masculinity and sexuality were allowed more room outside strict definition. Men who were shy and physically weak could still be seen as powerful and intelligent while also poking fun at the "typical" powerful masculine lover archetypes, as seen with Harold Lloyd's protagonist in *Girl Shy* (1927). There was also the possibility of women taking on "men's" roles, such as commanding armies and wooing maidens, as in *Queen Christina* (1933). By 1934, when the Hays Code was enforced, it became clear that things like gender roles and sexuality were not to be toyed with. Detailed by film historian Richard Barrios, gone were the days of Mae West, an actress who, in the 1920s and early 1930s, committed what was seen as a horrific sin by the Legion of Decency: treating sex as something light, fun, and laughable (Barrios 135). Men, although granted more leeway in their sexual and social expression, had to commit to an image of strength. They provided, they worked, they raged, they laughed, and they proved themselves to be desirable to all audiences. Even if they were close with other men, it had to be made clear, either by vaguely homophobic dialogue or the inclusion of one or more female love interests, that they were not "that way." This image of "correct" strength allowed for the United States to present a unified patriarchy, a generalized unit of men who could defend themselves, provide for their families, and dominate—both physically and sexually. This was not only a cultural need, but a political one, especially with the approach

of another World War. Many men during the early Code years were plenty complex and dynamic, despite being forced to adhere to such vague guidelines involving moral imperatives. What was made explicit was not so much the limits of what constituted a "real" man, but the broad expanse of qualities that constituted a "weak," or even a "false" one.

Before the Hays Code was instituted, it was common enough to see queer representation (romance/intimacy between two people outside of the heterosexual paradigm) onscreen. The representation was not usually three-dimensional, but it was present and normalized. "Sissies" were a common character type, with the actor Franklin Pangborn at the forefront. These men were usually effeminate and artistic, quick-witted and emotional. Visually, they would be clean-cut, often wearing a flower on their lapel (to symbolize a "pansy"). As said by queer film historian Vito Russo, "That there was a visual and verbal code for homosexuality in the movies is certain; powerlessness, femininity in men, decadence and sometimes anarchy were consistently colored with sexual references that became more explicit each year until the code clamped down in 1934" (Russo 36). Sissies were derided and laughed at, but the cruelty behind this laughter varied depending on the film. They functioned as witty sources of jokes, as in *Fig Leaves* (1926), just as often as butts of jokes, as in *Wanderer of the West* (1927). While at times intended to be presented as a weaker man, these characters would also be presented as a different kind of man from the ones shown as protagonists. For example, there was a scene in the sports drama *The Sport Parade* (1932) involving a boxing match between the two male leads. During the match, two men (coded as a couple) get up and leave the match in disgust. There are two jokes in this scene: The first, easier joke is that effeminate men cannot stomach violence. The other joke, which may only be caught by more discerning viewers, highlights the stupidity inherent in the practice of sports. As written by artist Barbara Kruger, "You construct intricate rituals which

allow you to touch the skin of other men" (Kruger 1981). The men leaving are not disgusted with the violence because it is violent, but because it is cowardly. The joke is on the boxers, because at least these men getting up and leaving don't feel the need to hide.

After the Code was firmly established in 1934, the overt and explicit sissies were almost completely eliminated, to the point where mere references to Franklin Pangborn in a script were eliminated (Barrios 165). However, sissies never left the screen. Men coded as effeminate were not positioned as familiar types for the viewing pleasure of the audience, but rather to bolster the idealized masculinity of the men around them characterized as real. Russo characterizes this role as a "yardstick sissy," a coded queer man placed next to a coded straight man, made to seem comparably effeminate to affirm the other man's straightness, and therefore his masculinity. For example, in *His Girl Friday* (1940), the news office's short, single Bensinger is characterized as the yardstick sissy when placed in contrast with his tough-guy field reporter coworkers, the nail put in the coffin when Rosalind Russel's character Hildy refers to him as a prospective bridesmaid. Since idealized masculinity (at this point in time, being a quick witted, physically strong provider) was the goal, effeminate behavior, and by extension queerness, became the ultimate insult. As stated by Barrios, "Male jealousy [in terms of proving physical/sexual power] must naturally find every way to minimize the competition, and nothing spells putdown like 'fag.' The equation is 'decorating ability = fussiness = unmasculine = gay'" (Barrios 162). Sexual deviancy is unacceptable under the Hays Code unless it is portrayed as such. When placed in contrast to ideal masculinity, the implication is clear. The presence of yardstick sissies is not done to uplift and define real men, but rather to put down and broaden the definition of fake men. At times, it was less about the yardstick sissy than it was about the yardstick hunk, who served to put down any and all alternative expressions of masculinity. It was easier to

identify and deride the qualities of an unlikable man than identifying the invisible and elusive qualities of a real man.

In the films of this time, it was not impossible for men to be portrayed in meaningful relationships with other men without it being seen as queer. In fact, close male relationships were not usually seen as a subversion. Men being close and vulnerable with other men only proved that they treasured and understood the value of masculine company. Strong men onscreen found kinship in their peers or offered wisdom to young men off the beaten path with no real male figures in their lives. *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) saw Jim Stark offering guidance to Plato, a young man with no father. Jim found comfort in Plato's company, and Plato saw both a schoolyard crush and surrogate father in Jim. The key to presenting this behavior without it being coded as queer was to sufficiently code these men as strong and sufficiently masculine, which would then prove their straightness. If queer men couldn't be considered strong, then every strong man shown in a film would be straight. These men could be coded as strong and masculine either through virtue of their presentation and actions, or by placing them in proximity of enough yardstick sissies or stock female love interests. Despite these methods of affirming heterosexuality, discerning audiences could still make out qualities of these relationships that existed outside of the heteronormative paradigm. The ideal of masculinity as a strong, lonely, silent type was not being denied or rejected, but subverted.

