

Abstract

Hall, Mark M. *The Journey is the Destination: Pursuing Masculinity*. (Under the direction of Dr. Anne Baker)

This thesis examines the influence of male homosocial relationships on the masculine identity performances men develop in such relationships. Specifically, I argue that three American novels—Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, and Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*—illustrate a similar pattern of masculine identity performance and (re)construction. In each novel, the narrator initially experiences a masculine identity crisis. In order to resolve his crisis, he engages in homosocial relationships that refine and reaffirm his masculinity. Furthermore, each narrator examines and reports the life of another man—a man obsessed with a single-minded pursuit. Ishmael of *Moby-Dick* narrates the events of a whaling voyage led by the Moby Dick-obsessed Captain Ahab. Sal Paradise of *On the Road* recites the adventures he has on the road following the IT-obsessed Dean Moriarty. And, the unnamed narrator of *Fight Club* explains the development of Fight Club and Project Mayhem by the revolution-obsessed Tyler Durden. As I reveal, hunting for Moby Dick, traveling the road, fighting each other and terrorizing capitalistic society all represent pursuits of manhood and ways of constructing, performing, and asserting masculinities. By joining these pursuits, the narrators forfeit their agency to these obsessed men; however, as the narrators continue to follow, they realize that to regain their masculine identities they must also eventually establish agency in their lives. Ultimately, the pattern illustrated in this thesis involves the continual remasculation of an emasculated man—or a man under threat of becoming so—through purpose-oriented homosocial relationships and an assertion of agency.

The Journey is the Destination: Pursuing Masculinity

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Dedication

To God and to my wife,
Thank you.

Biography

While developing and writing this thesis, Mark Hall lived with his wife in Raleigh, NC. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Appalachian State University, graduating cum laude and with honors in psychology in May 1999. After working in the corporate world for a few years, Mark returned to academia in 2002 in order to pursue his Master of Arts in English. His literary interests primarily involve literature that articulates the “American experience,” both at home and abroad, through time, and for various peoples. In the future, Mark hopes to pursue his doctorate in English, but in the meantime plans to teach literature and composition.

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Introduction

In America, where the culture celebrates independence and individuality, men depend on each other in the process of becoming masculine. As Michael Kimmel observes in his historical study of American masculinity, “If manhood can be proved, it has to be proved in the eyes of other men.”¹ Out of this need for other men’s affirmation, men engage in homosocial relationships that become formative factors in the construction of their masculine identities. American culture, however, venerates the self-reliant individual. So, in order to demonstrate his self-possessed independence the American man must strive to assert agency in his life and over his behaviors. Consequently, being masculine in America appears to be an impossible achievement: men must simultaneously depend on other men and become independent from them. However, by examining the process by which men develop masculine identities through homosocial relationships in three American novels, I demonstrate that being masculine in America is not a paradoxical accomplishment but rather a continual process—a performance of identity incorporating both America’s much esteemed assertion of independence and men’s need for authentication from other men.

Most scholars of masculinity study the issue from psycho-sociological and/or historical perspectives.² Only recently has scholarship begun to investigate the roles of male homosocial relationships in the performance of masculinity. This study investigates the construction and performance of masculinity portrayed in novels wherein the narrator’s homosocial relationships influence the type of masculinity he chooses to perform.

Specifically, my readings of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*,³ Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*,⁴ and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*⁵ suggest that the construction of a man's mature masculinity begins with a crisis of masculinity that, to be resolved, requires male homosocial relationships and an assertion of agency.

Some Thoughts on Masculinity

Compared to the study of femininity, scholars of masculinity have just begun their exploration. Yet, in the past fifteen years the study of masculinity has grown significantly, albeit somewhat quietly. Bryce Traister locates the advent of masculinity studies in “the generalist movement of ‘gender studies’”⁶ prompted by Elaine Showalter's critical work in feminism, both “Toward a Feminist Poetics” and *Speaking of Gender*.⁷ Traister goes on to claim that since the inclusion of a masculine focus in the realm of gender studies, “‘masculinity studies’ has emerged as a discipline unto itself.”⁸ However, even as its own discipline, masculinity studies often borrows its critical terms and framework from sociological and feminist studies (which I also do throughout this project). Accordingly, the following paragraphs provide a brief overview of the theoretical works that inform the present study.

I often rely on two sociological/historical texts throughout my investigation: Kimmel's *Manhood in America: a Cultural History* and Ian Harris' *Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities*.⁹ Kimmel's text, as the title suggests, examines American masculinity from a cultural and historical perspective, and relies on a diverse bibliography including newspapers, advice manuals, advertisements, literature, and other histories. In his own words, Kimmel's work “is the story of American manhood—how it has changed over

time and yet how certain principles have remained the same.”¹⁰ In particular, Kimmel traces the idea of the “Self-Made Man” through its evolution in American culture and how it still has “a lot to do with what it is that defines a ‘real’ man¹¹ even today.”¹²

Harris’ study “interprets the responses of [five hundred sixty] men,” which he catalogues into twenty-four “dominant male gender norms or male messages” that he argues “tell men how to behave.”¹³ Harris also brings to light the characteristics and the sources of these messages as he charts the developmental changes in males from childhood to old age. Where Kimmel’s study primarily helps me contextualize my readings, Harris’ study helps me articulate the types of messages the characters in each novel receive from society.

Judith Butler’s argument in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* that individuals perform their gender identity is a fundamental premise throughout my study. Specifically, when I refer to performing masculine identities or performances in general, I evoke her claim that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”¹⁴

In similar fashion, I appropriate the term “homosocial” from Eve Sedgwick’s *Between Men*, where, Sedgwick explores the desire of men to have relationships with other men. Sedgwick envisions this desire as belonging to a continuum she refers to as “homosocial desire,” which ranges from homosexual romantic desire to heterosexual male bonding.¹⁵ Where Sedgwick’s ideas inform my readings, I refer solely to the heterosexual end of the continuum and I apply the term homosocial, as Sedgwick initially uses it, to

describe “social bonds between persons of the same sex.”¹⁶ In this way, I limit my examination of masculinity to that of heterosexual masculinity.

The Present Study

My argument unfolds into three chapters, each focusing on one novel. Each novel contains a story about a man who examines and reports the life of another man—another man obsessed with a single-minded pursuit. Ishmael of *Moby-Dick* narrates the events of a whaling voyage led by the Moby Dick-obsessed Captain Ahab. Sal Paradise of *On the Road* recites the adventures he has on the road following the “IT”-obsessed Dean Moriarty.¹⁷ And, the unnamed narrator of *Fight Club* explains the development of Fight Club and Project Mayhem by the revolution-obsessed Tyler Durden. Together, these narrators offer readers illustrations of other men’s masculine performances in relation to their obsessions and to the narrators themselves.

In each text, the narrator begins his story as either an emasculated male or a man under threat of becoming so. Faced with the reality of his situation, the narrator of each novel explores various ways to resolve his masculine crisis. In each case, as the obsessed man follows his obsession the narrator joins him in his pursuit. As I reveal in the appropriate chapters, hunting for Moby Dick, traveling the road, fighting each other and terrorizing capitalistic society all represent pursuits of manhood and ways of constructing, performing, and asserting masculinities. As followers of obsessed men, the narrators and the other characters are themselves connected to obsessions, and thus, to the pursuit of masculine identities. Through their connections to these obsessed men, the narrators develop homosocial relationships that refine and reconstitute their masculine identities.

In each chapter, I examine the narrator's resolution of his masculine identity crisis as he undergoes exposure to masculine examples that restore his sense of masculinity. As I illustrate, in each case the narrator emerges at the end of his story with his masculine crisis seemingly resolved—or at least his identity performance stabilized. Moreover, I elucidate the development of homosocial relationships between the narrators and other men in relation to an idealistic purpose or goal.

While the novels share similar vantage points on the construction of masculinity, the stories were written in very different periods of American history. Melville wrote *Moby-Dick* during a time in which America was in the process of defining and uniting itself as a nation—a historical period in which Kimmel argues that the new Self-Made Man begins to displace the traditional masculine identities of the Genteel Patriarch (the land-owning American Aristocrat) and the Heroic Artisan (the independent shop owner).¹⁸ Kerouac composed *On the Road* a decade after the United States proved itself to be one of the few dominant world powers and, as Kimmel also claims, “modern capitalism had transformed a nation of small entrepreneurs—Self-Made Men—into a nation of hired employees [...] depersonalized cogs in the corporate machine.”¹⁹ Finally, Palahniuk's *Fight Club* takes place in contemporary American society where the materialism of a consumer culture emasculates men and misappropriates their agency.

Between these periods, expected (and/or repressed) masculinities vary as much as the hegemony itself varies over time. Yet, the pressure on men to inhabit particular masculine identities remains persistent. By examining these texts, which span American literary history from the antebellum world of *Moby-Dick* to the consumer-culture world of *Fight Club*, I

illustrate a pattern of masculine identity construction and performance in American novels: the resolution of masculine identity crises through purpose-oriented male homosocial relationships and a man's assertion of agency.

As a final note, readers should be aware that not only have I borrowed terms from other critical works in gender studies, I have created new terms based on the construction of other well-known terms. For example, no terms correspond to the terms "feminist," "feminizing," "emasculating," or "feminism." Thus, for this discussion I use the terms "masculating," "masculinizing," "remasculate," and any variation of their constructions to correspond to "emasculating" and to "feminizing."

Chapter One: *Moby-Dick*

Keeping the critical discussion alive and well, readers of Melville's *Moby-Dick* have interpreted the novel from numerous perspectives. Kim Long suggests as much: "since its composition, critics have continually reevaluated *Moby-Dick*, as adventure story, epic, tragic quest, and failure [...] The quality that makes *Moby-Dick* great is that it stands up well to many interpretations."²⁰ The novel, rich with Ishmael's descriptions of whaling and depictions of men and whales—arguably symbolic types of individuals in society: "This Right Whale I take to have been a Stoic; the Sperm Whale, a Platonian, who might have taken up Spinoza in his latter years" (267)—represents a potential source for a wealth of critical discussions on masculinity. Leland Person says that "Critics have generally agreed that *Moby-Dick* is a man's book and that Melville's representation of seafaring manhood inscribes a patriarchal, anti-female ideology that reinforces nineteenth-century gender separatism—a manhood based on differentiation from women."²¹ Long corroborates this anti-female perspective of the novel through her feminist evaluation that "a feminine presence pervades the novel and gives it its most important theme: the battle of male against female in the ongoing search for the American Dream."²² However, the differentiation from women—the battle of male against female—that critics argue defines manhood in *Moby-Dick* overlooks the influence of male homosocial relationships in the construction of a man's masculine identity.

Moby-Dick consists of the male-to-male identifications and confrontations in the homosocial relationships of the crew members, the mates, and Captain Ahab that construct their masculine identities. Ishmael and the other men are united by their occupation, but the oath they share with Ahab—to pursue of Moby Dick—endows their voyage with a more powerful and masculine purpose than commerce: the pursuit of manhood. Ishmael's accounts not only record the events of the *Pequod's* final voyage, his explanations offer insightful evaluations of the thoughts, actions, and interactions between the men of the *Pequod* as they pursue Moby Dick. In the context of this study, Ishmael's story primarily illustrates the constructions of masculine identities through his experiences and observations as a part of Captain Ahab's crew.

Similar to the masculine development of the narrators in *On the Road* and *Fight Club* that I will discuss in later chapters, Ishmael's story begins with a personal crisis of masculinity, moves through experiences and examples that refine his sense of masculinity, and concludes with his masculine crisis seemingly resolved, or at least his identity stabilized. However, in Ishmael's case the actions of the other characters, more than his own actions, symbolize his development. Whereas in my later chapters the final development of masculinity necessitates an assertion of the narrator's agency, Ishmael only asserts his agency in choosing to go whaling, to follow orders, and to report his experience—everything else that occurs Ishmael attributes to fate: “my going on this whaling voyage, formed part of the grand programme of Providence” (22). Nevertheless, Ishmael's story implies his sense of masculinity as he criticizes and praises the masculine examples of the other men he encounters. This chapter will examine Ishmael's conceptions of masculinity and its

constructions through his motivation for going to sea and the examples of masculinity onboard the *Pequod*. Ultimately, this examination illustrates how the homosocial relationships between the men of the *Pequod* shape their masculinities as they shape Ishmael's identity.

Ishmael's "Substitute for Pistol and Ball"

Ishmael's rationale for his retreat to the sea reveals characteristics of his identity as well as his perceptions and assumptions of other men. Ishmael explains:

Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand on me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball.
(18)

When Ishmael recognizes in himself the desire to harm himself or others, he seeks to escape the environment that engenders that desire. His acknowledgement that he must refrain from knocking people's hats off implies both his awareness of social norms against such behavior and his reliance on those social norms to direct his behavior.

Although Ishmael never explains the reasons behind his anti-social desire to inflict harm, one assumes that if removing himself from society alleviates his mal-intent then society bears some responsibility for his condition. A conclusion from Harris' sociological study of masculine identity construction supports my assumption: "Conforming to the expectations for masculinity established by cultural conditioning creates many different kinds of strain [...] Men are frustrated because they cannot live up to masculine standards."²³ Thus, Ishmael's environment helps to create his anti-social desire and at the same time restricts the expression of that desire. Instead of opposing—as Ishmael's anti-social desire

would have him do—the message males receive from society that Harris refers to as the “Law” message, doing right and obeying ethical principles, Ishmael submits himself to the authority of a whaling ship.²⁴ That is, in realizing the waning of his self-control and to avoid violating social norms Ishmael seeks a more rigid authority than the implicit social constraints and multiple expectations his inland environment provides.

Exposure of Ishmael’s waning self-control would suggest to his peers his lack of discipline, which Harris claims is a “manly virtue.”²⁵ Thus exposed, Ishmael would be emasculated among his peers because, as Kimmel argues, “If manhood can be proved, it has to be proved in the eyes of other men.”²⁶ Kimmel also professes, as Harris does, that self-control is an essential quality of masculinity—that a man “has to gain control over himself.”²⁷ Moreover, Kimmel claims that “in the 1830’s and 1840’s a spate of advice manuals counseled young men on how to [gain self-control].”²⁸ According to Kimmel, these manuals advocated a man’s restraint in the areas of his life ranging from sexual desire to drinking to violence, while providing guides in “the transition to manhood” where the “‘crude aggressions and the raw boisterousness of boyhood’ were transformed into the ‘refined self-assertion and purposeful self-discipline of manhood.’”²⁹ Kimmel’s observation reveals the public concern (contemporaneous with Ishmael’s story) over this issue of masculinity that Ishmael reflects in his rationale. Paradoxically, Ishmael must surrender his agency to men with more self-control in order to re-establish control in his life, and thus, avoid emasculation—Ishmael initially gives up his agency to redeem it later.

The experienced men of a whaling ship offer Ishmael an environment wherein he can regain his sense of masculinity. The risks and adventures associated with whaling

presumably make these sailors more masculine because, as Harris claims, “Men take risks and have adventures. They are brave and courageous.”³⁰ Ishmael’s continued explanation for going sailing suggests that the industry has a similar appeal to most inexperienced males: “Why is almost every robust healthy boy with a robust healthy soul in him, at some time or other crazy to go to sea?” (19). Ishmael’s rhetorical question reflects his assumption that robust boys—boys already on their way to becoming robust men—recognize the masculine refining experiences available to them as sailors. The appeal of the sea Ishmael articulates in the passage represents the appeal of adventure for the inexperienced male; and as Harris also claims “masculinity has always been associated with adventure.”³¹ Ishmael’s rhetoric builds to his assertion:

Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all. (20)

Tara Penry argues that since “Ishmael introduces ‘Narcissus’ as ‘the key to it all’: the boy or man who ‘can not grasp the tormenting, mild image he [sees] in the fountain’ will drown in his pursuit of identity.”³² While Penry correctly asserts that “the self-seeking waterlust of every ‘robust healthy boy’ is thus fraught with hazard,”³³ Ishmael’s admission that the image is “ungraspable” suggests that, as opposed to the ability to grasp one’s identity, the pursuit of identity itself is the key to it all.