Masculinity in Crisis

It was following both World War I and World War II that America experienced a crisis of masculinity, believing the current presentations and definitions of masculinity to fail to live up to the current hegemonic ideal, that being a strong, stoic man who actively provided for his family. Fixing these masculinities was not understood in truth as reconstructing what was already a

construct but attending to the corrupted spirits and work ethics of the young men who had been traumatized by the war, whether they were involved directly or only witnesses. After experiencing war, many men were left without the will to join or rejoin the workforce, or attend to their family lives, thus failing to take on their needed roles as providers. It was not only masculinity that changed, but every social dynamic that had been understood as normal before the war. As put by film historian David Lugowski, "The post-World War I era, a key period in identity politics in U.S. culture, with its disillusioned veterans, feminist struggles, racial and ethnic migrations, shifts and tensions, and widespread contempt for Prohibition, was often enabling for queerness. Queer fire accrued to the 'flaming youth' culture of the Jazz Age" (Lugowski 5). Following large-scale events that greatly affect mass culture (in this case, a war), it is fairly common for there to be a tendency to question the culture at large and urge social progression. When faced with daunting social progression, the powers that be who wish to retain their power may vie for a return to traditionalism, or the state of culture before whatever event occurred. Because queerness was such a hot-button topic in the late 1920s (especially in New York), it presented itself as a scapegoat. Those who clamored for decency, like William Hays, could criticize the celebration of effeminacy during a post-World War I era that was producing no new heroes. The goal of Hays Code entertainment was not only to reflect popular culture, but to create an ideal culture for viewers to emulate. Going into the 1930s, everyone knew that pansy-types existed. The Hays Office wanted to create a world where they didn't, and real men reigned supreme.

However, the masculinity crisis following World War I had different results than the one following the second World War. One of the attempts to fix America's young men traumatized by the war, either as participants or spectators, was the Civilian Conservation Corps, an effort that

came about during the New Deal in 1933. The CCC aimed to make a new crop of brave, strong young American men—nothing like the aimless, shiftless, effeminate group that was turning up during the Prohibition era. However, the goal was not to emulate the violent sort of strength seen during wartime, but a new masculine strength that centered on responsibility. Historian Jeffrey Suzik discusses the efforts of this period, stating: "Letter writers…contributed a great deal to the ongoing discourse about what the identity of a truly masculine, reinvigorated CCC boy should be. In these letters, writers…intimated that American masculinity need not (and should not) be affirmed through military training" (Suzik 162). Going into the 1930s and early 1940s, the new ideal man would not be one defined by violence. It was better that a commendable man be a responsible, dependable talent, and with those qualities he may go on to be a great provider, as would have been the goal defined for him. There was still a need for boys to prove themselves as real men, but manhood was based more on respectable behavior than impressive action. This development can be seen in the leads of pre- and post-Code films. The drunken, saucy, gun-toting Nick Charles in *The Thin Man* (1934) is a far cry from the goofy family man Nick Charles in *Another Thin Man* (1939). The ideal young man of the 1930s and early 1940s was meant to be admirable, and admirability did not include a capacity for brutality. This new, tightlipped, postwar strength did not encourage power as much as it villainized tenderness.

War and Homosociality

Homosocial behavior generally refers to the behavior exhibited by those who spend their time around people of the same gender, but the connotations run far deeper. Men socialized in this version of homosocial masculinity often become insecure or aware of how they may be labelled, leading to choices (such as engaging in homophobia or misogyny) made to soothe any fears of intimacy between men existing outside the culturally acceptable masculine paradigm.

Gender studies researcher Nils Hammarén wrote in his essay about homosocial bonds and intimacy:

> “The discontinuity between male homosociality and homosexuality results in male homosocial relationships being a form of ‘male bonding,’ which is characterized by homosocial desire and intimacy, as well as homosexual panic. Homosocial desire refers to men turning their attention to other men, and homosexual panic refers to the fear of this attention gliding over into homosexual desire. In an attempt to emphasize heterosexuality, fear or hatred of homosexuals and misogynist language are developed” (Hammarén).

During war especially, homosocial bonding is essential. It allowed men to explore intimacy in a traumatic situation while also creating relationships that may last their entire lifetime. During World War I, these kinds of friendships (with the understanding of some level of nonsexual romanticism) were normalized and encouraged. By World War II, while these relationships were still very present and just as important, the attitude toward the bond was not the same. It was understood that men enter into intense, close relationships with other men during wartime, but expected that they return to their normal roles (sexual power over female partners) upon their return home. There is a lot of value found in homosocial bonding of any kind, but plenty of fear surrounding it. The importance of homosociality exists in a contradictory state, in which bonding socially with women is seen as effeminate behavior, as well as being in exclusive proximity with men, so other language surrounding homosocial bonds must be developed.

This contradiction inherent in the cultural perception of homosocial behavior plays a part in the masculinity crisis following World War II. There is a feeling of a misstep on the part of

soldiers, taking part in behavior that would be condemned in any other circumstance. Holding on to one another or falling asleep in the same quarters may be perfectly acceptable and encouraged during a war, but surprising if not taboo in civilian society. While some bonds between soldiers were certainly romantic, whether out of homosexual desire or emotional/physical necessity, plenty were platonic. This did not matter, as pre-war masculine gender roles of men being stable, constant providers for their families had already shifted to the postwar realities of unemployed veterans with behavioral issues for which they were offered no support. Many veterans were out of a job while their wives had been in the workforce in service of the war effort until its end in 1946, and masculinity (as it was defined at the time) had to be asserted somehow. Feelings surrounding this perceived misstep in the post-war cementation of pre-war gender roles are addressed by gender scholar Eve Sedgwick in her study *Between Men:* “To draw the ‘homosocial’ back into the orbit of ‘desire,’ of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted” (Sedgwick 1-2). How, then, can media present these bonds while still retaining the cultural understanding of patriarchy-approved masculinity?

“Buddies” in Films from 1920 to 1970

“Buddy films” can be defined as films in which the central relationship and emotional core is the bond between two men. Sometimes this bond is coded as familial or brotherly, sometimes rooted in a childhood friendship, sometimes resulting from two strangers fining one another during a stressful time. Film historian Cynthia Fuchs describes buddy films with, “The buddy movie typically collapses intramasculine differences by effecting an uncomfortable sameness, a transgression of boundaries between self and other, inside and outside, legitimate

and illicit" (Fuchs, 194). The buddy film was useful both as a way to reaffirm the image of what was seen as correct masculinity under the Hays Office (two strong, independent men affirming their masculinity together) and act as a means of delivering stories about intimacy that fell safely within however the masculine paradigm was defined at the time. The buddies in *The Sport Parade* and war drama *Wings* (1927) suited the ideal of hegemonic masculinity for their time, and that time allowed for more expressions of physical intimacy. Following World War II, the buddies in films like *Rebel Without a Cause* portrayed their bond through moments of emotional intimacy. However, the construct of masculinity was defined, intimacy remained an important thread running through these films. Like male bonds during World War II, these onscreen relationships could very well be seen as romantic and sexually coded by certain audiences but were often intended as presentations deep platonic love that, although unknowingly, resembled the romantic friendships built during the war. Fuchs identifies the cultural necessity of the buddy film as, "Coming of age during the late 1960s, the buddy film responded to the political advent of sex and race issues…Holly Haskell describes this period as 'a time when men, released from their stoical pose of laconic self-possession by the "confessional" impulse and style of the times, discovered each other'" (Fuchs 196). Those late years of the Code were a time when (mostly white) men could tell stories with and about one another without having to worry about whatever social ruckus was occurring around them. The intent was to reinforce the patriarchal values of men exerting their power, but many of these stories also functioned as acts of healing. They were a way for writers and actors alike to recreate the comfort and intimacy they experienced during wartime. Sometimes the stories were intended and understood as romantic in one way or another, and sometimes they were not, but there was always an emphasis on intimacy.

As self-serving as these stories were for the men who made them that wanted to remain comfortable in their concept of acceptable masculinity, there was an underlying current of queer affirmation among many of them, able to be enjoyed by queer viewers and digestible for heterosexual ones. These were deep emotional bonds between men presented as entirely normal, even encouraged, though often with the insert of a female love interest to emphasize where a real man's loyalties lie. At the same time, these stories could also be used to deny socially perceived queerness, emphasizing the previously identified homosocial contradiction. Men coded under the American masculine ideal could readily engage in misogyny and (nonexplicit) homophobia, their relationship remaining right and virtuous in comparison to whatever yardstick sissies are close to them.

These stories became so popular during a time that was so keen on defining and affirming real men, doing everything just short of yelling that heterosexual was equal to masculine which was equal to strong, and homosexual was equal to effeminate, which was equal to weak, because they provided male viewers with a depiction of intimacy that was excusable under dire conditions. Fuchs' identification of the cultural necessity is perfectly sensible but ignores a simpler explanation. With masculinity being a cultural construct, it has many rules that of course will not naturally apply to every man born, so men will ultimately be made to feel as if they must force themselves to adhere to those rules. One of the cultures of American masculinity especially is that men must not desire emotional intimacy, which is false, as emotional intimacy is a fundamentally human desire. Thus, (oftentimes heterosexual) men want access to stories about the intimacy they don't let themselves feel, sexual or not, and those stories often would not be told with women because the classic narrative surrounding men's pursuit of women was built so much on conquest. Buddy films such as *Rebel Without a Cause* and *The Big Sky* (1952) in which

men form strong bonds under perilous circumstances, or even the films surrounding the comedic partnerships of duos like Laurel and Hardy or Martin and Lewis, don't shy away from showing men in relationships with or attracted to women. What these films do is show that the relationships these men have with one another exist with separate conduct from the male/female relationships shown onscreen, as male characters may interact with women for the purpose of romantic or sexual conquest, while men interact with other men for the purpose of emotional, human understanding, thus making these relationships appear to be more meaningful to the characters and the audience. Buddy films, or any films focused on the relationship between two or more men, allowed these men to tell emotionally intimate stories without the immediate connotation of effeminacy or queerness. They just had to prove through the presence of an attractive woman that these relationships were not going anywhere untoward.

METHODS

In analyzing the way male/male relationships evolved, four films will be analyzed: *Wings* (1927), *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), and *Midnight Cowboy* (1969). These films have been chosen due to their cultural popularity upon release, and for how their depictions of male/male relationships adhered to the cultural expectations of masculinity for their time. Not all of these movies have explicit presentations of war and homosociality or buddy relationships, but all four serve as clear depictions of the ways in which the presentation of masculinity and masculine bonds changed from the late 1920s into the late 1960s, which, by extension, shows how the Hays Code affected the American understanding of male/male relationships. Through these films, we can see how different eras of cinema explored the differences between acceptable masculine behaviors and relationships, and those that were coded and thus determined to be queer, or in proximity to queerness.

MEASURES

These films are, first and foremost, being analyzed through a queer feminist theoretical lens. However, the lens through which these films are being observed also includes and hinges upon an understanding of the history surrounding perceptions and depictions of masculinity in popular culture, an understanding of the history surrounding the discourse around queer relationships (romantic, platonic, heterosexual, homosexual, or otherwise), and an identification of shifts in the culture surrounding discourse, perception, and presentations of the masculine construct. These films were not only chosen due to their relation to the topics discussed, but also their existence in particular moments in time. *Wings* was released in 1927, which was an era before the Hays Code and before World War II. *The Best Years of Our Lives* was released in 1946, placing it incredibly close to World War II while still in the constraints of the Hays Code. *Rebel Without a Cause* was released in 1955, which was in the later years of the Hays Code and far enough following World War II that the reinterpretation of the masculine ideal was now completely natural within the American zeitgeist. *Midnight Cowboy* was released in 1969, which was both post-Code and post-World War II, placing it in the unique position of being a clear depiction of how masculinity could now be represented during a time of cultural revolution and the loosening of censoring constraints. It was also made during the Vietnam War, thus adding another layer of discourse the forms masculinity and heroism would take during a controversial war. This progression gives us a view into both how and when cultural views on the masculine construct would shift.