The experience of sailing provides males the chance to pursue and develop their identities by inhabiting the identity of a sailor. The robust boys do not grasp their own identities, they adopt an already established identity. The pursuit itself exhibits characteristics deemed masculine—hard work, physicality, discipline, and purpose. One can

surmise then that Ishmael's escape to the sea involves his re-assertion of masculinity through the pursuit of an identity that will allow him to operate in society without giving into his anti-social desires. In other words, Ishmael needs time away from society and time in the company of only men in order to allay his malaise, to rejuvenate his masculinity.

While explaining his reasons for going to sea, Ishmael makes a point (or rather several points) to inform readers that he chooses to "go as a simple sailor" (20). Ishmael admits that as a sailor, "they [the ranked men] rather order [him] about some, and make [him] jump from spar to spar" (20). Ishmael reduces and simplifies his identity to that of sailor by relinquishing his control to the open and clear-cut authority found on a ship. By performing the role of a sailor Ishmael develops hierarchical, homosocial relationships that direct his masculine identity. Ishmael welcomes this external order because it provides balance in his life as well as in the world: "however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right; that everybody else is one way or other served in much the same way [...] the universal thump is passed round" (21). As Ishmael obeys the orders given him, his relationships to the ranked (the captain, the mates, and the harpooners) men continuously affirm and reinforce his role and identity. In this way, the ranked men control Ishmael's performance of his masculine identity and their control relieves his anxiety of performing the self-controlled masculinity inland society requires of him.

In addition to Ishmael's need for direction from other men, he decides to go whaling because of his relationship with Queequeg, a harpooner. In this savage, but noble character Ishmael finds an example of an independent man (possibly the only truly independent man in the novel) and feels himself "mysteriously drawn towards him" (56)—interestingly,

Queequeg's appeal resembles the appeal of the sea. Even though they meet while sharing a bed at the Spouter-Inn, they become friends over a smoke: "if there yet lurked any ice of indifference towards me in the Pagan's breast, this pleasant, genial smoke we had, soon thawed it out, and left us cronies" (56). Important in this account, is the presence of an activity shared between Ishmael and Queequeg that unites them. While the smoke they share inaugurates the homosocial relationship that leads them to join the crew of the *Pequod* together, it also sets the precedent for establishing the foundations of homosocial relationships that develop in the novel—shared activities and purpose bring men together.

For Ishmael the moment that cements their relationship entails Queequeg's "noble" act of rescuing a drowning "bumpkin" who had moments earlier mocked him: "The boat soon picked them up. The poor bumpkin was restored. All hands voted Queequeg a noble trump; the captain begged his pardon. From that hour I [Ishmael] clove to Queequeg like a barnacle" (64). In the presence of other men, and no less the captain (a ranked man), Queequeg receives a democratic recognition of his nobility, a masculine quality Ishmael then shares with him through their close association. As a "barnacle"—marine life often found living on the bottom of ships—Ishmael receives sustenance from his attachment to Queequeg; and, at the end of his story literally survives because of this attachment, albeit to Queequeg's coffin. Ishmael's homosocial relationship with Queequeg constructs and sustains Ishmael's masculine identity through Ishmael's continued identification with Queequeg. In the same way that Ishmael must surrender his agency to the control of superior men to avoid potential emasculation, Ishmael also avoids emasculation through his association with Queequeg.

Ishmael's need to avoid emasculation connects his confessed and implied reasons for going to sea. As Kimmel claims, one of the solutions to the emasculating influences of society is escape; or as he restates later "the ultimate relief is simply to get out of town."³⁴ Having sailed before, Ishmael knows that sailing and the homosocial relationships available on a ship will relieve his masculine anxiety as he is inundated with masculine examples and masculine discipline—both of which Ishmael needs to regain a sense of his masculinity.

The Men of the *Pequod*

Throughout the text, Ishmael comments on nearly every man he encounters or observes. From his comparison of "town-bred dandies" and "country-bred dandies" to the (at least) four chapters of exposition he dedicates to the primary masculine characters, Queequeg, Starbuck, Stubb, Flask, and Ahab, Ishmael inundates readers with his thoughts on masculinity. Through Ishmael's multiple masculine examples, Person believes that "Melville both explores and challenges a traditional, essentially phallogentric masculinity (individualistic, instrumental, projective, [and] competitive)."³⁵ Even without the critically debated imagery of phalluses, maternal seas, and androgynous characters, Ishmael's open evaluations of other men and himself present the text as a study of masculinity—a study found in Ishmael's observations.

Ishmael frames his studies of men with an idealistic belief in the existence of a universal "immaculate manliness:"

Men may seem detestable as joint stock-companies and nations; knaves, fools, and murderers there may be, men may have mean and meagre faces; but man, in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature, that over any ignominious blemish in him all his fellows should run to throw their costliest robes. That immaculate manliness we feel within ourselves, so far within us, that it remains intact though all the outer character seem gone; bleeds with keenest anguish at the undraped spectacle of a valor-ruined man. (103)

Even though Ishmael articulates this idealism in reference to Starbuck's foreshadowed "overmanned" submission to Ahab's will, Ishmael measures all the men by this ideal as they either prove themselves through their adversity or fail. Ishmael's reliance on this measure can be seen in Queequeg's previously discussed "bumpkin" rescue, in that Queequeg acts in the moment that matters and displays his nobility and immaculate manliness.

Queequeg is the first primary character that Ishmael scrutinizes. While watching Queequeg at the Spouter-Inn, Ishmael claims, "Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw traces of a simple honest heart; and in his large, deep eyes, fiery black and bold, there seemed tokens of a spirit that would dare a thousand devils" (55). In Queequeg, Ishmael recognizes the aspects of immaculate manliness that Queequeg later displays—Queequeg's spirit is both honest and courageous. Ishmael goes on to state that he "had noticed also that Queequeg never consorted at all, or but very little, with the other seamen in the inn [...] here was a man some twenty thousand miles from home [...] thrown among people as strange to him as though he were in the planet Jupiter; and yet he seemed entirely at his ease" (55). Not only is Queequeg honest and courageous, he is "content with his own companionship;" that is, although other men affirm Queequeg's masculinity, he does not need other men to do so (55). Despite his foreignness, Queequeg does not feel awkward among strangers; to him they are but other men the same as he. Queequeg's ease signifies his confidence in his gender identity.

The quickness of their friendship also displays Queequeg's sense of security in his own masculinity. Ishmael says that "in a countryman, this sudden flame of friendship would have seemed far too premature, a thing to be much distrusted; but in this simple savage those

old rules would not apply” (56). As Ishmael observes, Queequeg represents a man independent of the constraints of other men. Social norms do not influence Queequeg’s behaviors or his perceptions. In this way, Queequeg becomes a point of comparison for the other men, including Ishmael, who succumb to social constraints and to the control of stronger men. Queequeg is his own man, following his own rules, and as such provides an example of self-assured and independent masculinity. In his ease, honesty, courage, and consistence performances, whether conscious of the fact or not, Queequeg exemplifies immaculate manliness.

Despite the evidence supporting Queequeg’s secure masculinity, critics waver between claiming Queequeg as an androgynous male or as a superior masculine man. At one moment Long refers to the savage as “masculine Queequeg” and a few lines later claims, “Queequeg himself can be seen as androgynous because of the many birth images associated with him: rescuing the insulting sailor on the shore, delivering Tashtego from the head of the whale, and helping to give Ishmael new birth as he finds love and community.”³⁶ Alternatively, Lyle Glazier says in reference to the suggestive language used in the early bedroom scene that “both Ishmael and Queequeg are too masculine for them to become the butt of reader’s jokes.”³⁷ Explicitly, Glazier’s comment suggests that both Ishmael and Queequeg should not be confused with androgynous, maternal, or effeminate (or as homosexual³⁸) men.

Nonetheless, most critics agree that the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg represents an alternative and a challenge to what Person calls the “phallogentric masculine ethos” of Ahab.³⁹ Person explains the alternative as “a manhood centered in cooperative

rather than oppositional relationships” that is “realized in ‘A Squeeze of the Hand’.”⁴⁰ In other words, the “bosom buddy” status between the two protects them from Starbuck’s fate of being overmanned by Ahab. Queequeg and Ishmael choose to cooperate with each other as well as with both Starbuck’s economic pursuit of whale oil and Ahab’s monomaniac pursuit of Moby Dick—they oppose neither goal.

The mates of the *Pequod*, Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask, each represent a particular type of masculinity. Even though Ishmael does not devote as much attention to Stubb and Flask, the second and third mates respectively, as he does to Queequeg, Starbuck, or Ahab, together they elucidate, by contrast, Starbuck’s and Ahab’s characters. Ishmael describes Stubb as “happy-go-lucky,” “good-humored, easy, and careless” (104). Ishmael attributes Stubb’s nature to his propensity for pipe smoking, of which Ishmael says that “Stubb’s tobacco smoke might have operated as a sort of disinfecting agent” against “all mortal tribulations” (105). In other words, with his pipe in hand Stubb remains content, emotionally balanced, and able to take “perils as they come with an indifferent air” (104). On the other hand, of Flask Ishmael says, “This ignorant, unconscious fearless-ness of his made him a little waggish in the matter of whales; he followed these fish for the fun of it” (105). Flask represents for Ishmael an unthinking and mediocre man who does little but “clinch tight and last long” (105). Ishmael describes both of these mates as reckless and unconcerned men, with Stubb seemingly a little smarter and more poised than the “pugnacious” Flask. In comparison to Stubb and Flask, Ahab and Starbuck are more somber, deliberate, and complex men.

Ishmael describes Starbuck as “an earnest man” who “seemed prepared to endure for long ages to come, and to endure always, as now” (101-2). Ishmael also claims that “looking into his eyes, you seemed to see there the yet lingering images of those thousand-fold perils he had calmly confronted through life. A staid, steadfast man, whose life for the most part was a telling pantomime of action, and not a tame chapter of words” (102). By describing Starbuck’s life as a “pantomime of action,” Ishmael suggests that, like Queequeg, Starbuck also acts in the moments that matter, that “for the most part” Starbuck performs his masculine identity rather than speaking for it. However, Starbuck is not a reckless man like either Stubb or Flask, as evidenced by Ishmael’s claim that “Starbuck was no crusader after perils; in him courage was not a sentiment; but a thing simply useful to him, and always at hand upon all mortally practical occasions” (102). Overall, Ishmael’s descriptions of Starbuck depict him as an accomplished man who confidently knows his capabilities as a man.

Starbuck represents the type of man that Harris would claim has proven his manhood through the “hurdles” he has overcome; men that Harris contends do “the best they can; support their families...work hard and be self-reliant; value money; do not show their feelings; strive to get ahead; present a tough exterior to the world and conform.”⁴¹ That Starbuck, in Ishmael’s retrospective estimation, represents this sort of admirable masculinity elucidates Ishmael’s antipathy in reference to “the complete abasement of poor Starbuck’s fortitude” (103). Person, also referring to Ishmael’s remorse, argues that as “no match for a ‘mighty man’ [Ahab], Starbuck both evokes and jeopardizes the apostrophic vision of ‘immaculate manliness’ that Ishmael extrapolates immediately after introducing him.”⁴² The

moment in question involves Starbuck's private concession of defeat by Ahab that begins the slow progression to his ultimate failure to act given the opportunity (musket in hand and Ahab asleep—chapter 123): “My soul is more than matched, she's overmanned; and by a madman” (144). According to Person, “To be ‘overmanned’ by Ahab within a nineteenth-century heterosexual economy is to be a woman.”⁴³ Thus, while outwardly displaying a strong and steady masculinity Starbuck's awareness of his diminishing agency reveals his emasculation under Ahab's control.

Of all the characters Ishmael presents in his story, Ahab receives most of Ishmael's attention as well as the attention of *Moby-Dick* scholars (for obvious reasons to readers and critics alike). Ishmael's observations of Ahab largely entail Ahab's performance of masculinity and the crew's reactions to his performances as he hunts for Moby Dick. Ishmael perceives of Ahab, while Ahab is shrouded in mystery and hidden in his cabin, that “it was plain [the mates] but commanded vicariously. Yes, their supreme lord and dictator was there [in Ahab's cabin]” (107). Ishmael's first impression of Ahab is one of absolute control and dominance over his subordinates. In a following scene, Ahab perceives an offense in Stubb's complaint of the noise Ahab's peg-leg makes at night. In confronting Stubb, Ahab offends him in return, and as their confrontation intensify “Ahab advanced upon [Stubb] with such overbearing terrors in his aspect, that Stubb involuntarily retreated” (111). That Stubb both offends Ahab and attempts to stand his ground against Ahab's initial rebuke threatens Ahab's absolute power and masculine authority as the Captain of the *Pequod*.

In the face of Stubb's potential emasculating threat, Ahab must respond as he does to avoid appearing vulnerable and less of a man than Stubb. If Ahab had performed any

differently, he would have lost his ability to influence the crew, and thus, his ability to convince them to chase Moby Dick. Similar scenes lead Glazier to claim that “Ahab’s treatment of officers and crew...is consistent with his acceptance of a man-of-war world, with absolute power at the helm.”⁴⁴ Likewise, Sanford Marovitz claims that “so inflexible, so fierce, so awesome is Ahab that it seems anomalous to the point of absurdity to think of him as anything but hyper-masculine.”⁴⁵ Consequently, Ahab’s identity performance represents an extreme masculinity among the examples of masculinities Ishmael observes onboard the *Pequod* and epitomizes the rigid authority Ishmael seeks in contrast to his inland social constraints.

Anything Ahab perceives as threatening to his masculine character, and therefore potentially emasculating, he discards. According to Glazier, although “he is not without feminine impulses, Ahab is afraid of those impulses, and tries to eradicate them.”⁴⁶ Ahab, as Glazier argues, demonstrates his repugnance to these impulses when he throws his pipe into the sea.⁴⁷ As Ahab articulates, “What business have I with this pipe? This thing that is meant for serenity, to send up mild white vapors among mild white hairs, not among torn iron-grey locks like mine. I’ll smoke no more” (113). Ahab’s words indicate his awareness of the softening effects of pipe smoking—Stubb’s contentment—and the incompatibility of such comfort with his hyper-masculine performance. Whereas pipe smoking enables Stubb to continue his masculine identity performance (and facilitates Ishmael and Queequeg’s episode of male-bonding), it threatens Ahab’s masculinity in its potential softening of Ahab’s resolve to hunt Moby Dick. Ahab’s locks must remain “torn iron-grey” and not become “mild white hairs;” that is, the “serenity” pipe smoking provides might produce within Ahab the same

“indifferent air” that characterizes Stubb. Thus, this scene is significant in that it follows Ahab’s rebuking of Stubb, who is associated with his own affinity for pipe smoking. Ahab’s disposal of his pipe into the sea parallels his reprimand of Stubb as both actions remove threats to Ahab’s ability to chase the white whale—threats that, from Ahab’s hyper-masculine perspective, are potentially emasculating because his masculine identity is contingent upon his monomaniac pursuit of Moby Dick.