ANALYSIS

Wings (1927)

Wings is most known today as the first film to win an Academy Award for Best Picture, but there is plenty of value present in the film in how it allows for an understanding of homosocial dynamics and ideal masculinity during World War I but adapted for a 1927 audience. The film follows two soldiers in World War I, Jack Powell and David Armstrong, both involved in a romantic rivalry over the same woman that gradually turns into a begrudging professional respect and then a deep, meaningful friendship. At the end of the film, when Jack and David have made peace over their rivalry and see one another as close friends, David is involved in a crash that Jack is unaware he survived. David steals a German plane and Jack, believing him to be an enemy, shoots him down. He soon realizes his mistake, lands his plane, and rushes to find David who is collapsed in a stretch of French land. This action was not imperative to the war effort, but rather done as an impulsive need on the part of Jack to express his fondness before it was too late. They hold one another and communicate how important their friendship was. Jack cries and kisses David on the mouth before he dies.

To contemporary audiences, this exchange is almost unarguably romantic. The closeness and the language used, despite emphasizing friendship, speaks to an emotional intimacy usually only found in romantic partnerships. From a contemporary perspective, kissing another person on the mouth, looking deeply into their eyes, holding their head, stroking their hair, and proclaiming that nothing else is as important as their relationship is not usually behavior reserved for a friend. However, while it could have certainly been interpreted by some viewers as romantic at the time, it was not intended as such, and not largely seen as such. The homosocial bonds between soldiers (and young men in general) were widely recognized at the time to be natural, healthy, and worth encouraging, even when verging into physical expression. Any more suspicion could be cut in the movie when, upon David's death, Jack immediately pursues and

forms an explicitly romantic bond with Mary, the girl the two had rivaled over. Men could prove themselves to be physically strong and emotionally capable through their relationships with other men, thus having the capacity to become successful future providers. Historian E. Anthony Rotundo details the nature of these wartime relationships: "Gentle emotions served both as the cement of male friendship in youth and as one of its chief subjects as well. More than this, many young men expressed their fondness in affectionate physical gestures. All together, these friendships inverted usual patterns of male behaviour—they were intimate attachments that verged on romance" (Rotundo 1). During this time, it was not as though male/male relationships were considered without romance (romance here defined as emotionally and physically intimate, though not necessarily sexual), but that romantic friendships were common and natural. A man expressing the emotional love for a man that one might have towards a woman only showed that he treasured this bond, just so long as he did not cross over into a sexual relationship.

These deep emotional and physical connections were also identified as typical for youths. Brown goes on to contextualize the scene involving David's death, "While it is possible to view this scene as the ending of a homosexual relationship, there are so many elements of Rotundo's description of romantic friendship present here that it is difficult to view it as anything else…Jack is only able to begin an affair with [Mary] once David is dead; the romantic friendship has prepared him for heterosexual love" (Brown 91). The implication here is that the definition of male queerness has not yet become so broad as to include behaviors and interactions that would later be considered effeminate. Jack shows a lot of emotional and physical tenderness towards his friend, but he ends up in a relationship with a woman, so there is no doubt that he is heterosexual. This is done to show that, even though Jack has discovered a normal, natural, intimate relationship with another man, he is able to understand his role and

move on to what was perceived to be a real relationship. However, so much more freedom was given during this time to display a close, intimate relationship between two men without the immediate connotation of sexuality. It is unlikely that a moment like this would be allowed after the implementation of the Hays Code. Even despite the affirmations of heterosexuality, this level of male/male tenderness would not be received kindly by those wishing to uphold the 1930s masculine construct.

Masculinity was being redefined to the patriarchal dominant culture in the late 1920s going into the 1930s to adapt to the popularized image of a successful man during the Prohibition Era, thus highlighting in real life and the reflected popular culture the value found in rebellion. The popularized image of a man was not the physically strong, working-class womanizer that came about after World War II, but a man who was urbane, witty, and emotionally intelligent. Film historian Drew Todd describes the dandy craze of this era, stating “In blurring the lines of distinction between genders, the dandy similarly initiates a ‘release from the ties of sexual difference.’ He is a protean character whose movement between the sexes (and sexualities) defines his rebelliousness as well as his appeal in 1930s Hollywood” (Todd 173). The heterosexual dandy of this era was allowed to engage in an acceptable level of queerness, almost as a means of capturing the disillusionment of the Prohibition era and repurposing it into a manner of behavior that acted outside of the previously defined masculine paradigm. This form of expression existed between the turn of the century through World War I because it emphasized the social development that could occur alongside urban development. If society progressed, so did human nature and human relationships. The homosociality in *Wings* emphasizes this form of masculinity as a way of codifying the importance of male/male bonds during wartime, and how men seen as pillars of great strength may become even stronger by engaging in forms of

emotional intimacy. While neither Jack nor David are dandies, they are taking part in an acceptable form of queerness that operates within the masculine norm and harkens back to the nostalgic bonds of wartime. At the same time, anything possibly questionable about this behavior is rectified by Jack's immediate pairing off with a woman. This was a time before the Hays Code in which queer behavior did not hold an inherent danger, but rather built up a level of emotional intimacy that was held and desired by many men. It was a cultural standard, and this cultural standard was freely expressed in film. At the time, *Wings* was the ultimate expression of wartime friendship, and it was greatly enjoyed by audiences. Years later, with the Code established, a film with this level of explicit male/male intimacy could not be made. In the coming decades of the Code, intimacy and honesty could not exist at once.

The Best Years of Our Lives (1946)

Directed by William Wyler, who was himself a veteran, *The Best Years of Our Lives* was released almost immediately after World War II ended. This was when American culture was in its infancy of redefining itself, trying to understand how a return to normal could be possible in the face of so much change. There are three veterans at the focus of this film: Al Stephenson, a family man who is unprepared to see how his family has progressed without him; Fred Derry, a traumatized man who must cope with a loveless marriage that he cannot financially support; and Homer Parrish, who feels he cannot return to being a young, engaged athlete after becoming disabled in the war. All these men feel, in different ways, that they have had their masculinity threatened. Al has become a stranger to the people he means to provide for. Fred cannot provide money for his wife, and because he feels no emotional or romantic closeness to his wife, he does not feel willing to take part in the nuclear family structure encouraged for him. Homer no longer

feels like a real man due to his disability. Thus, some of the only people these men can find solace with are each other.

Performance, with its various definitions, becomes an important codifier of the real men in the 20th century. If he cannot adhere to the ideal masculine image, physically or behaviorally, he has failed to perform his duties in some way. The men who could not take part in the nuclear family structure expected in the late 1940s failed to do their jobs as men, as did the men who no longer had the strapping bodies associated with physical strength. The failure to exist in adherence to the cultural norms of postwar masculinity function as new means of emasculation. Cultural analyst Sarah Sahn writes in her essay on the intersection between disability and masculinity in the film: “Abject masculinity thus disrupts normative expressions of military and civilian masculinity alike: military spaces become contexts where the three men are paradoxically freed from their need to assert dominance, and are allowed to share their feelings, express pain and fear, and speak (or choose not to speak) freely about their wounds and war experiences” (Sahn 21). During the war itself, when surrounded by other soldiers, disability may not have seemed so daunting. Many men were left with the loss of some sort of physical ability, and those around them understood what they had to do to lose that aspect of themselves. Upon re-entering civilian society, the perspective from civilians becomes that these men have proved their manhood through sacrifice, but also sacrificed some of their manhood through losing it. Physical strength became one of the aspects tied to American masculinity after World War II (as the narrative was that the war was won through domination). Upon losing any kind of strength, even in a context perceived as honorable, a man will still be seen as insufficient. By the end of the film, Homer can reclaim a masculinity separate from physical aptitude by finding comfort in allowing himself to be supported by those around him. He puts himself in a vulnerable position

in which his fiancée helps him prepare and dress for bed, which he cannot do without his hooks. He did not do this when first coming home out of fear that his fiancée would see him as less of a man but bringing her into this vulnerable ritual helps him to realize that letting the people he loves see every aspect of the person he has become will only help him become a more fulfilled person, despite whatever role he is meant to fill.

Following the conditions of war, men find themselves in a liminal space in which behaviors that were celebrated and comforting during wartime may no longer be acceptable in a civilian context. Veterans are celebrated and thanked following World War I and World War II, but their emotional turmoil is not convenient for the newly defined confines of cultural masculinity. Acceptable behavior, like the construct of masculinity, is something that changes without an explicit warning, and men are left to adapt or be deemed unable to perform their roles (physically strong independent caretaker) as men. World War I historian Santanu Das comments on this this behavioral transition: "In the trenches of World War I, the norms of tactile contact between men changed profoundly…the sense of alienation from home led to a new level of intimacy under which the carefully constructed mores of civilian society broke down […] These moments of charged physical contact […] raise questions about the relation between the experimental reality of the body under physical extremity and the social constructions of gender and sexuality" (Das 52-53). The same intimacy and questions resulted from the conditions of World War II, but the difference was that a post-World War II society was even more hostile to this behavior under civilian circumstances. Men returned from the war changed, and they would never return to how they once were. There is nothing inherently wrong with that, but there were negative cultural connotations with the failure to return to normalcy, as that return was greatly encouraged with little room for transition. The relationships created during wartime allowed men

to unpack what happened to them and how it affected them, but those relationships were not expected to be given nearly as much attention as the transition back into civilian society. *The Best Years of Our Lives* is groundbreaking for its time because it confronts the realities of adjustment following physical and emotional trauma, but it was still prevented the opportunity to be as forthright as it could have. Not only could the film not be candid and truthful about the realities of wartime intimacy (physical/emotional), but it could also not fully express the unfairness and uselessness behind the cultural expectations of masculinity. If the Hays Office was going to put forth an ideal (pre-war traditionalist adjusted for the new expectations of physical strength and defense) society onscreen, it could not reflect the existing cultural inequities just as they were.

Whether or not wartime intimacy was romantic, the exact conditions of wartime cannot be replicated upon returning to civilian society, so veterans may find solace in shared experience. There is a scene in which each of these men find each other in a bar (a space typically coded as masculine), and they are all seen as abandoning their masculine duties of providing monetarily and keeping a stiff upper lip to be around each other—Al does not want to be in a home setting, Fred cannot find his wife, and Homer is too humiliated to be around his fiancé. They have dropped the veil of perfect civilian adjustment in favor of postwar vulnerability, and it is unacceptable. They once again exist in a contradictory space—engaging in actions too vulnerable and unmasculine for the public while under cover of a space that caters to men. None of the behaviors they are engaged in are inherently effeminate, especially in the masculine space they are engaging in said behaviors, but they are performed outside of the culturally recognized emotional masculine paradigm, which is seen as almost as bad as effeminacy. When they force themselves into the acceptable roles of emotionally unavailable providers, their behavior