However, Person and Marovitz each argue that a feminine presence exists in Ahab that he cannot escape. Person claims that Ahab “celebrates his ‘queenly personality’ in the climatic ‘Candles’ (chap 119).”⁴⁸ Yet, a closer look at Ahab’s speech in “Candles” supports Glazier’s position (and mine). In the middle of a typhoon, with thunder and lightning all around them, and nature’s power threatening the mortality of the men onboard the *Pequod*, Ahab states:

In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here. Though but a point at best; whencesoe’er I came; wheresoe’er I go; yet while I earthly live, the queenly personality lives in me, and feels her royal rights. But war is pain, and hate is woe. Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee; but at thy highest, come as mere supernal power; and though thou launchest navies of full-freighted worlds, there’s that in here that still remains indifferent. Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true child of fire, I breathe it back to thee. (382)

The personified impersonal, the supernal power, is nature itself in the form of the storm; and as nature is symbolic of the maternal and the feminine, Ahab’s speech is defiant of both. Important in Ahab’s speech is the manner in which he declares that he will receive his “queenly personality”—his feminine side. Ahab will only receive the feminine from a position of either superiority, “I will kneel and kiss thee,” or defiance, “I breathe it back to thee.” When Ahab’s says that “there’s that in here that still remains indifferent,” he refers to

himself. Be it his lungs that defiantly breathe back the feminine or his heart that rejects it, Ahab refuses to embrace the feminine.

Not only does Ahab reject the feminine, he seeks vengeance on anything that threatens his masculinity, hence his fierce suppression of Stubb. But above all, Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick illustrates his obsessive need to re-assert his masculinity in the face of his visible inferiority to and emasculation by the white whale—Moby Dick's amputation of Ahab's leg on a previous voyage. Moby Dick more than threatens Ahab, the whale cripples him: "it was Moby Dick that dismasted [him]; Moby Dick that brought [him] to this dead stump [he] stands on now" (139). As Glazier argues, since "as a masculine symbol, Ahab fittingly interprets the counter assault by Moby Dick as an assault upon his masculinity" then "Ahab's wound decreases his manhood."⁴⁹ Glazier goes on to state later that "[Ahab's] masculine self suffers the outrage of being assaulted by an even more powerful masculinity."⁵⁰ For similar reasons, Long likens Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick to a "quest for his lost manhood."⁵¹ That is, in pursuing Moby Dick, Ahab pursues his masculine gender identity.

These arguments support Kimmel's assertion that "throughout American history American men have been afraid that others will see [them] as less than manly."⁵² Ahab cannot escape the physical sign of Moby Dick's assault on his masculinity. Whether Ahab's concern lies with the impressions others have of him or with his self-perception, Ahab feels emasculated by the loss of his leg and must reclaim his masculinity by destroying Moby Dick. Ahab's pursuit of the whale is not what Kimmel refers to as the traditional conception of masculinity's "drive for power, for domination, for control,"⁵³ it is Ahab's attempt to

assert his agency in the world—his attempt to declare his freedom from the control of others, from Moby Dick.

In his explanation to Starbuck for the pursuit of Moby Dick, Ahab uses the metaphor of a prisoner's freedom to illustrate the constraints Ahab feels Moby Dick places upon him: "How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me" (140). As his words indicate, Ahab justifies his actions—his pursuit of Moby Dick—through his need to free himself of the white whale's power over him. Ahab's imprisonment by the white whale represents his inability to assert agency in his own life. Ahab's monomania about Moby Dick informs his actions; and thus, he cannot experience freedom through agency except by killing Moby Dick.

Moreover, as he explains to Starbuck his pursuit of Moby Dick has another "lower level:" "All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask!" (140). Ahab's speech not only articulates his desire to discover what is beyond the mask, it expresses both his angst toward the existence of the masks and his belief that only through action, "in the living act, the undoubted deed," can the masks be penetrated and transcended. In this way, Ahab's words suggest his conception of masculinity—masculinity proven by performance "in the living act"—coincides with Judith Butler's argument "that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."⁵⁴ However, Ahab's tragic flaw, the tragedy of his hyper-masculinity, is his conflation of the pursuit and *death* of Moby Dick—the means and the *end*—with his own

manhood. Whereas Ahab's words suggest that he believes his living acts constitute his masculinity, his monomania with Moby Dick suggest instead that he believes he must kill the white whale to regain his manhood. Ahab's hyper-masculinity, like his pursuit of Moby Dick, is a relentless performance-as-evidence of his desired supreme authority and masculine power; Ahab just fails to see it that way.

Conclusions: The Consequences of Masculine Performances

All of the men onboard the *Pequod* share responsibility in the fate of the ship because the crew, like Ishmael, choose to take up Ahab's hunt for Moby Dick: "I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs" (152). In either their cooperation with or opposition to Ahab's monomania, the crew members of the *Pequod* perform their masculinities in relation to Ahab as Ahab performs his in relation to them and to the white whale. Their actions reflect their "immaculate manliness" that Ishmael claims "bleeds with keenest anguish at the undraped spectacle of a valor-ruined man" (103). Thus, the consequences of their masculine identity performances correspond to the interactions of their homosocial relationships as they either live up to this ideal, die trying/performing, or become "valor-ruined" men. While Ahab's monomania leads the crew to its final demise, the ultimate consequence of the homosocial relationships onboard the *Pequod* is the death of everyone but Ishmael.

Ahab's monetary incentive of the gold doubloon to the first man who sights the white whale entices the crew's interest in his pursuit of Moby Dick. But, Ahab's confession that Moby Dick "made a poor pegging lubber of [him] for ever and a day" and that he will "chase him [Moby Dick]...round perdition's flames before [he gives] him up" appeals to the crew's

fears of vulnerability and need to act against such fears. That Ahab then asks the crew “What say ye, men, will ye splice hands on it, now? *I think ye do look brave,*” implicitly questions their bravery and courage—both considered masculine traits⁵⁵—and thus, questions their masculine identities (139, emphasis mine). Ahab’s petition, then, offers the crew a chance to “strike through the mask” and demonstrate their masculine identities against the challenge that Moby Dick represents.

By accepting Ahab’s pursuit, the crew denies any masculine weaknesses and chooses to identify with Ahab’s hyper-masculinity. Thus, the crew’s choice to pursue Moby Dick does not result in the same extent of emasculation Starbuck experiences as Ahab coerces him into obedience. Rather, as the pursuit of Moby Dick authenticates Ahab’s hyper-masculine identity the crew’s choice empowers their masculine performances. In the act of choosing, Ishmael and the crew assert their agency, and therefore, maintain it as they bear the consequences of their choice. Conversely, Starbuck’s moment of silence in the face of Ahab’s monomania incapacitates his future attempts to assert his agency: “thy silence, then, voices thee...Starbuck now is mine [Ahab’s]; cannot oppose me now, without rebellion” (140). Starbuck’s coerced submission to Ahab denies Starbuck the chance of gaining the masculinity that Ahab believes is obtainable in the death of Moby Dick.

Ahab’s monomania not only emasculates Starbuck and prevents his remasculination, it eclipses all of the homosocial relationships onboard the *Pequod*. As Leslie Fiedler argues, “Ishmael himself has been bent temporarily to Ahab’s will [...and] remains a spectator from the moment of Ahab’s ascendancy over him. But as a spectator and Ahab’s man, he has no longer any use of Queequeg, who is also converted into an accomplice” (377). Ahab’s

monomania suppresses, through the crew's oath, even the immaculate manliness Queequeg previously exemplifies and endears him to Ishmael. Consequently, as Ahab's monomania directs (much like a play director) his own actions and decisions, and thus his masculine performance, Ahab's monomania also constructs—as it directs—the masculinities and homosocial relationships of his crew.

However, the end of Ahab's monomaniac pursuit appears to be as futile as Starbuck's initial defiance. The actions on the part of neither character yield the desired results, and instead both die. Yet, at least in his pursuit of Moby Dick Ahab strives to strike through the mask, and thus performs his masculine identity while Starbuck loses his and becomes the example of a "valor-ruined man"—presumably the poorer fate. As the crew share in Ahab's hyper-masculine performance they also die while performing it. Ishmael's survival, then, seems to suggest nothing in particular about his masculine identity save his lucky positioning, "as the Fates ordained," on Ahab's whaleboat in the final chase (427). Yet, as Long claims, "in Ahab's defeat and in Ishmael's victory or at least survival, Melville seems to be suggesting that male linear aggression will not succeed."⁵⁶ And, as Glazier argues, "a true reading of Ishmael seems to be that, attracted as he is toward the idea of equipoise, moderation, common sense, he, like the reader, is filled with horror and admiration for Ahab's profound vision of a relentless antagonist."⁵⁷ Accordingly, Ishmael's survival and subsequent testimony suggests that while homosocial relationships entail masculinizing pursuits (like whaling), if the goal of the pursuit is destructive, malevolent, and illusory the relationships will be likewise. Hence, Ishmael's observation that Ahab "was intent on an audacious, immitigable, and supernatural vengeance" (158), characterizes Ahab's

homosocial relationships with the crew, Starbuck, and Moby Dick—all of which sink into the sea while Ishmael finds refuge from the wreck afloat Queequeg's coffin.

With Ahab's hyper-masculinity taken away, as his entanglement in the harpoon ropes ensures, Queequeg's coffin saves Ishmael and suggests that Ishmael can once again engage in supportive and constructive homosocial relationships as represented in his attachment to Queequeg. Specifically, the coffin, as Fiedler says, "graven with the symbols of Queequeg's identity, standing in Queequeg's stead, rises to the hand of Ishmael."⁵⁸ Since the coffin embodies Queequeg's identity, Ishmael's survival symbolically renews their pre-oath relationship, reestablishing Ishmael's attachment to Queequeg's immaculate manliness. Thus, Ishmael's homosocial relationship with Queequeg saves him from the swallowing sea while Ahab drowns in his monomania.

In the same way that Ishmael reasons the rigidity of a whaling ship will restore his sense of masculine self-control so he can reenter society without threat of emasculating himself, Ahab thinks that in the death of Moby Dick he will reclaim his sense of masculine power and agency. While onboard the *Pequod*, Ishmael's experiences and homosocial relationships help him regain his self-control before he reenters society via the *Rachel*. In this way, Ishmael's experiences whaling refine his masculine identity performance and his homosocial relationships become his lasting "substitutes for pistol and ball." However, unlike Ishmael who sails for its remasculinizing experience, Ahab sails for his hyper-masculine vengeance on Moby Dick. Ahab dies because he does not understand that his performance makes him masculine; he thinks that only in the accomplishment can a man prove his masculinity. In other words, Ahab fails to see his pursuit of Moby Dick as

masculine in and of itself—his monomania overrides his understanding of his own performance of masculinity. In the end, Ishmael’s survival and Ahab’s death reinforces Ishmael’s opening reflection on Narcissus’ fate. As *Moby-Dick* illustrates, identity remains ungraspable as it is an intangible performance in the pursuit of itself.

Chapter Two: *On the Road*

Cars, girls, kicks, jazz, roads, and men comprise the content of Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, or as Matt Theado describes it: "the story is simple; two young men travel the American continent looking outwardly for kicks and inwardly for salvation."⁵⁹ However, as evidenced by the voluminous critical discussion concerning the novel and Theado's own continued analysis, *On the Road* is not a simple story. Instead, it is a complex exaltation and critique of Americans and America.

While scholars approach the study of *On the Road* in several ways—ranging from its allusions to Buddhism,⁶⁰ to its contributions to the "Duluo Legend,"⁶¹ and to its representations of a spiritual quest⁶²—few examine the novel's illustration of masculine identities and their constructions. Scholars who do address the novel's depiction of masculinity primarily relate their discussions of the masculine characters to Kerouac's biographical information and to the novel's influence on its readers (e.g., Stephen Davenport,⁶³ Craig Leavitt,⁶⁴ and David Savran⁶⁵). Although valid and informative, these critical conversations neglect the novel's treatment of masculinity in Sal's interactions with and perceptions of the other masculine characters.

Instead of analyzing the implications of Sal's masculinity in reference to the masculinity of Sal's creator, Kerouac, I examine the influence of the other characters' masculine performances on the masculine identity of Sal. As much as *On the Road* tells the story of two young men's experiences on the road, the novel reinforces the necessity of male

homosocial relationships in the refinement and (re)construction of a man's masculinity—much in the same way Ishmael of *Moby-Dick* needs the masculine and masculinizing environment of the *Pequod* to regain a sense of his masculine identity and self-control.

In *On the Road*, the rigid and almost completely masculine environment of the *Pequod* is replaced with the wild and careless environment of the road. Whereas Dean is not quite the hyper-masculine character that I argue Ahab embodies in the previous chapter, he pursues “IT” with almost the same monomania that Ahab pursues Moby Dick. The mask to strike through in *On the Road* seems to be the road itself—the more roads traveled, the more experiences had, the more one realizes “IT.” Like the *Pequod*'s pursuit of Moby Dick, Dean's, and by proxy Sal's, pursuit of “IT” gives purpose to Sal and Dean's travels as their homosocial relationship matures. As a mutual desire, IT provides Sal and Dean something else upon which to focus their attention instead of each other as they become more intimate friends and as they perform and develop their masculine identities.

Although Sal's and Dean's adventures direct Sal to the masculinity he at last chooses to perform, ultimately the development of their homosocial relationship influences his choice. As with the construction of masculine identities found in *Moby-Dick*, the homosocial relationship between Sal and Dean alleviates Sal's masculine anxiety as it refines and reconstructs Sal's sense of masculinity. However, *On the Road* differs from *Moby-Dick* because, whereas Ishmael attributes to Fate all events after his decision to go whaling (22), the final development of Sal's masculine identity requires an assertion of his agency.

In building to Sal's final assertion of agency, several factors affect the nature of Sal's and Dean's relationship: the reasons behind each of Sal's trips on the road, the examples of

masculinity characters perform, the pursuit of “IT” that bestows purpose on their travels, and Sal’s and Dean’s eventual but not devastating fallout. Through these aspects of their homosocial relationship, this chapter explores the construction and performance of Sal’s and Dean’s masculinities, and by doing so clarifies the significance and necessity of their homosocial relationship and Sal’s agency in the development of Sal’s masculine identity.

The Exigencies of Hitting the Road: Sal’s Crises

Sal takes to the road every time he becomes restless and dissatisfied with his life—every time he feels incomplete and in need of life-affirming experiences. Significantly, Sal first meets Dean after leaving his wife and recovering from a “serious illness” that Sal does not want to explain except that “it had something to do with the miserably weary split-up and [his] feeling that everything was dead” (1). In the context of gender identity construction, the divorce deprives Sal of his sense of manhood in that he no longer performs the ‘superior’ social role of husband, and is demoted to bachelorhood—a role for young men and post-adolescent boys. As Ian Harris claims, “Marriage takes a man out of the rough and tumble world of bachelorhood, where he has to prove himself and take risks to get his emotional needs met, and allows him to abandon many of the trappings of classical masculinity.”⁶⁶ Sal’s divorce ejects him from the secure masculine world of marriage into the anxious and unsure world of bachelorhood. That Dean, an excited and energetic character, comes into Sal’s life after a time of depression and loss positions Dean as a potential, influential model of masculinity in Sal’s life.

In a manner of speaking, Sal’s divorce emasculates him as it creates a void (and vulnerability) in his masculine identity. In contrast to Sal’s recent depression, Dean’s

liveliness and vigorous masculinity engrosses Sal's attention and provides him with an opportunity to renew his sense of a masculine identity. In Sal's words, "the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road" (1). Sal's life on the road consists primarily of discovering how he wants to live and specifically the masculine identity he will perform. Dean, as Theado argues, "offers a sunlit future, a positive force, a chance to be a man in the great western sense of cowboys and frontiersmen."⁶⁷ In the context of the road, Dean—as he represents the cowboys who went west in search of freedom from social constraints—represents the dominant force countering the ideas of a more compliant and traditional American life that influence Sal's masculine identity.

Early in the novel Sal provides many descriptions of Dean that reveal the attention Sal gives to Dean's character as well as suggest Dean's influence on Sal's development. For Sal, Dean initially represents the ideal compromise between carnality and intellectualism. Sal says that "to [Dean] sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living and so on" (2). Sal also describes Dean as "the holy con-man with the shining mind" (5), whose "intelligence was every bit as formal and shining and complete, without the tedious intellectualness. And his 'criminality' was not something sulked and sneered; it was a wild yea-saying overburst of American joy" (7). Dean's behavior and personality intrigue Sal and cause him to follow Dean: "I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me" (5). In addition to Dean's ability to influence and captivate other men, the image of Sal's shambling along after Dean is important. Shambling indicates a slow, shuffling gait. This image reiterates Sal's malaise as well as implies doubt about Sal's ultimate ability to sustain the same vivacity that Dean can.

Nevertheless, entranced by Dean's enthusiasm, Sal follows Dean as he leads them from one adventure to another.

The significance of Sal's interest in Dean exceeds mere curiosity—Sal finds in Dean a part of himself (not unlike, as I will later discuss, Tyler as a part of *Fight Club*'s narrator). As Sal explains, “it wasn't only because I was a writer and needed new experiences that I wanted to know Dean more...but because, somehow in spite of our differences in character, he reminded me of some long-lost brother” (7). Compared to Sal's other “negative” friends in New York, “in [Dean's] excited way of speaking [he] heard again the voices of old companions and brothers” (7). Dean provides Sal with a genuine sense of familial belonging that begins to fill the void his divorce creates in his life. Instead of establishing his masculine gender identity in marriage, Sal takes his first trip to reconstitute his masculinity through his new brotherhood with Dean.

The brotherhood/fellowship Sal shares with Dean overpowers Sal's relationship with his actual blood-brother in Virginia. When Dean and company arrive at his brother's house in Testament, they interrupt Sal's “quiet Christmas in the country” (115). The scene interrupted by Dean symbolizes Sal's life without Dean's presence during the previous year. According to Sal, after returning from his first trip “[Sal] stayed home all that time, finished [his] book and began going to school” (109). In other words, Sal spent the year quietly recovering from his last trip and the loss of his pseudo-marital relationship with Terry, the Mexican girl he had met in L.A (which I will discuss later). Like their first meeting, Dean's arrival in Testament provides Sal with another chance to rediscover and reconstruct his bachelor masculinity through their homosocial brotherhood. Once again, in comparison to

Sal's subdued life Dean offers adventure and excitement: "the bug was on me again, and the bug's name was Dean Moriarty and I was off on another spurt around the road" (115).

Dean's appeal to Sal and Sal's need for fellowship with Dean suggest both the lingering feeling of dissatisfaction in Sal's life and his reliance on Dean to enliven him.

However, Sal's second trip with Dean differs from his first trip in that Dean's character has changed: "this was the new and complete Dean, grown to maturity" (113). Not only had Dean matured, he also had developed his influence over other men: "Ed Dunkel was a tall, calm, unthinking fellow who was completely ready to do anything Dean asked him" (111). In the period of Sal's first trip, both he and Dean require guidance in the development of their identities. While Sal looks to Dean for guidance, Dean initially looks to Carlo Marx. However, Carlo's influence expires after he "finally taught Dean that he can do anything he wants" (42). After which, Dean begins to perform his own uninhibited and intoxicating identity that draws other men and women to him. It is the mature and purpose-driven Dean that Sal chooses to follow on his second road trip. Sal's choice suggests that he requires the experienced and influential Dean as a guide to his own maturity. Specifically, Sal needs the masculine identification he acquires through his homosocial relationship with Dean to perform a masculine identity.

However, by the end of Sal's second trip Dean's influence over him wanes. Sal admits, "What I accomplished by coming to Frisco I don't know. Camille wanted me to leave; Dean didn't care one way or the other...It was the end; I wanted to get out" (178). Originally, Sal's interest in going to San Francisco with Dean and Marylou involved a potential affair with Marylou and continued companionship with Dean. The affair never

occurs and after the first few days in San Francisco Dean abandons Sal for Camille. As a result, Sal loses both his potential, masculine security as Marylou's romantic partner (similar to the masculine security of marriage) and his masculinity-affirming and enriching homosocial relationship with Dean. Even though Sal admits he "was too young to know what happened," the experience displays the beginnings of his self-sufficiency, another quality Harris argues is necessary in a masculine identity.⁶⁸ As Sal survives on the streets of San Francisco, Dean's abandonment helps Sal develop a sense of his own capability and independence.

Sal's development of independence during his second trip prepares him to take his third trip for and by himself. Tired of his transitory life, Sal decides to establish himself: "In the spring of 1949 I had a few dollars saved from my GI education checks and I went to Denver, thinking of settling down there" (179). In Denver, Sal "saw [himself] in Middle America, a patriarch" (179). Even though his claim initially appears as a sign of his masculine empowerment, Sal quickly notes that "nobody was there" (179). The absence of his friends invalidates Sal's feeling of being a patriarch—without subjects or an audience he cannot perform a patriarch's role. Lonely, depressed again, and wandering Denver's streets, Sal realizes that "all [his] life [he had] white ambitions;⁶⁹ that was why [he had] abandoned a good woman like Terry" (180). Sal's realization indicts society's influence on his masculine gender identity and his subsequent dissatisfaction in life. By contrast, Dean seems free from society's constraints on his identity performance. In looking to Dean as his model, Sal desires the same apparent freedom.

Once again disillusioned and alone, Sal finds himself desiring Dean's re-masculating companionship: "the raggedy neighborhoods reminded me of Dean and Marylou, who knew them so well from childhood. How I wish I could find them" (180). Sal's third trip—his first assertion of agency—fails as he realizes his masculine vulnerability and his need for his homosocial relationship with Dean despite their previous conflicts. As Sal confesses, "I ran immediately to Dean" (182). Surprised and not surprised, Dean greets Sal, saying, "I didn't think you'd actually do it. You've finally come to *me*" (183, emphasis original). Sal's reply is telling: "Yep...Everything fell apart in me" (183). Somehow Dean knew Sal would need him again, and Sal in need seeks and submits himself to Dean's reassurance and guidance. Without his homosocial relationship with his "long-lost brother" Dean, Sal remains unable to perform any masculine identity—Sal's masculinity seems always connected to Dean's. The conclusion of Sal's third trip, initially an assertion of independence, ends with Sal's dependent embrace of Dean on Long Island: "We clasped hands and agreed to be friends forever" (248). Sal can only experience the freedom to perform his masculine identity while bound to Dean.

Sal's fourth trip also begins with an assertion of his presumed independence: "Whenever spring comes to New York I can't stand the suggestions of the land that come blowing over the river from New Jersey and I've got to go. So I went. *For the first time in our lives I said good-bye to Dean in New York and left him there*" (249, emphasis mine). That Sal leaves Dean in New York is significant in two conflicting ways: Sal's action displays his agency, but Dean's residence in Sal's hometown provides the foundation for Sal's will to act. In leaving Dean in New York, Sal acts only because he believes Dean will remain in New

York: “I hope you’ll be in New York when I get back...All I hope, Dean, is someday we’ll be able to live on the same street with our families and get to be a couple of old timers together,” to which Dean replies, “That’s right, man” (253). Dean’s sharing of Sal’s hope that they will grow old together provides Sal with the courage to take his fourth trip. In this way, their homosocial relationship continues to empower Sal.

While the empowerment of their homosocial relationship allows Sal to take his trip to Denver, Dean’s unexpected arrival in Denver ensures that Sal and Stan Shephard will make their trip to Mexico. Originally, Stan looks to Sal to lead him on a trip to Mexico. However, when Dean, in New York, hears about the potential trip he buys a car and drives to Denver to lead the trip himself. Upon his arrival in Denver Sal relinquishes his control to Dean: “Well, okay, I’m always ready to follow Dean, so we all hustled to the new set of plans” (262). With only the news of his imminent arrival, Stan also defers to Dean’s authority: “Do you think he’ll let me come along?” (259). In this way, Dean’s influence supersedes Sal’s agency and Sal again becomes one of Dean’s followers.

Sal, Stan, and Dean leave Denver for Mexico City because Dean desires to do so. Dean not only directs their travels, but he energizes the trip with his unstoppable determination to enjoy himself. Dean’s presence enriches Sal and Stan’s experience, and that is why they follow him. Traveling with Dean allows Sal and Stan to identify with Dean’s continued performance of his masculine freedom and power.

Examples of Masculinity: Dean, Sal, and Others

On the Road contains several examples of masculine identities. However, as Sal and Dean’s homosocial relationship develops, Dean’s character becomes the most pervasive

masculine presence in the novel. Dean represents Sal's ideal compromise between carnality and intellectualism. Sal's depiction of Dean in Denver during his first road trip illustrates the intensity with which Dean pushes this compromise. Dean races back and forth between two women and all-night conversations with Carlo Marx. In doing so, Dean crams as much activity into his daily schedule as he can manage; as Sal reports, "I was amazed. Everything was so crazy" (43). While Dean's life fascinates Sal, Sal's observations suggest some criticism of Dean's behavior, and thus of his model of masculinity.⁷⁰ As Sal comments on Dean's and Carlo's all-night talks, he warns, "If you keep this up you'll both go crazy" (50). In Sal's eyes and the eyes of others, Dean does not appear to truly be in control of his life but rather to be controlled by his whims.

Sal's observations of Dean's behaviors imply Dean's lack of discipline, and thus, depict Dean as a more of a boy than a man. One of the male messages that Harris argues men receive from society involves a man's self-control: "Men are in control of their relationships, emotions, and jobs."⁷¹ Harris explains that "young boys are taught at an early age to control their emotions" and that "Men who do not have self-control lack discipline, a manly virtue."⁷² Yet Sal also seems to understand that Dean's behavior is a defiant challenge to such social conventions. Dean's lifestyle in Denver is a personal experiment to test the limits of his control while on the brink of losing control. Only Dean seems out of control—Dean strains himself in this way to demonstrate that he can.

Presumably, Dean's identifications with his alcoholic bum father and his hectic, hedonistic running around Denver isolate him from the relocated New York gang. Specifically, Dean refuses to act like a reformed man acceptable to society. Sal observes the

social division between his friends: “I sense some kind of conspiracy in the air, and this conspiracy lined up two groups in the gang” (37). Dean, as associated with Carlo and the local pool hall gang, contrasts the seemingly upstanding and socially accepted group of Chad King, Tim Gray, Roland Major, and the Rowlines—all established Denver community figures. In this way, Dean represents the anti-establishment alternative to social constraints upheld by Sal’s established friends.

Sal’s relationships with the two groups in Denver position him “smack in the middle of this interesting war” (37). As Sal explains further, “Dean, who had the tremendous energy of a new kind of American saint, and Carlo were the underground monsters of that season in Denver” (38). Describing Dean as the “new American saint” reveals Sal’s partiality towards Dean. However, Sal also knows that Dean does not fit in the mainstream: “I wished Dean and Carlo were there—then I realized they’d be out of place and unhappy” (54). For Sal, two roads lie before him: controlling his desires in order to identify with his established friends or suffering their disapproval through his continued companionship with Dean. Either way, Sal risks receiving criticism from each group. Sal’s concern evokes Kimmel’s argument that manhood “has to be proved in the eyes of other men.”⁷³ Sal’s dilemma, then, is deciding which group’s approval he desires.

Sal’s balancing between these opposing groups—and desires—indicates his unwillingness to choose between either identification. That Sal spends most of his time with the established group but continuously seeks to know Dean’s location suggests he actually desires association with Dean over his association with his established friends. Whomever Sal associates with determines his masculine identity performance. While with his

established friends Sal must perform a conservative masculinity, with Dean Sal can perform an uninhibited masculinity. Dean's masculinity represents a freedom from social constraints that makes his identity more appealing and, in its defiant independence, its rebellious self-reliance, seemingly more masculating.

The mature and complete Dean who meets Sal in Virginia is even more out of control than the Dean Sal left in Denver. Yet Dean has become a man of complete faith that everything will be okay; as Dean explains, "Everything is fine, God exists, we know time" (120). Dean's faith provides order underneath the chaotic surface others observe and suggests again Dean's control over his actions while seemingly out of control. The new optimistic Dean downplays the consequences of his faults while asserting his agency. Significantly, Dean explains to Sal that "everything since the Greeks has been predicted wrong. You can't make it with geometry and geometrical systems of thinking. It's all *this!*' [Then] He wrapped his finger in his fist; the car hugged the line straight and true" (120). In wrapping his finger with his own fist, Dean claims his agency and suggests that everyone else has agency as well. The last clause about the car holding straight and true symbolizes Dean's faith and provides physical and mystical affirmation of Dean's insight—the car does not falter from the path that Dean sets it on, it somehow stays true. With this concept of universal agency established, Dean claims that "the rest is not my fault" (121). Dean not only provides an example of independence, he advocates others' attempts to assert their own agency. Dean leads them while taking no responsibility for the consequences of his or their actions—Dean becomes the independent and blameless masculine man.

The trip to Mexico represents Dean's masculine zenith of adventure and sexual conquest. Ultimately, Dean loves Mexico because he feels a sense of freedom there that he does not experience in America. Sal and Stan follow Dean as he leads them to Mexico City by way of swamps, mountains, and whorehouses. Their behavior and excitement on the trip display the extremities of their masculine identity performance. Specifically, their experiences at the whorehouse—what Sal refers to as “a pornographic hasheesh daydream in heaven” (289)—epitomize hedonistic masculinities. Yet, when it is time to get back on the road and move on to their destination Sal and Dean can restrain themselves enough to leave: “we had to get on to the end; and Dean saw that, and began frowning and thinking and trying to straighten himself out” (289). However, as Sal reports Stan is the one who cannot control his hedonistic desires: “He wanted to start all over again. When he is drunk he lumbers like a man ten feet tall and when he is drunk he can't be dragged away from women” (290). In contrast to Stan, the man-without-discipline, Dean and Sal exhibit the ability to satisfy and control their desires, and thus, prove their superior masculinities.

Woman and *On the Road*: The Views of Dean and Sal

Dean's considerable problems with women throughout the novel result from his idealized romantic relationship. While observing strangers they meet in San Francisco, Dean explains his ideal to Sal, “Now you see, man, there's *real* woman for you. Never a harsh word, never a complaint, or modified; her old man can come in any hour of the night with anybody and have talks in the kitchen and drink beer and leave any old time” (204). Inherent in Dean's observation is the idealized freedom of a man given to him by his “*real* woman;” that is, according to Dean a *real* woman's identity is contingent on the freedom the woman

allows her man, on her performance as an unrestrictive romantic partner. When Sal goes to Dean in San Francisco, during his third road trip, Dean has undergone a period of restriction by Camille. Dean leaves her because she limits his masculine identity and he cannot perform the independence of the man he observes in San Francisco.

Dean's performance of what he would consider a *real* masculine identity, then, necessitates either the absence of women or the presence of a *real* woman. In either case, it is the presence or absence of other men in Dean's life that actually complicates his relationships with women. Like the woman they observe in San Francisco, a real woman will give Dean the freedom to behave as he wishes, but a woman like Camille "won't let [Dean] out to see Slim Gaillard [and] gets mad every time [he's] late" (183). In restricting Dean's behavior and interaction with other men, Camille reinforces the male cultural message that Harris argues tells men to "give up their freedom when they get married."⁷⁴ But as Dean embodies a rebellious masculine identity he cannot stay with the constraints Camille places on him—much as he cannot accept the social constraints of Sal's established friends in Denver.