becomes just as off-putting to themselves. Film historian and women's studies scholar Chris Holmund addresses the insecurity in the masculine masquerade, writing, "But these careful restructurings of hints of homosexuality according to binary oppositions of gender betray the nervousness which underlies masquerades of masculinity…Fear and narcissism thus permeate masquerades of masculinity as well as masquerades of femininity even though the two occupy different positions *vis-à-vis* power" (Holmund 221-222). Throughout the film, the three men do things to accelerate their adjustment, but they only end up hurting themselves. Al begins to drink more to cope with the lack of empathy his coworkers have for veterans, Fred makes his wife quit her job so he can earn a meager living for both of them and fulfill his role as provider, and Homer pushes away his fiancée so she won't witness his vulnerability. Since these men haven't adjusted to postwar life, these insecure performances are seen for what they are. What happens in this case is three men perceiving and adapting to contradictory changes in the postwar definition of masculine heroism and seeing how others' views towards them change when they fail to do so. These men have returned to a culture with an impossible goal: being a real man.

True to typical Hollywood films of the time, the film had a happy ending. Al reformed a healthy connection with his family, Fred divorced his wife and got a new job, and Homer put aside his pride and got married. The only reason any of them were able to re-engage in their masculine identity is because they refused to force themselves into this new paradigm and accept the fact that they were seen as inadequate, especially when compared to heroes of other Hays-approved films of this time. The jealous, womanizing, gun toting Lewt of *A Duel in the Sun* (1946) would not be found in the same room with Homer Parrish, as Lewt represents a projected image of masculinity encouraged to young men returning from war, and Homer represents the reality of those young men. In the real world, nothing that happened to any of these men made

them any less masculine, just as nothing made them any more masculine. *The Best Years of Our Lives* becomes such a revolutionary film because, despite working within the censorial restraints of the Hays Code, it still created endings for its central characters that existed outside of the ideal masculine paradigm encouraged for men post-war. The only way to appeal to a construct is to operate within its lens, and had these three done so, they may not have adjusted so well.

Rebel Without a Cause (1955)

Rebel Without a Cause remains one of the most iconic American films of the 1950s, due in part to its reinvention of the ideal American man. The film follows three teenagers who feel neglected by the society they inhabit: Jim Stark, constantly searching for feeling and emotion outside of his all-too-permissive parents; Judy, who finds that her father resents and emotionally starves her the older she gets; and Plato, an unpopular kid whose father has left him. Both Judy and Plato see a romantic partner and a surrogate father in Jim, though Judy's romantic desire is the only one made explicit. Jim, played by James Dean, was intended to be desirable to everyone watching. He was young and athletic, quietly charismatic, and he carried a sensitivity that, in the eyes of filmmakers and filmgoers, humanized him without verging into effeminacy. There was something magnetic about both his rebellion and his yearning to be understood that called for mimicry, revitalizing how the second half of the twentieth century was about to define a real man. He did not look like the barrel-chested hard-eyed Dana Andrews of *The Best Years of Our Lives.* He was a much younger protagonist, and he carried himself with a sense of slouching carelessness that held under it a subtle frustration. This appealed to the reservoir of sympathy men have for the pressure they put themselves under. Cultural scholar Pablo Dominguez Andersen addresses the new wave of teen idol boys that swept the culture, stating "[F]orms of nonconformist, rebellious behavior increasingly gained acceptance in mainstream US culture.

Figures like the teenage rebel or the swinging bachelor or playboy, while still portrayed as deviant forms of masculinity, were not represented and understood as corrective critiques of [effeminate figures]. By the late 1950s, elements of these alternative masculinities increasingly gained acceptance and slowly became acceptable traits of hegemonic masculinity" (Andersen). Rebellion was becoming extremely conformist.

The buddies present in this film, Jim and Plato (and to an extent, Jim and his rival Buzz) do not take the typical wartime form seen in the previous two films. They were not soldiers or veterans, and they had not been in positions that called for the sense of closeness and familiarity that the men in *Wings* and *The Best Years of Our Lives* had experience. However, they exist within the similar framework of emotional trauma. One of the writers for the film, Stewart Stern, drew on his own social experiences during World War II in writing how the boys interacted with one another. Author Arthur Homberg quotes him as saying "I went back to an earlier draft…and what Buzz said in the first rendition…was 'Hey, lover, I'm Buzz.' Now where that came from I don't know. But when I thought, maybe that's true…I had come out of World War II where we had friendships in the army that were as committed and emotional and romantic in a way as any we ever had, not sexual but romantic" (Holmberg 9). Stern's choice here to change the line was a personal one, but it is more than likely that the line would not have been approved by the Hays Office. They most likely would not have had an issue with a villain being coded as queer (as evil was allowed only if it was being presented as such), but the problem here is the explicitness behind the greeting. It was imperative that the writing of these films dance around the truth behind these interactions, that being that men crave some form of intimacy and recognition from one another, and it oftentimes occurs that this intimacy and recognition sublimates into something romantic. The safer route was to frame Plato as a young admirer with intentions that

were not so explicit. Plato yearns for Jim because he is desperately lonely and Jim, a desirable new person in his life, reflects his loneliness and reciprocates his attention. Their bond is just as sudden and meaningful as the one Jim had with Judy, but if Judy were not in the film, one could imagine the direction Plato and Jim's relationship could have gone.