Though Dean feels restricted by his relationships to women, Sal does not. Sal's affair with Terry calls into question his perception of his own masculine identity in relation to woman and also illustrates his sense of traditional masculine roles. Unable to pick cotton as well as Terry or her son Johnny, Sal says, "What kind of old man was I that couldn't support his own ass, let alone theirs" (96). Whereas Dean might feel restricted by the needs of a family, Sal's self-rebuke suggests his belief in the masculine responsibility to provide for a family. His belief aligns his sense of masculinity with what Harris refers to as the male

message of “Breadwinner:” “Men provide for and protect family members.”⁷⁵ Sal’s self-rebuke acknowledges his masculine deficiency. However, in adhering to the demand to provide he performs his masculine duty and continues to work for enough money to buy their food. In return for his performance, Sal’s experience with Terry and their days spent in the fields fulfills an ideal for Sal: “I was a man of the earth, precisely as I had dreamed I would be, in Paterson” (97). During his time with Terry, to have a family, to work with his hands, to come home every night tired and hungry from a good, hard day at work meant for Sal being a man.

The Pursuit of “IT”: Dean’s Masculating Purpose

In *On the Road*, Dean believes that traveling and “digging” everything available to him (sex, drugs, jazz, books, friends, etc.) will eventually lead to “IT.” Giamo describes “IT” as “a transcendent state of pure excitement.”⁷⁶ However, Dean’s references to IT suggest that IT consists of knowledge through experience, pure excitement, and tranquility together. Thus, IT is better described as a transcendental state of enlightenment obtained through one’s experiences. The transcendental nature of IT resembles the nature Ahab ascribes to the white whale in *Moby-Dick*. That the enlightenment of IT requires experiences recalls my earlier argument that Ahab’s words suggest that only in one’s living acts is one’s identity performed and expressed. Yet, as a state of enlightenment—an individualized and perceived psychological state—IT also represents an experience that one cannot clearly articulate to or perform for another. Nevertheless, similar to the effect Ahab’s pursuit of Moby Dick has on the masculinities onboard the *Pequod*, Dean’s pursuit of IT becomes a significant aspect of his masculine identity and his homosocial relationship with Sal.

Dean's all-night conversations with Carlo Marx represent his first attempts to realize IT. Sal's criticism of their all-night sessions reveals his initial lack of faith in Dean's pursuit: "I just don't know what you're both driving at or trying to get at" (48). Dean and Carlo believe that if they continuously discuss their everyday experiences, emotions, and thoughts they might articulate the essence of experience that evades language—they might strike through the mask of language and express IT. Inexperienced compared to Dean and Carlo, Sal cannot understand the purpose of their prolonged conversations—only through having more life experiences can Sal begin to understand IT. However, Dean's attempts to reach IT through conversation also suggest his need for more life experience to understand IT—since he must understand that IT cannot be found in conversation. Accordingly, IT is established as something that only experience will impart to the individual.

Dean's desire to obtain IT motivates him and provides purpose to his actions as IT also draws others to him. In providing purpose to his actions, Dean's pursuit of IT becomes a formative factor in his masculine identity and the identities of other men with whom he shares homosocial relationships. While defending Dean to a group of their female friends, Sal claims, "I'll bet you want to know what he does next and that's because he's got the secret that we're all busting to find and it's splitting his head wide open" (196). Sal's comments indicate his and others' awareness of IT as part of Dean's character. Moreover, Sal's observation of the women's preoccupation with Dean mirrors his own. As much as IT attracts Sal, Dean's awareness of and search for IT induces Sal's desire for homosocial intimacy with Dean; a homosocial relationship with IT as the focus. Dean, aware of Sal's yearning, wants to help Sal realize IT. As a result, their homosocial relationship develops out

of their mutual desire for IT. And, the more their desire to obtain IT increases the closer they become.

Through the example of Rollo Greb, a jazz musician, Dean attempts to convey to Sal the meaning of and the path to IT: “He’s never hung-up, he goes every direction, he lets it all out, he knows time, he has nothing to do but rock back and forth. Man, he’s the end! You see, if you go like him all the time you’ll finally get to it” (127). Not understanding, Sal asks, “Get what?” To which Dean replies, “IT! IT! I’ll tell you—now no time, we have no time now” (127). While Dean wants Sal to understand “IT,” he cannot stop to explain IT because only through continuing their co-experience of listening to Rollo and later to George Shearing (another musician) can either hope to reach IT. As Dean’s words and actions display in this scene, perpetual movement towards IT is the only way to the enlightenment IT represents.

As much as the trip to Mexico represents Dean’s masculine zenith, it represents the climax of Dean’s and Sal’s pursuit of IT. While heading to Mexico, Dean articulates the culmination of their pursuit to Sal: “‘Man, this will finally take us to IT!’ said Dean with definite faith. He tapped my arm. ‘Just wait and see. Hoo! Whee!’” (265). Dean, always the optimist, believes that on the roads of Mexico they will realize the IT they cannot attain on the roads of America. However, Sal realizes that for Dean there is always something ahead that leads to a greater sense of IT: “Dean wanted to make extra-special time to get to Mexico City, and besides he knew the road would get more interesting, especially ahead, always ahead” (279). Sal’s observation implies that IT represents an unreachable enlightenment, and yet, the experiences that Dean and Sal share allow them to understand each other in

incommunicable ways. The experiences Dean and Sal share build their homosocial relationship to a level that allows them to intuit IT without words. The pursuit of IT becomes IT, and pursuing IT together forms the basis for their relationship. The pursuit of IT unites Sal and Dean as it defines their relationship and their masculine identities.

Conclusions: *On the Road* and Society

Kerouac's novel takes place in a period of American history in which, as Leavitt claims, "American masculinity reached another of its perpetual crisis points."⁷⁷ Leavitt explains that "the sweeping triumph of technological capitalism made the strong back of the American worker irrelevant."⁷⁸ and that "most American men in the 1950's lacked true outlets for their passions. Consumerism, mainstream society's major means of creating and measuring identity, was utterly unsatisfying for many. Social roles grew more constrained just as the pressure on masculine identity grew stronger."⁷⁹ In this cultural context, Kerouac's portrayal of Dean's assertive and uninhibited character offers *one* alternative to the constraints—behavioral expectations like secure employment, personal self-control, and provision for family—placed on men's social roles and especially on their masculine identities.

Whereas Dean's peers, including Sal for most of the text, and presumably readers, adhere to social constraints that construct and control one's identity performance, "Dean just raced in society, eager for bread and love; he didn't care one way or the other" (8). In this way, Kerouac's Dean embodies what Savran describes as the beat generation's protest against "the inflexibility of social norms."⁸⁰ Or as Leavitt argues, Dean "made a natural hero for a generation of disaffected youth. His special talent was [...] for passionate living:

lovemaking, drug-taking, spontaneous action without regard for social norms.”⁸¹ Leavitt goes on to remind readers that “while [Dean’s talents] are highly debatable behaviors, they were in fact the core values of the ‘60’s generation’s counterculture.”⁸² Yet, that Sal, abandoned by Dean in a Mexico City hospital, finally rejects Dean’s example of masculinity—“when I got better I realized what a rat he was” (302)—suggests that Dean, in his self-absorbed rebellion, is not the only alternative to social conformity in the text. Sal’s conscious choice to perform his own identity, whatever that identity is, offers the other, overlooked option: conscientious conformity.

The insights into the construction of masculinity that emerge from reading *On the Road* in this way subvert the novel’s contemporary readership’s conceptions of identity construction and offers alternatives to the social messages men receive.⁸³ As their relationship develops, Sal’s identification with Dean empowers his masculine identity performance. Dean’s disregard for their homosocial relationship frustrates Sal’s identification with him and finally leaves Sal responsible for the construction of his own masculine identity. Importantly, Sal says “in the fall *I myself* started back home from Mexico City” (303, emphasis mine). As evidenced in his words, Sal finally develops a sense of his own agency—Sal can and does act on his own. Ultimately, Sal’s life on the road proves—as he discovers and develops his identity—his manhood outside of marriage and independent of his masculinity-affirming homosocial relationship to Dean.

Reading the novel this way suggests that even though one’s masculinity is ultimately affirmed through the realization and then assertion of one’s agency, that moment of agency requires preparation through male homosocial relationships. Sal’s life on the road, as

composed of his homosocial relationship with Dean and their adventures, is his preparation for agency. *On the Road*, then, presents homosocial relationships as a necessary part of the construction of masculinity and suggests that without the development of agency one's masculine gender identity cannot be realized, and thus, will be constructed by another entity. In the context of *On the Road*, as well as *Moby-Dick* and *Fight Club*, the other entity is either society or a more dominant male such as Dean, Ahab and Queequeg, or Tyler.

The purpose of this reading is not to advocate either alternative to social conformity, but to reiterate the necessity of agency in the construction of masculinity supported by the text. Both Dean and Sal choose the masculine identities they come to perform. To the extent that a man's masculinity requires an assertion of agency, the text also supports the development of masculine identities through homosocial relationships. In this way, as the novel offers the travels of both Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty as forms of resistance to culture's influence on one's life, it also illustrates the construction of masculinity through male homosocial relationships and assertion of agency.

Chapter Three: *Fight Club*

Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*⁸⁴ epitomizes the struggles of men in their masculine identity performances. As a novel about men who fight each other because it makes them feel alive and who revolt against society because it has deceived them with a false promise of wealth, fame, and happiness, *Fight Club* explicitly concerns the effects of culture on one's identity. However, as a story completely dependent on the development of the relationship between the two primary male characters, the narrator and Tyler Durden, *Fight Club* also demonstrates the significance of homosocial relationships in the development and performance of masculine identities.

While several scholars have discussed David Fincher's film adaptation of the novel, few have discussed the novel itself. For the most part, these scholars focus on the reasons behind the men's rebellion against the culture they inhabit. As Mark Pettus says, "Palahniuk's novel primarily consists of an examination of contemporary consumer culture and a quasi-fascist mobilization against it, namely fight club and Project Mayhem."⁸⁵ Palahniuk's examination reveals, what Krister Friday describes as, a "besieged and waning masculinity" that represents "a crisis of masculinity in contemporary American culture"⁸⁶—a crisis caused by social pressures to conform "to emasculating white-collar work" in an "enervating consumer culture."⁸⁷ In reference to this crisis, Kevin Boon explains that "In America during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, a cultural ethic emerged that disassociated men from aggression in an attempt to create a more congenial masculinity."⁸⁸

The emergence of this “congenial masculinity” through, as Boon refers to it, “the rhetoric of anti-aggression” resulted in the “radical altering [of] the way men are perceived and the way men perceive themselves.”⁸⁹ Enfeebled by a consumer culture and confused about the gender identities society expects of them—the radical altering of their perception—men have become emasculated as they surrender the control of their identities to cultural norms.

Reading *Fight Club* with regard to these sociological claims inevitably causes one to focus on the nature of Tyler’s revolution as a rebellion against the modern emasculation of men and the consumer culture that reinforces that emasculation. However, though Tyler presents the revolution as such a rebellion, it is more accurately a rebellion against the emasculated man the narrator represents. Tyler is the narrator’s subconscious projection of what the narrator desires to be but is too conditioned by society to become, and as such, Tyler represents a subconscious response to—a psychological revolt against—the narrator’s emasculation.

Putting alter egos and “schizophrenic hallucinations” aside (168), to the narrator Tyler is a separate person who saves him from the emasculating world by first befriend- ing him and then starting a revolution; their relationship remasculates the narrator by providing him with masculine fellowship and purpose. The narrator—like the rest of the men in *Fight Club*—looks to Tyler for an example of how to be a man. In doing so, the narrator follows the same pattern of remasculation that both Ishmael of *Moby-Dick* and Sal of *On the Road* undergo; he resolves his masculine identity crisis through engaging in purposeful homosocial relationships. And, in much the same way that Sal’s experiences with Dean prepares him to

assert agency in his life, the narrator of *Fight Club*'s experiences as part of fight club and Project Mayhem prepare him to do the same.

However, whereas the absence of a woman in Sal's life initiates his life on the road, the presence of a woman in the narrator's life instigates the creation of fight club, which evolves into Project Mayhem. As the narrator admits late in the text, "I know why Tyler had occurred. Tyler loved Marla. From the first time I met her, Tyler or some part of me had needed a way to be with Marla" (198). In other words, because the narrator was not "man enough" he could not be with Marla except through Tyler. As Marla's presence in the text exposes the masculine identity crisis the narrator has denied, the narrator needs Tyler's remasculation in order to interact with Marla. What happens to the narrator in *Fight Club* is a result of his relationships with Tyler and Marla, or as the narrator informs readers in the beginning of his story, "I know all of this: the gun, the anarchy, the explosion is really about Marla Singer... We have sort of a triangle thing going here. I want Tyler. Tyler wants Marla. Marla wants me" (14). In this way, *Fight Club* entails the homosocial relationship between Tyler and the narrator, Tyler's remasculation of the narrator, and the narrator's subconscious desire for Marla.

Since *Fight Club* concerns the process of remasculation, this chapter traces the narrator's masculine identity crisis and his responses to it through three plot elements: the narrator's pre-fight-club emasculation and flight from the feminine presence of Marla, the emergence of Tyler and the development of fight club as a method of coping with/remasculating gender identity, and the invention of Project Mayhem, Tyler's disappearance, and the narrator's reconciliation with Marla.

Pre-Fight Club: the Narrator's "Lovely Nest," Support Groups, and Marla

In the world of *Fight Club*, the narrator epitomizes the late twentieth-century emasculated male. As readers learn, the narrator does not like his job, yet he continues to work towards his "five-year plan" (49); he builds himself a "lovely nest" in which he feels trapped but does nothing to escape (44); he owns a lot of things but feels as if his possessions really own him (44). Like the other men at a fight club, the narrator had a fatherless childhood and was "raised by women" (50). Tyler describes the narrator and his peers as "the middle children of history, raised by television to believe that someday [they'll] be millionaires and movie stars and rock stars, but [they] won't. And [they're] just learning this fact" (166). Disillusioned, the narrator no longer wishes to live, but is too weak to commit suicide: every time his plane takes off, lands, or banks hard the narrator "prays for a crash" (25-6). On some psychological level the narrator knows all these things are wrong in his life, but he lacks the motivation to correct his situation—he would rather watch his life "end one minute at a time" (29). Burdened, depressed, and incapacitated as a passive spectator of his own life, the narrator represents a generation of average- middle- and working-class American males.

Early in his story the narrator presents himself as a gatherer of things, locating his identity in the domestic sphere of his apartment. Before his condominium suspiciously explodes and destroys all of his possessions, the narrator recalls all the items he once owned (40-6). The possession of these items is a symptom of what the narrator refers to as his "nesting instinct" (43). As the narrator claims, this sort of instinct is not unique to him: "The people I know who used to sit in the bathroom with pornography, now they sit in the

bathroom with their IKEA furniture catalogue” (43). Boon argues that the “nesting instinct” stands in for the traditional masculine demand for conquest; that is, he argues that gathering possessions is the same as conquering the frontier.⁹⁰ More accurately, I maintain that the “nesting instinct” completely displaces the masculine expectation of conquest with the feminizing behavior of gathering. Like his peers, the narrator has now also replaced stereotypical masculine habits—the sexual objectification of women through “conquest”—with stereotypical feminine habits—the shopping for and gathering of things to complete his “lovely nest” (44). In displacing his masculine need for conquest with the feminizing behavior of gathering, the narrator seeks to complete himself by completing his lovely nest—the narrator seeks a feminizing completion of his identity.

Consumer societies need materialism to survive. In the world of *Fight Club*, materialism focuses men’s energies on acquiring luxuries: “Advertising has these people chasing cars and clothes they don’t need. Generations have been working in jobs they hate, just so they can buy what they don’t really need” (149). The possessions the narrator lists are not the typical inexpensive furnishings of a bachelor, but are all name-brand lamps, sofas, clocks, sheets, quilt-cover sets, and even hat boxes—all luxuries. As the narrator’s doorman asserts, “A lot of young people try to impress the world and buy too many things” (45). According to Tyler’s dogma, “as long as you’re at fight club, you’re not how much money you’ve got in the bank. You’re not your job” (143). In other words, material possessions and employment should not define a man. Identifying with domestic possessions—such as “the right set of dishes,” “the perfect bed,” and “drapes”—constructs a faulty and emasculating identity (44).

In his historical study of American manhood, Michael Kimmel recounts the critiques of manhood based on the acquiring of and insisting upon luxuries, specifically that such luxuries as the narrator's feminize the possessor.⁹¹ Kimmel's observation concerns the anxieties of men in the early nineteenth century who were attempting to establish standards for masculine behavior. The doorman's comment reminds us that these anxieties remain unresolved even in contemporary society. In this scene, the doorman represents the wiser and older American man who knows that material possessions do not make the man. The narrator represents the young man who has confused his identity with his luxuries, and thus, has feminized himself. While defending himself to a detective who suspects his guilt in the explosion, the narrator explains, "That was my whole life. Everything, the lamps, the chairs, the rugs were me. The dishes in the cabinets were me. The plants were me. The television was me. It was me that blew up" (111).

The doorman also represents an earlier perspective of society's expectations of masculine identities. The narrator and his peers represent the new expectations of men, both multiple and emasculating. Harris argues in his sociological study of men that "male behavior is strongly influenced by gender role messages men receive from their social environments."⁹² Accordingly, society/culture informs the narrator and the late twentieth-century men he represents that the objectification of women is not appropriate anymore, but that possessing a "Mommala quilt-cover set" is quite proper for any man (44). Harris also argues that "each man constructs his own identity in relation to specific gender notions deeply embedded in his culture."⁹³ In the pre-fight-club world, the narrator and other men construct their identities based on the gender notions of an American culture driven by

materialism—men should find contentment in building “lovely nests.” After fight club’s invention, these men construct their identities through fight club’s revolt against the culture that reinforces such emasculating gender notions.

Before he meets Tyler, the narrator’s attendance at support groups also exemplifies his emasculation. The most symbolic of these groups is “Remaining Men Together, the testicular cancer support group” (18). This support group consists of men who have had their testicles removed to save them from cancer. The narrator, who does not have cancer and who is fully intact, goes to this group to feel better about his own life and to reduce his insomnia. The physically emasculated men in this support group provide the narrator with a sense of fellowship in their struggle to remain men. Acceptance into this community of men is based on the mutual presumption among the men that they all suffer through the same struggle: “Bob loves me because he thinks my testicles were removed, too” (17). Survival of and recovery from testicular cancer unite the men and gives them a common purpose. In the company of men who have literally had their testicles—a symbol of their manhood—removed, the narrator feels accepted and comfortable. However, these men only interact in stereotypically feminine ways. They express their feelings, give each other hugs, and cry on one another’s shoulders—these are not traditional masculine behaviors.

Moreover, the narrator’s interaction with Bob, a man without testicles but with breasts, unites him to the maternal through their embrace. Within Bob’s arms, the narrator experiences his first moment of feeling “more alive than I’d ever felt” (22) (The next place the narrator will make such a claim is at fight club (51)). Before meeting Bob, the narrator suffered from insomnia, which his doctor informed him is a “symptom of something larger”

(19). Presumably, the something larger in the narrator's life was his life: his job, his car, his apartment, his possessions, et cetera. These things that constituted the narrator's life did not satisfy him, but Bob's embrace does. The narrator's image of his first meeting with Bob is one of him submerged in Bob's hormone-created breasts, crying out all his woes. As a result of their interaction the narrator sleeps better than a baby (22). The image of their embrace positions Bob as the mother and the narrator as the weeping, weak boy, and thus not a man. The image presents the narrator as finding solace and protection within Bob's maternal embrace. Before the invention of fight club, the narrator can only find release, comfort, and security with men made feminine because he too is a feminine/emasculated man.

Once the narrator experiences Bob's maternal embrace, to feel complete, to find relief, and to sleep at night, he seeks it again and again for over two years (39). However, in this emasculated environment the new presence of an actual female, Marla, threatens this safe place for the narrator. The narrator claims, "I can't cry with her watching. This should be my favorite part, being held and crying with Big Bob without hope" (18). Marla prevents the narrator from uniting with these men: "with her watching, [he's] a liar" (23). Her lie reflects his lie, and this reflection corrupts the narrator's experience, which causes him to break his embrace with Bob and flee from Marla's authentic feminine presence.

Kimmel's study of American manhood suggests that men need the approval of other men to feel like men.⁹⁴ Certainly, if the narrator's deception is exposed he will not have the approval of these men; and in this way, Marla's presence is a threat preventing the narrator from feeling secure. Hence, I hold that Marla exposes the narrator to his own counterfeit, to his true performance in this support group. In her study of gender construction, Butler

explains, “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”⁹⁵ In other words, one continuously constructs one’s gender identity through an active performance of expressions; or simply, gender identity is performed. Butler’s insight into gender construction indicates that it is only in the act of expression that gender identity is inhabited by the performer. With Marla watching, the narrator realizes the type of image his performance projects: a man performing the role of a boy in a mother’s arms, not two men comforting each other (also, an emasculating performance). In Marla’s presence, he can no longer deny that by crying in Bob’s arms he projects an emasculated image of child and not of a man.

Consequently, Marla’s observation of the narrator interrupts his delusion of belonging to this group of men. Specifically, Marla’s spectatorship of the narrator’s gender identity performance—a little boy crying in a mother’s arms—calls into question the validity of the narrator’s experience. In a group of men united by the purpose of remaining men together, none of the men perform the traditional roles of men. And ironically, the narrator, the only male fully intact performs the role of a boy. As evidenced by his flight from the Bob’s arms, the narrator realizes that the men locked in maternal embraces are not remaining men together, but becoming even more emasculated. His attendance at the support group can no longer resolve the masculine identity crisis that causes his insomnia. Without inclusion in the community of men, the narrator loses the completeness he feels in Bob’s arms. Once again, the narrator loses his sense of agency in life. Marla, through her threat of exposing

him to the other men, has power over him. That is, the narrator's emasculated gender identity is overpowered by the feminine presence of Marla.

Overtaken by Marla's feminine presence, Tyler emerges from the narrator's subconscious. In the narrative sequence of the novel, the narrator meets Tyler after the first time the narrator discusses Marla (16-24, 25-33). Then, after the second time the narrator discusses Marla—their confrontation at Remaining Men Together—Tyler blows up the narrator's apartment and they move into the house on Paper Street (38-9, 45-6). Thus, when the narrator's gender identity is threatened, Tyler comes into existence as the narrator's way of confronting Marla's assertive feminine presence and of coping with his lack of agency in an emasculating world.

Fight Club and Tyler's Revolution: Philosophy, Problems, and Fatherhood

If the narrator epitomizes of the late twentieth-century emasculated male, Tyler epitomizes the man of action and purpose, literally fighting for his way of life. Tyler is what cultural historian Kimmel would describe as the self-made man of American mythology.⁹⁶ He does not watch his life “end one minute at a time,” he actively participates in his own life as well as the lives of others. Tyler reveals to the other males in the text their emasculation and its origins. Tyler reminds these men “what kind of power they still have” (120) so he can “teach each man in the project that he [has] the power to control history...[that] each of [them], can take control of the world” (122). He creates an environment that saves them from their monotonous jobs, allowing them to be men again. When Tyler looks at the men at a fight club, he sees “a generation of men raised by women” (50) and “by television” (166). Discontented with their rearing, he wants to “finished raising them” (149). Tyler wants to

make these emasculated males into men. At fight club he sees men in the middle of the masculine identity crisis that Boon and Friday examine. The men do not know how to be men and their incapacitating lives keep them from asserting any agency over their identities. Tyler's life does not burden him and does not affect his agency. It is his sense of agency that Tyler wants to develop in the men of fight club, and specifically in the narrator. Thus, Tyler not only represents the man the other men should become, he leads the other men in the process of becoming his kind of man.

When Tyler comes into the story, the narrator focuses his attention on him. No longer seeking completion in Bob's maternal embrace, the narrator finds with Tyler the sense of belonging he had while attending Remaining Men Together. Instead of pretending to fight for survival of and recovery from testicular cancer, the narrator unites with Tyler in their common struggle against the kind of lives society has them chasing. Their common struggle provides the purpose for their relationship. When they invent fight club, and later Project Mayhem, they create ways to deal with their common struggle—ways to take action.

When the narrator's apartment blows up he learns his first lesson from Tyler: material possessions do not make or complete a man. As readers discover, Tyler sets up the bomb in the narrator's condominium in order to "save [the narrator's] spirit" (110). Saving the spirits of his generation is one of Tyler's revolutionary objectives because, as per Tyler dogma, "We don't have a great war in our generation, or a great depression, but we do, we have a great war of the spirit. We have a great revolution against culture. The great depression is our lives. We have a spiritual depression" (149). Tyler sets up the bomb because he needs to detach the narrator from his possessions before he can reconstruct the narrator's identity,

before he can save the narrator's spirit. Pettus argues that "the destruction of the narrator's condo and possessions prevents his identification with them through their removal from consciousness."⁹⁷ Harris claims in his study that men receive multiple and conflicting messages about the roles they should enact.⁹⁸ As Boon and Friday imply, society's multiple messages create masculine identity crises. From Tyler's perspective, everyone but the working- and middle-class male is informing men how to be men. Tyler desires to change, to clarify, and to minimize the messages men hear. Tyler's messages not only admonish against attachment to emasculating material possessions, they are meant to "remind these guys what kind of power they still have" (120). The messages the narrator receives from society are bound to his possessions—he owns things because society tells him to. Blowing up the narrator's condo destroys his possessions and the societal messages attached to them.

Contrary to the messages of society, owning nothing empowers the narrator. Moreover, the narrator realizes that completeness and perfection might not be the answer he is looking for: "Maybe self-improvement isn't the answer" (49). The narrator turns to Tyler for deliverance from his previous life: "Oh, Tyler, please deliver me... Deliver me from my Swedish furniture. Deliver me from clever art... May I never be complete. May I never be content. May I never be perfect. Deliver me, Tyler, from being perfect and complete" (46). He now knows that he does not need to own a "Mommala quilt-cover set" to complete him as a man. The narrator's prayer to Tyler also establishes a hierarchy in their relationship. Tyler has the power to deliver the narrator and Tyler will lead the narrator to knowing more about himself through self-destruction (52). In this way, the narrator becomes Tyler's first follower among the many men seeking purpose through fight club—Tyler becomes his savior.

Masculine vanity is another message Tyler's revolution labors to invalidate.

In the context of *Remaining Men Together*, Bob is the maternal—the extreme version of a man emasculated and made feminine. As the narrator discovers, Bob once was a “juicer,” a power-lifter who out of vanity used steroids to create a narcissistic body image, and now is a man with breasts. According to *Fight Club*'s philosophy, “fight club gets to be your reason for going to the gym,” as opposed to going to be “guys trying to look like men, as if being a man means looking the way a sculptor or an art director says” (50). In other words, men should go to gyms to become stronger so they can fight better with other men, not look better among other men. Bob serves many purposes in this text, but as an emasculated man he is a warning against narcissistic self-improvement: love the image of one's body and become a woman. Or, more specifically, like Bob's image once as a model of masculinity, images are temporary, but being a man means constantly projecting a masculine identity, constantly acting like a man.

By changing the motivation for going to the gym, fight club changes the environment in which men prove their manhood. The gym is a place where men try to *look* like men; fight club is a place where men *act* like men. Whereas gyms are static environments of display, fight club is a dynamic environment of performance. For the men of *Fight Club*, performing masculinity involves fighting. And, their performance at fight club is mandatory: the seventh rule of fight club “is if this is your first night at fight club, you have to fight” (50). While fighting, the men perform, develop, and inhabit masculine gender identities. Regardless of the outcome, the act of fighting makes one a man just for fighting—because “you fight to fight,” it is not personal (54). However, their performance only happens at fight club because

“who guys are in fight club is not who they are in the real world” (49). And according to the first two rules of fight club, no one talks about fight club, “because fight club exists only in the hours between when fight club starts and when fight Club ends” (48). By restricting the performance of masculinity and stressing masculinity’s temporariness, the rules Tyler and the narrator make provide the framework for the other men’s masculine performances. One can only perform while at fight club. Thus, working out becomes a means to the end of performing one’s masculinity better in the future, better at the next fight club, better at the next performance.

Another problem men have before going to a fight club is not knowing their capabilities as men. As the narrator explains, “when we invented fight club, Tyler and I, neither of us had ever been in a fight before. If you’ve never been in a fight, you wonder. About getting hurt, about what you’re capable of doing against another man” (52). These words express the narrator’s and Tyler’s pre-fight-club anxieties about the power they have over themselves and over other men. Once again, Kimmel’s study of American manhood helps explain these anxieties. Kimmel says that “masculinity, we are told, is defined by the drive for power, for domination, for control.”⁹⁹ However, Kimmel immediately discounts this belief, stating that historically “manhood is less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us, having power or control over us.”¹⁰⁰ The narrator articulates a similar view of the men who come to fight club: “Most guys are at fight club because of something they’re too scared to fight. After a few fights, you’re afraid a lot less” (54). Fight club takes away the fear of one’s inadequacies: “You see a guy come to fight club for the first time, and his ass is a loaf of bread. You see this same guy here six months

later, and he looks carved out of wood. This guy trusts himself to handle anything” (51). Fight club provides men with a place to test themselves and to learn to trust their abilities—a place to learn how to be men through performing their masculinity, through fighting.

In the beginnings of fight club, learning one’s capabilities provides one purpose for fighting. Fighting unites these men as testicular cancer unites the men of Remaining Men Together. And, in an obvious parallel, fight club becomes a support group for the average-middle- and working-class American male. Beyond learning their capabilities, the purpose of fight club for these men involves a way to survive and recover from their mundane and purposeless lives. In these ways, the men of fight club have a common struggle and find purpose in their fellowship.

When a man knows his capabilities he develops a new confidence in his sense of masculinity. Even though gender identity is performed, and thus temporary, a good performance at one point will probably result in successful performance at a later point—just like the guys who can handle anything after six months. These men continually reconstruct their masculinities through fighting. Consistent successful performances result in the confidence the men of fight club exhibit. Moreover, although fight club only exists between when it starts and when it ends, the men carry their scars and bruises into the real world with them, signifying their past performances and alluding to their future ones.