Jim's relationship with Plato could be excused at the time through the virtue of Jim being made to seem the more masculine party, not only through his appearance and quiet rebellion, but due to the appearance of those around him. Despite his complexity, Plato is still a yardstick sissy, and the less desirable character from the point of view of the audience. He is short, baby-faced, academic, and Jim could be seen as a leader figure meant to put him on the right course just as much as he could be seen as his friend. Another yardstick sissy is Jim's father, who is submissive to the two women in his life (his wife and his mother). When Jim is arrested in the beginning of the film, his father bends to the requests for punishment by the women around him. When Jim confesses to being involved in a drag race later in the film, his mother takes charge in reprimanding him while his father sits on the stairs, literally below her. There is even has a scene in which Jim, though unable to find the words, gets upset with his father for wearing a woman's apron. None of these things are necessarily wrong, but they speak to the cultural knowledge Jim already has, that being that a submissive man cannot be considered honorable or masculine. Jim gets himself in trouble because he is fumbling to define what it means to be a man and what it means to be honorable, and those two become equated in his mind and the minds of some viewers. When Jim is strict in his convictions and presents himself as honorable, he becomes the new image of the hegemonic man.

Every subversion Jim takes part in is presented in a way that would be justifiable to the Hays Code. He rebels, but he knows it's wrong. He is sensitive, but he can have outbursts of

anger and physical strength. He has a close, intimate relationship with a boy from school, but he ends up in an explicit romantic relationship with a woman. For 1955 audiences, he was helping to create a new image of excusable gentleness that still fell within the boundaries of postwar Hays Code depictions of masculinity. A man could be both strong and emotionally conflicted, and as more Americans became disillusioned with the nuclear family system encouraged in the 1940s, ideal masculinity drifted from the image of a provider to the image of a man who was independent, physically strong, and sexually viable. It spoke to an ideal kind of freedom that those wishing to leave the nuclear family lifestyle aspired to. Never mind that Jim Stark was emotional and yearned for human connection—he was independent, and no one understood him, which made him a new, attractive kind of man for a masculine culture that was beginning to construct its own loneliness.

Midnight Cowboy (1969)

If the United States experienced revisions to the cultural model of masculinity following World War I and II, the revisions it experienced during the Vietnam war ran much deeper. *Midnight Cowboy* is a special case, as it exists in a different realm than the three previous films. The film was made after the dissolution of the code and after World War II, but during the Vietnam war. Its place in time allowed for it to be caught in shifting definitions and understandings of the masculine construct. In a post-World War II United States patriarchy, the confines of masculinity were made stricter and more unattainable. Both the Vietnam draft and the changing political landscape of the 1960s put a divide between the men willing (and at times wishing) to adhere to traditional (1940s and 1950s era) masculinity, and the men who wished to explore other modes and definitions of the masculine construct. There was the pressure of honor with the draft making men decide and debate about the lengths to which they would go to defend

their country. There was also the booming artistic scene which made popular a kind of labor different from the kind previously associated with masculinity. To be a real man, it seemed that one either had to go to a war and die or become injured or traumatized, work at a job he hates, or never question anything to avoid accusations of effeminacy. One thing to exacerbate these sharp divides the dissolution of the Code in favor of the rating system in 1968, which then allowed for films to use explicit language to state once and for all who was not a real man.

Onscreen reactions to the yardstick sisses became crueler, and those who failed to operate within the new masculine paradigm became jokes, villains, or victims. This era in Hollywood filmmaking allowed for the buddy film to thrive, especially with new opportunities to place buddies in violent, traumatic circumstances. The dialogue of war in popular culture allowed for a kind of celebration of its conditions when reflected in media. At once there was the glorification of violence and condemnation of the weak, wrapped up in another space in which men were close with one another, "sustain[ing] the paradox of homophobia and homoeroticism as a kind of performative hysteria" (Fuchs 197). The ideal man presented onscreen into the 1960s was taken with violence, independence, and sexual power as aspects of heroism. *Midnight Cowboy*'s main characters Joe Buck and Ratso Rizzo present the damage one can cause to themselves and those around them by trying to appeal to the violent new heroic image.

Joe Buck is a young man who moves from Texas to New York with the hopes of becoming a male prostitute, as he believes it will be easy for him to have sex with several rich women. When New York cosmopolitan women are not immediately swayed by his cowboy aesthetic, he is recruited by a con man named Ratso who promises to help Joe make enough money so they can both go to Florida. One key aspect of Joe Buck's failure as a hustler is the fact that he is appealing to an image of masculinity that is no longer relevant in New York City in the

1960s. Cowboys are, while still relevant and perhaps idealized in a rural setting, no longer considered masculine in an urban landscape. Joe is moving to a place that has taken on a social culture and social progression totally foreign to the one in which he grew up, and this new social culture makes him realize that he has been tailoring himself after an image of strength and masculinity that does not hold weight in many parts of the country. In fact, as Ratso tells Joe Buck in the film, cowboys have shifted into a form of expression for the queer community. For queer men at this time, it served as a form of subversive costume: taking an image that belonged to hegemonic masculine figures like John Wayne and Clint Eastwood and utilizing it to affirm their own culture of masculinity. As film historian Parker Tyler put it, "All masquerades have this paradoxical quality of making dress-up look like a display of nudity…the subtle substructure of homosexual charades in Westerns is not the hallucination of homosexuals who arbitrarily twist the facts of the plot, but rather something inherent in the plot's basic material" (Tyler 187). Joe Buck takes on the image of a cowboy not as a subversion, but as a sincere appeal to what was considered the masculine ideal in the isolated rural landscape he spent his whole life in. Whether or not it's really him is beside the point—this is how a real man presents himself, so this is how he must be.

Joe Buck continues to force himself into the construct of a cowboy as a masculine ideal by adapting his behavior to an outmoded, irrelevant model, as opposed to an urban ideal of an intelligent, debonair cosmopolitan type. He has decided that he is an attractive man who likes sex and is good at sex, so this must be the only way he can prove his worth. At the same time, he is so clearly a man who craves emotional intimacy and acknowledgment. Before he leaves Texas, he fantasizes about how those around him will be begging him to stay, but they don't care. He is eager to learn from and be in the company of Ratso but fears the emotional intimacy that could

result from a closer bond. There is one enlightening scene in which Joe expresses trepidation at the prospect of sleeping in the same apartment as Ratso, despite Ratso's protestations and dismissal of the fear. This does not necessarily mean that he fears Ratso, but rather that he fears the connotations of sharing an intimate space. There are two reasons for this reaction. The personal reason has to do with Joe Buck and his former girlfriend's rape at the hands of a group of violent men. The rape traumatized Joe as a witness and a victim, and he feels emasculated both for his inability to protect and save his girlfriend, and for being a victim of sexual trauma himself. At this point in time in the United States, and especially in a rural setting, a male victim of this attack would not have been treated sympathetically. When Joe constructs his cowboy image, he does so to create a visual character distant from any association with emasculation, yet he is moving to a culture where this masculinity is not honored. To avoid further feelings of emasculation, he must compensate in other ways, which may include pushing himself away from a close friend. The cultural reason for his fear has to do with the connotations with and ramifications of men who spend too much time with other men, those connotations being much more explicit in a 1969 world than a 1940s one. The former certainly affects how Joe Buck acts, but the latter puts an immense pressure on how he behaves. With regards to the cultural fear affecting Joe, consider Hammáren's point about men acting within homosocial bonds feeling the need to overcompensate for how they are perceived by going on misogynistic and, notably, homophobic rampages.

There are two scenes in which Joe Buck involves himself with homosexual men. These encounters are notable because they belong to a new, post-Hays Code era that allows filmmakers to be explicit about homosexuality, and, at times, more overtly critical. These men are sympathetic, but their presence around Joe holds the implication that he has sunk to a level he

never expected of himself. He feels emasculated for engaging in sexual conduct with other men, so he must make up for it with physical reactions. The first involves him mugging and intimidating a young man, shorter and weaker than Joe and meeting with him as a client. When he cannot pay for sexual favors, Joe beats and robs him. The second encounter involves him beating, robbing, and smothering an older effeminate man after they presumably had sex in a motel. He does this to be able to pay for a bus fare for him and Ratso, but it was deliberate that he choose a gay man to attack. These are shocking and upsetting scenes, as they are intended to be. If this were another movie that did not so readily question the construct of masculinity and the uselessness and futility behind it, these attacks may have been framed as celebratory and warranted, as many homophobic attacks on film were depicted in the overcompensation of the post-Hays Code era. However, given the character's personal history and struggles, and the sexual identity of both the author of the novel and the director of the film, the upsetting needlessness of these acts of violence are understood. Joe Buck is engaging in violent homophobia to attach himself to a dominant discourse surrounding queerness and masculinity, and he does so as an outward expression of self-loathing and fear of a close emotional relationship that could be seen as existing outside of the culturally macho image he has created for himself.

Joe Buck dons the costume of a lonesome, violent cowboy, an image drawn from his upbringing and how he has idealized masculinity due to his personal experiences, because he does not recognize his relationship with Ratso as an act of (albeit unintentional) healing for both men. Tragically, it seems that he does not realize he is in a costume until the end of the film. When addressing masculine masquerade, Holmund writes:

"The doubling and hyping of masculinity…only highlights how much masculinity, like femininity, is a multiple masquerade…[I]t would be a mistake to underestimate how much and how often spectators, and performers too, see masquerade as reinforcing hegemonic power relations, precisely because masquerade suggests there may be something underneath which is 'real'" (Holmund 224-225).

Midnight Cowboy functions as a direct reaction to and subversion of the men idealized during the Hays Code. Joe Buck attempts to absorb the strong, independent, violent men he consumed in popular culture, but those men cannot be replicated because they are false creations. Now that the Hays code was dissolved and the system had changed, the film was free to explore the dangers of trying to replicate the ideal man more openly and truthfully (with the large caveat of knowing that the audience would be greatly limited due to the film receiving the rating of X). Joe followed an ideal image of masculinity, doing exactly what he was supposed to—he modeled himself physically after western heroes of the 1940s and 1950s, he made himself sexually dominant and available, he beat up on weaker men to reaffirm his own masculinity, but none of it worked. He never reached the goalpost of hegemonic masculinity because the goalpost does not exist. As the years went on following World War II, men in Hays era films only became more violent and isolated, and one of the biggest limitations of films that did show close, intimate relationships was that the full human realities of intimacy could not be presented. Joe Buck was fooled by the myth he had been fed his entire life, and with the constraints of the Hays Code lifted, the gritty, dark, violent aftermath of that myth could be shown in his actions.

CONCLUSION

The construct of American masculinity and its depiction in American film was directly affected by the Hays Code and World War II, and when the construct itself was affected, so was

the behavior and attitudes surrounding relationships between men. The Hays Code was a means of reinforcing and redefining the ever-shifting masculine paradigm, and when that paradigm shifted and gained new definitions, so did the actions and behaviors that were considered acceptable or not. The perception and portrayal of male/male bonds varied from year to year in accordance with what was and was not deemed as sufficiently masculine under whatever definition suited the construct at the time. The kiss in *Wings* would not have been framed as sweetly or perceived as positively in 1969 as it had been in 1927. By that time, those kinds of romantic friendships, while still just as common, were not spoken about openly. Films made during the Hays era that danced around the topic of queerness played a direct hand in villainizing it. The depiction of male/male intimacy reflects cultural moments and needs, though the need for its portrayal has been constant. There have often been direct attempts (especially on the part of the Hays Office and the Legion of Decency) to police how those relationships ought to be presented, thus villainizing alternative forms of expression. A specific, heterosexual version of masculinity needed to be upheld during this era to benefit patriarchal ideologies and institutions. By the time the code was no longer in place, it was too late—the popularized cultures of ideal (by the 1960s, aggressive, sexually dominant, and independent) masculinity were malignant, and films now had the opportunity to discriminate explicitly. It cannot be understated the role that the Hays Code played in the defensiveness of the American masculine construct.

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