Their scars extend fight club beyond the hours of fight club—this is one reason for its growth: men curious about the activities of other men. To the males outside of fight club, the scarred and bruised men represent something they have yet to become. The non-initiated male looks to the experienced man of fight club as what the representative masculine male

should be. The men of fight club look to the inventors of fight club—the narrator and Tyler—for their masculine model and their masculine purpose, the fighter and the revolution. And, until the narrator realizes he is Tyler, he looks to Tyler as a model for his own masculine performance. Each entity, the non-initiated male, the experienced man, the narrator, and Tyler, represent the successive degrees of masculine spectatorship. All of the spectator's eyes eventually look to Tyler. Yet, Tyler looks to no one for a model of how to perform. Tyler just performs his role as the leader of a revolution, obsessed and intent upon its success—a role he gives himself.

Because they accept Tyler as their leader, it is his dogma that the men repeat to each other and his rules that they follow (140-50). Through fight club, Tyler becomes the authority who tells the men what roles they should perform. Tyler becomes the man in control who other men should fear (i.e., Kimmel's claim about the fears of American men), but the other men embrace Tyler's control as opposed to fearing it. The men of fight club willing submit to Tyler and Tyler provides them a place to liberate their spirits and to feel alive. In this way, Bob's maternal embrace that made the narrator feel alive is replaced by the embrace of men in the middle of a fight. Tyler's embrace replaces Bob's embrace. Teaching the men how to be men through a form of corporal punishment, Tyler's embrace is not that of the comforting mother, it is that of the disciplining father.

When the narrator has his first fight with Tyler (the first fight club), he exchanges maternal comfort for paternal instruction. The narrator sought masculine instruction at Remaining Men Together but did not find it. Even though the narrator speculates after the first few fight clubs that "Maybe we didn't need a father to complete ourselves," he describes

Tyler as a father figure in his life (54). After Tyler develops a sexual relationship with Marla (because as the *ideal man* Tyler does not fear the feminine but controls it), the narrator compares both of them to his parents (65-6). Between this comparison and the narrator's desire for Tyler to "deliver" him, Tyler becomes the father figure the narrator had lacked his whole life (when he was six his father left home (50)). Unfortunately for the narrator, while Tyler remains the father figure in his life, the narrator remains a child striving to become like his father. Just as the narrator needed to break his embrace with the maternal Bob, he needs to break his embrace with Tyler in order to finally become a man—a boy needs independence from his parents to become a man.

The issue of present and absent father figures in one's life is significant for both Tyler and the narrator. Tyler admits to the narrator that he never knew his father (49) and the narrator only knew his father for about six years (50). For obvious reasons (they are the same person), both the narrator and Tyler lacked paternal parenting and both felt abandoned at an early age. Despite his father's abandonment, the narrator continues to seek his father's instruction by calling him every few years, but his father has never known how to instruct him properly. The last advice the narrator's father gives—after failing to think of anything else—is that the narrator should get married. The narrator's response is, "I'm a thirty-year-old boy, and I'm wondering if another woman is really the answer I need" (51). Harris argues that the "most powerful teacher about masculinity is [a] father, who plays an enormously important role in development, modeling how men behave."¹⁰¹ The narrator's pursuit of his father's instruction reflects Harris's claim. The narrator needs a masculine, paternal presence in his life, but his negligent father defers to the feminine. Consequently,

when Tyler enters the narrator's life, he inhabits the father-figure void the narrator still seeks to fill. Tyler is willing to play the fatherly role, to instruct, and to lead the narrator so he can be "free to do anything" (70). On the other hand, in their first fight Tyler seeks to destroy his father symbolically through fighting the narrator: "[the narrator] asked Tyler what he'd been fighting. Tyler said, his father" (53). In much the same that Tyler does not look for an example of masculinity to imitate, he does not seek a father figure either. Tyler seeks independence from the need of paternal support. Symbolically fighting his father succeeds for Tyler, because after the first fight he, not the narrator, becomes the masculine ideal the other men strive to attain.

The narrator observes the same fatherless phenomenon among the men of fight club: "what you see at fight club is a generation of men raised by women" (50). Presumably, like the narrator, the men of fight club find in Tyler the father they never really knew, but always desired. According to Tyler's dogma, the result of a fatherless life is "spending your life searching for a father and God" (141). In turn, for a period of time Tyler plays the fatherly role for these men because he desires to "finish raising them" (149). Tyler knows the men of fight club desire to be more than they are; he also knows they lack the knowledge, the paternal knowledge, to do so. Society has told men that self-improvement (buying the right things, reading the right books, having the right physical image, having more and more) is the answer. As the narrator informs readers, fight club provides an alternative and possibly better message, "Maybe self-destruction is the answer;" that is, maybe fighting will save men from their emasculation, maybe death is better than emasculation (49).

Tyler is always one step ahead of the narrator, always a little better, always more of a man—this is how Tyler embodies the masculine ideal. In addition to the narrator’s desire for a father figure, his desire to achieve what Tyler has achieved—nearness to the masculine ideal—focuses his attention on Tyler. The narrator wants the same status, the same approval, from the men of fight club that Tyler has. In order to become the man Tyler is, the narrator must free himself from the need for a father; he must free himself from Tyler. Tyler understands this, but the narrator does not. As a result, the narrator feels as if he needs something more out of fight club—once again he needs something more out of life. However, this time the narrator does not understand his restlessness. Unlike his experience in the support groups, his fight club experiences are not counterfeit. He thinks fight club should satisfy him. Yet fight club, like the support groups, no longer resolves the narrator’s masculine identity crisis. The narrator no longer feels secure in the role he performs. The narrator is once again a boy trying to become a man.

Project Mayhem: Its Invention, Tyler’s disappearance, and Marla’s Return

The men of *Fight Club* want one thing: revolution. Revolution unites the men and provides the foundation for their relationships. Tyler leads their revolution to “break up civilization so [they] can make something better out of the world” (125). Through television and advertisements, culture has deceived the men in Tyler’s revolution, and through fight clubs “[they’re] just learning this fact” (166). The “something better” the men envision—envision because it is Tyler’s vision—involves “stalking elk past department store windows and stinking racks of beautiful rotting dresses and tuxedos on hangers; [they’ll] wear leather clothes that will last [them] the rest of [their] life, and [they’ll] climb the wrist-thick kudzu

vines that wrap the Sears Tower” (125). Such a vision requires the fall of capitalism and its closest ally, materialism. All the men in *Fight Club* look to Tyler for this vision, to Tyler as the way to make it real, and to Tyler as the example of masculinity to emulate. They all wait for him to speak, for him to act, and then they do likewise. By positioning Tyler as the masculine ideal in the text, the men fail to realize their own masculine potentials because, unlike Tyler who follows no one, they devotedly follow him.

Tyler’s revolution will resurrect society’s hunter-and-gatherer origins—a society organized around men hunting (conquering wild beasts) and women gathering (building and supplying their “lovely nests”), with each sex’s role clearly defined. Men will know how to be men, and women will know how to be women, because there will be only two roles to perform: hunter and gatherer. Sex and gender will once again be conflated—as opposed to the division of biological sex from the culturally constructed gender that modern theorists¹⁰² argue exists in society. Men will not be confused about the roles they are supposed to play or about the various masculinities they are supposed to perform—Man will equate to hunter. The men of *Fight Club* will be the cultural producers who influence the construction of their masculinity. And, as the hegemony, they will construct hyper-masculine men.

Eventually, all of the men desire more, and this increased desire is part of Tyler’s plan. The men of have become accomplished performers of masculinity at fight club, and thus, in that environment have reached a kind of masculine plateau. The narrator realizes that “[one] can build up a tolerance to fighting” (123). In time, fight club no longer gives the narrator “any kind of buzz” (123)—at least, that is how the narrator explains his brutal beating of a first-timer at fight club one night. Tyler invents Project Mayhem because he

realizes that “he had to take fight club up a notch” (123). Otherwise, the men of fight club will no longer be striving towards a more masculine masculinity, towards hyper-masculinity; they will stagnate and once again risk emasculation.

All of Tyler’s work towards creating Project Mayhem and making it self-sufficient is meant to allow him to disappear and let the men be men on their own. Before he leaves, Tyler tells the narrator, “Don’t bother them. They all know what to do. It’s part of Project Mayhem. No one guy understands the whole plan, but each guy is trained to do one simple task” (130). Tyler’s creation of Project Mayhem and his subsequent departure positions him as a deist sort of god in relation to the project—just as a clock maker builds a clock and then lets it operate on its own.¹⁰³ This set up is important to the narrator’s development because a fatherless life results in “spending your life searching for a father and God” (141). The narrator has already found a father figure in Tyler, and when Tyler leaves, abandoning the narrator just as his real father did, he searches for Tyler as the god-figure of Project Mayhem.

The text supports the conflation of Tyler as father and Tyler as god: “your father is your model for God” (141). The conflation elevates Tyler’s model of masculinity to unreachable heights. By positioning Tyler as a god-figure, the men can only aspire to emulate Tyler’s masculinity, not attain it. Men can only work toward becoming the man Tyler is. By inhabiting the place of deity for the men of Project Mayhem, Tyler causes these men to feel alive—they find purpose in working towards a purpose. Tyler as deity represents the final evolution of fight club into Project Mayhem and Project Mayhem into Tyler’s actual utopia: men abandoning emasculating behaviors by continuously performing their masculinity, always in a state of becoming more masculine. In this way, Tyler’s concept of

ideal masculinity suggests that if one is to be masculine, masculinity itself is the ideal to constantly strive towards (just as in *On the Road*, to realize IT one must constantly pursue IT).

Project Mayhem is both an outreach organization and a discipleship. Despite his first two rules not to talk about the club,¹⁰⁴ Tyler's hunter-and-gatherer utopia can only be realized if fight club grows. Without the realization of his utopia, Tyler cannot unseat himself as the father-/god-figure who prevents them from realizing their own manhood. Moreover, in the hunter-and-gatherer utopia Tyler envisions men will always perform a hyper-masculine role, always risking their lives hunting and protecting their families. Man will always equal hunter.

Similar to the need to prove/perform one's masculinity by fighting at fight club, to gain admission to Project Mayhem one must prove his more-disciplined masculinity: "tell the applicant to go away, and if his resolve is so strong that he waits at the entrance without food or shelter or encouragement for three days, then and only then can he enter and begin training" (129). Project Mayhem makes fight club more visible to the real world, increasing the curiosity of non-initiate men. Project Mayhem increases fight club's audience base, its potential spectatorship. In this way, "it's Project Mayhem that's going to save the world" (125). More and more men will look to Tyler as the masculine ideal.

However, Project Mayhem does not produce the independent, self-made man Tyler embodies. Instead, it produces "men with the energy of trained monkeys, cooking and working and sleeping in teams," what the narrator refers to as "Space Monkeys" (130). While the men establish their independence from society, breaking their ties to culture by

assimilating themselves into Project Mayhem, they become drones of the project, dependent on Tyler's instruction. The men of Project Mayhem merely substitute one controlling power for another. Project Mayhem suppresses individuality as each member becomes one more space monkey. Or as one member informs a group of men, "You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone else, and we are all part of the same compost pile" (134). Project Mayhem does not engender the masculinity Tyler exemplifies; it produces a homogeneous community of men subject to Tyler's instruction.

The members of Project Mayhem never develop identities of their own. Instead of identifying with their jobs and possessions, they identify with Project Mayhem. Thus, they define themselves through their identification with Tyler; they feel masculine because their leader, Tyler, is masculine. However, the men maintain a false sense of masculinity because they continue to look to Tyler as their masculine ideal, to him for the direction of their next masculine performance: "Everybody on Project Mayhem wants to know what's next. Where are we going? What is there to look forward to?" (135). The men have yet to construct independent identities. Beyond Tyler there is nothing to look forward to, and his disappearance secures his position as the final entity of spectatorship, the god of Project Mayhem. Once he disappears, the men of the project merely try to get his attention, because, "unless [they] get God's attention, [they] have no hope of damnation or redemption" (141). What the men of the project seek is approval and recognition from Tyler—the same way young boys seek the approval of their fathers.

The narrator's search for Tyler reflects not only the narrator's search for a god-figure in his life, but also his desire for Tyler's approval and recognition. The narrator perceives Tyler's disappearance as a personal rejection: "I am Joe's Broken Heart because Tyler's dumped me. Because my father dumped me" (134). When he discovers that he is Tyler, the narrator receives the recognition he seeks, but he is also threatened by Tyler's control over his life. The narrator's continued lack of agency leaves him vulnerable to the influence of others, as in his original emasculation by society. Now instead of society enslaving him, Tyler has. Accordingly, the narrator has failed to resolve the masculine identity crisis in his life.

In looking to Tyler as the masculine ideal, the narrator submits himself to Tyler's control. Before this realization, the narrator fails to authentically construct his own identity—both textually and psychologically the narrator's identity is always bound to Tyler's. Much like Tyler's symbolic fight against his father, to establish agency in his life the narrator must fight against Tyler's control over his life. Now instead of his identity being threatened by the emasculating influence of society or by the authentic feminine presence of Marla, the narrator's identity is threatened by the hyper-masculinity of Tyler.

The change of threatening entities in the text suggests that hyper-masculinity is just as threatening to a man's gender identity as cultural emasculation and feminine subjugation. Instead of protecting himself from the feminine presence of Marla, the narrator must protect himself from the hyper-masculine presence of Tyler. As evidenced by the narrator's fallout with Tyler, hyper-masculinity threatens gender identity because it requires the subjugation of many men by one man. Tyler must be in control of the narrator and the other men of Project

Mayhem to continue to perform his hyper-masculinity and to continue to exist. Through the forfeit of their agency, the narrator's and the other men's submission to Tyler's control emasculates them.

Ironically, the narrator requires Marla's help to resist Tyler. Faced with Tyler's hyper-masculinity, he needs the feminine presence that once threatened his gender identity to suppress the identity he has created in Tyler. As the narrator says, "So Tyler can't take complete control, I need Marla to keep me awake" (174). Significantly, his request for help from Marla marks the narrator's new self-confidence and his assertion of agency in his life. Because of his fight club experiences the narrator is now man enough, remasculated by his homosocial relationship with Tyler, to confront the feminine presence of Marla on his own. Prior to fight club, the closest the narrator comes to a feminine presence is Bob's maternal embrace. The narrator's previous avoidance of Marla resulted from his fear of being exposed as an emasculated man (both to Marla and the other men). After his fight club experiences, the narrator is no longer emasculated—he no longer fears Marla but seeks her help, her approval, and her affection (197, 205). Moreover, the narrator no longer looks to Tyler as the empowering example of masculinity in his life. The narrator knows that if Tyler is the other half of his split personality, if he desires, he can perform Tyler's hyper-masculinity. However, the narrator does not desire Tyler's hyper-masculinity; he thinks fight club has gone too far, or as he expresses at a fight club, "I think fight club has served its purpose, don't you" (178). The narrator looks away from Tyler's example and rejects it as a dysfunctional masculinity.

Conclusions: Homosocial Relationships, Purpose, and Agency

The men in *Fight Club* (re)construct their masculine gender identities through their relationships to each other. Only through homosocial relationships can a man find examples of masculinity to emulate, and only between men can a man authenticate his masculinity. In *Fight Club*, Tyler becomes the example the men follow and the relationships they develop as members of fight club and Project Mayhem become the source of affirmation for their masculine performances. However, to realize their full masculine potentials the men eventually need to establish themselves as independent, self-assured men. Otherwise, whether it is Tyler or society, the men emasculate themselves by surrendering agency.

The need for guidance and the need for independence generate tension in the process of becoming a man. The tension that exists between Tyler and the narrator exemplifies the complications in the process of becoming a man. As a father figure, Tyler demands the narrator's initial obedience and his eventual defiance. As the god figure, Tyler establishes his masculinity as an unattainable ideal that the narrator must continually strive to perform (most ideals are unattainable). And finally, as the hyper-masculine man, Tyler requires the narrator's (and the other men's) submission, which emasculates him by diminishing his sense of agency. In each situation, Tyler's superior position creates tension between him and the narrator through an ultimate conflict or an ultimate failure, and thus, inevitable disapproval. Either way, the narrator suffers as he attempts to resolve his masculine identity crisis.

However, through his suffering the narrator becomes remasculated and develops a sense of agency in his life. Shooting himself in the mouth—symbolically killing Tyler and almost committing suicide—represents the narrator's ultimate act of agency. For the narrator

this act carries two meanings. In killing Tyler as a father figure, the narrator rejects Tyler's paternal influence. In almost committing suicide, the narrator rejects Tyler's control, providence, and salvation as a god figure. When the narrator shoots himself, he commits the one act that Tyler does not want him to commit. Through his defiance, the narrator removes Tyler from his consciousness, preventing himself from identifying with Tyler. After the shooting, Tyler, like the narrator's exploded possessions, does not exist materially anymore; he is only a memory. As a memory, Tyler's hyper-masculinity can no longer threaten the narrator's gender identity, and thus the narrator is finally able to assert his own masculinity.

Following the narrator's process of remasculination provides readers with insights into how masculinity is (re)constructed and maintained in *Fight Club*. As the text suggests, the men of fight club resist society's influence by developing homosocial relationships that are always triangular in nature. Any time men gather together in the text, they gather for a purpose outside of themselves and each other—there is always a third entity in their relationships. The men of Remaining Men Together have their testicular cancer, the men of fight club have their fights, and men of Project Mayhem have their cultural revolution. In *Fight Club*, male homosocial relationships are founded on and necessitate a common purpose or goal. A common purpose allows men to focus on their purpose instead of their relationships to each other. Working towards a goal provides the men meaning in their lives and unites them with other men. When the common purpose is removed from the homosocial relationship, the relationship falls apart. Every time the narrator is unable to share a purpose with other men he is unable to continue his relationships with them.

Removal of a common purpose results in the narrator's flight from Remaining Men Together, his ejection from Fight Club, and his symbolic murder of Tyler.

However, in the end the narrator willingly chooses to share the goal of cultural revolution with the remaining members of Project Mayhem. From within the walls of a mental institution, the narrator claims, "I don't want to go back. Not yet [...] because every once in a while, somebody brings me my lunch tray and my meds and he has a black eye or his forehead is swollen with stitches, and he says: 'We miss you Mr. Durden'" (207-8). The narrator chooses to remain institutionalized because the men who believe he is Tyler Durden continue to authenticate his masculinity. At the same time, the narrator continues to provide those men purpose by remaining their example of masculinity. In doing so, the narrator as Tyler Durden remains an ideal to strive for that unites the men in their common goal of resisting society's emasculation. The men, however, remain followers, not yet realizing or choosing their own masculine roles.

Read this way, *Fight Club* becomes a complicated indictment of the late twenty-century men the narrator represents before Tyler emerges from his subconscious. Although the narrator's masculinity is (re)constructed through the violence of and homosocial relationships found in fight clubs and Project Mayhem, the text suggests that a man's agency and/or fight for agency are also fundamental aspects of his masculine performance—a man must eventually act independently of others. That is, according to *Fight Club* performance of masculine identities necessitates a man's continual struggle to maintain control—assert agency—of his identity despite the influences of culture, television, advertising, other men, and women on a masculine gender identity. Yet, the narrator chooses to perform a masculine

identity that emasculates other men as they authenticate his performance and that keeps him institutionalized in an ultimately enfeebling environment.

While the narrator's pseudo-suicide is his ultimate act of agency, as he performs Tyler's identity for the approval of other men he asserts a compromised agency—other men influence his masculine performance. In this way, the text subverts and cautions against Tyler's hyper-masculinity while reinforcing the process of masculine (re)construction the text illustrates. As I argue of the text, in order for the narrator (and the other men) to recover from his societal/cultural emasculation he must engage in masculinity-refining-and-affirming homosocial relationships. However, because male homosocial relationships require a common purpose, maintaining Tyler's hyper-masculinity as the ideal/purpose corrupts the narrator's (and company) remasculation. As Ahab's pursuit of the white whale in *Moby-Dick* results in the destruction and death of his crew, Tyler's revolution in *Fight Club* will ultimately result in the wreckage and collapse of either society or the men who follow his hyper-masculine example. The text ultimately suggests then that the construction of functional masculine identities requires homosocial relationships based on useful and empowering purposes as well as eventual and continual assertion of agency—the performance must be maintained.

Conclusions and Remaining Questions

In the previous chapters, as I examined the accounts of men in the process of resolving masculine identity crises I illustrated a pattern¹⁰⁵ of constructing and performing masculine identities found in three American novels. In each case, I revealed the nature and source of the narrator's masculine crisis and his process of remasculization. Similarly, in each novel the process entails a man who, when his masculine identity is threatened, engages in homosocial relationships that reaffirm his sense of masculinity, helping him resolve his crisis and stabilize his masculine identity performance.

While the structure of the process is similar between these novels, the nature of each narrator's crisis is different. Under threat of either committing suicide or battering others, Ishmael's waning self-control in *Moby-Dick* motivates him to seek the firm command of a whaling ship. Sal of *On the Road*, deprived of the masculine security found in marriage and propelled into an overly conservative culture, embraces Dean's uninhibited masculine performance as they travel across America. And, the narrator of *Fight Club* develops the hyper-masculine alter-ego of Tyler to cope with a consumer culture that emasculates his gender identity and incapacitates his agency. Ishmael seeks self-control; Sal seeks freedom; and, *Fight Club*'s narrator seeks empowerment.

Significantly, that which each narrator seeks mirrors each obsessed man's pursuit. Ahab chases Moby Dick to reclaim the control over his life that his monomania deprives him. Dean pursues IT in order to liberate his mind (and body) from the constraints of

traditional, logical thought in order to experience the purity of the moment—to experience IT (however hedonistic IT might be). And Tyler’s revolution explicitly struggles to make the individual more powerful against the monolith that is America’s consumer culture. Moreover, the nature of the pursuit affects the outcome of the narrator’s remasculation. Ishmael eventually re-identifies with Queequeg as Ahab perishes in his hyper-masculine performance. In time, Sal rejects Dean’s carefree masculine performance and finally settles down in New York. While the narrator of *Fight Club* ultimately chooses to inhabit Tyler’s identity, he is first freed from society’s influence and then empowered enough to free himself from Tyler’s control. In effect, what each narrator needs to regain a sense of his own masculine self, his homosocial relationships provide for him.

Another difference between the narrators’ stories concerns the issue of their agency. Whereas Sal demonstrates his autonomy as his story concludes, Ishmael surrenders his agency when he boards the *Pequod* and *Fight Club*’s narrator compromises his as he performs Tyler’s masculine identity for the approval of other men. However, Ishmael and *Fight Club*’s narrator choose to act as they do—Ishmael chooses to go whaling and *Fight Club*’s narrator chooses to perform Tyler’s identity. Among the three, *Fight Club*’s narrator is the only one who regresses somewhat in his remasculating process as he finally realizes and asserts his agency only to concede some of it to other men. On the other hand, Ishmael presumably re-enters society empowered and refined through his experiences chasing the white whale and his attachment to Queequeg. And Sal returns to New York and begins to live his life on his own terms. Nevertheless, in all three novels the narrators’ final

performance is an act of agency and all appear to have their crises under control and their identity performances stabilized.

While this project primarily illustrates a pattern of masculine identity development in American literature, it inevitably raises new questions and presents other ideas not yet thoroughly addressed. Significantly, the homosocial relationships portrayed in each novel necessitated a purpose outside of the relationship itself—a common goal or struggle to unite men. Though I discuss this point some in the chapter on *Fight Club*, the homosocial relationships in the other novels require the same uniting focus. For example, in addition to the hunt for Moby Dick, the men on the *Pequod* unite in the economic goal of whaling. Furthermore, Queequeg and Ishmael initially become friends as Ishmael explains the content of a book to Queequeg while they share a smoke, and then their friendship continues with the goal of shipping together, in their partnership in the “cutting-in” process (254-6), and as Queequeg’s coffin saves Ishmael. In *On the Road*, Dean’s relationship to Sal (and to a lesser extent Carlo) focuses on the road ahead in the pursuit of IT, and not on each other. Accordingly, these novels suggest that male homosocial relationships need something which draws attention away from the relationship itself.

As the men in homosocial relationships focus on a goal, the goal itself affects the nature of the relationship. To some extent, the goals of these men create the problems and conflicts that occur in each novel. But the more significant issue is that these goals initially belong to only one of the men in these relationships. In the context of these novels, the obsessions of Ahab, Dean, and Tyler draw other men into relationships with these characters who eventuate their influence on the masculine performances of the other men in the

relationships. Why is it that in these novels, and possibly others, men are drawn to the pursuits of the obsessed men? Are men drawn to the pursuit or to the men who have something to desire, something to motivate them—whose lives apparently have meaning because they pursue something greater than themselves? Do men who are experiencing a crisis of masculinity need relationships with seemingly hyper-masculine men to resolve their crises? Future study of homosocial relationships should examine these questions and the differences between relationships that begin with a purpose common to all parties (e.g., whaling, a sports game, etc.) and those that begin with one man's obsession (e.g., the death of Moby Dick, etc.)—it seems that there is more to be said about the sharing of power in male homosocial relationships and the appeal of passionate men.

Another (somewhat obvious) consideration for future studies of homosocial relationships is the question of women. Do women undergo similar feminizing processes? That is to ask, as men resolve masculinity crises through homosocial relationships and an assertion of agency, are there accounts in literature of women having similar experiences? How do the experiences of women becoming more feminine differ or relate to those of men becoming more masculine. Likewise, do stories exist that portray a similar pattern of masculine development for homosexual males (to be sure, homosexuals have relationships that shape the masculine identities they perform)?

Questions aside (because there will always be more questions than answers), the original issue of this project concerns the conception of masculinity in America and its literature. Studies, such as Kimmel's suggest that America perceives itself as a nation of

independent individuals who became so independently of others—a nation of self-made men who became so on their own. Yet this project suggests that in the novels examined the protagonists become autonomous men by engaging in homosocial relationships that prepare them to become so. The differences in the perception of masculinity itself produce the inconsistencies between these views. To make an analogy with the characters of *Moby-Dick*, the Ahab's of the world think that masculinity is something to be possessed while the Ishmaels understand that identity cannot be grasped only performed—masculinity is either the end or the means.

Viewing masculinity as evident through performance, as only expressed while performing it, implies that the pursuits examined in these novels demonstrate the masculinities of the characters and constitute their performances—masculinity is the means, not the end. The homosocial relationships and the pursuits that unite the men stage their masculine identity performances. In this way, their pursuits are their performances; and likewise, the pursuit of masculinity in and of itself makes a man more masculine. In other words, my readings suggest that a man does not necessarily need to succeed in his pursuit to become more masculine, but he must nonetheless pursue masculinity in the presence of other men to perform his own. Thus, according to the texts examined in this study, being masculine is a cyclical and continual process of remasculation, in which a man with a personal crisis of masculinity engages in homosocial relationships that refine and authenticate his masculine performance as well as prepare him to reassert his agency and become independent again.

Notes

¹ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (N.Y.: The Free Press, 1996) 26.

² E.g., Ian M. Harris's *Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities*, Thomas DiPiero's *White Men Aren't*, Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, Anthony E. Rotundo's *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, etc.

³ Herman Melville, 2nd Norton Critical ed., *Moby-Dick*, Eds. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford (N.Y.: W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 2002). From hereafter this text will be cited parenthetically.

⁴ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1976). From hereafter this text will be cited parenthetically.

⁵ Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* (N.Y.: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1996). From hereafter this text will be cited parenthetically.

⁶ The "generalist movement" in gender studies involves the move away from focusing only on women, their representation, and their construction to broadening the focus to include men, homosexual of either sex, and cross-gender individuals.

⁷ Bryce Traister, "Academic Viagra: the Rise of American Masculinity Studies," *American Quarterly*. 52.2 (2000): 274.

⁸ Traister 274.

⁹ E. Anthony Rotundo's *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* is another valuable study of American masculinity, but

Rotundo limits its scope to the nineteenth century where Kimmel's includes twentieth-century perspectives and examples.

¹⁰ Kimmel 17.

¹¹ Kimmel places quotes around the term *real* to emphasize that the idea of a *real man* is ultimately a relativistic idea, as evidenced in his argument that "Manhood means different things at different times to different people...To acknowledge these differences among men, we must speak of masculinities" (5).

¹² Kimmel 17.

¹³ Ian M. Harris, *Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities* (Bristol, PA: Taylor and Francis Inc., 1995) 1.

¹⁴ Judith Butler, 2nd ed., *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (N.Y.: Routledge, 1999) 33.

¹⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (N.Y.: Columbia UP, 1985) 1-27.

¹⁶ Sedgwick 1.

¹⁷ "IT" is a form of enlightenment I explain further in the 2nd chapter that both Sal and Dean refer to and discuss several times throughout *On the Road*: 48, 127, 196, and 265.

¹⁸ Kimmel 15-20.

¹⁹ Kimmel 240.

²⁰ Kim Long, "Ahab's Narcissistic Quest: The Failure of the Masculine American Dream in *Moby-Dick*," *Conference-of-College Teachers of English Studies* 57 (1992): 42.

²¹ Leland S. Person Jr., “Melville’s Cassock: Putting on Masculinity in *Moby-Dick*,”
ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance 40.1 (1994): 1.

²² 42. Long also argues that “the American Dream has traditionally been a masculine dream,” as she claims, “to recreate the Garden of Eden without Eve” (42).

²³ Harris 184.

²⁴ Harris 85-9.

²⁵ Harris 111.

²⁶ Kimmel 26.

²⁷ Kimmel 45.

²⁸ Kimmel 45.

²⁹ Kimmel 55.

³⁰ Harris 12.

³¹ Harris 118.

³² Tara Penry, “Sentimental and Romantic Masculinities in *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*,”
Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture, Ed. Mary
Chapman and Glenn Hendler (Berkeley and L.A., CA: U of CA P, 1999) 230.

³³ Penry 230.

³⁴ Kimmel 60.

³⁵ Person 2.

³⁶ Long 46.

³⁷ Lyle Glazier, “Melville’s ‘Feminine Air’ and ‘Masculine Sea’,” *Aligarh Journal of
English Studies*, 16:1-2 (1994): 145-6.

³⁸ Some readers might mistake Ishmael and Queequeg's friendship as having homosexual undertones because as Lyle Glazier admits it "is described in sexual imagery" (145). However, in addition to Glazier's claim that they are too masculine to be homosexual, Ishmael's report in 'The Counterpane,' that "by dint of much wiggling, and loud and incessant *expostulations upon the unbecomingness of his hugging a fellow male in that matrimonial sort of style*...[Queequeg] drew back his arm," suggests, in his aversion to the Queequeg's matrimonial embrace, Ishmael's heterosexuality, and thus argues for their relationship as homosocial as opposed to homosexual (38, emphasis mine).

³⁹ Person 13.

⁴⁰ Person 13-5.

⁴¹ Harris 117.

⁴² Person 11.

⁴³ Person 11.

⁴⁴ Glazier 140.

⁴⁵ Sanford E. Marovitz, "Ahab's 'Queenly Personality' and Melville's Art," *Melville Society Extracts* 65 (1986): 6.

⁴⁶ Glazier 140.

⁴⁷ Glazier 140.

⁴⁸ Person 6.

⁴⁹ Glazier 141.

⁵⁰ Glazier 141.

⁵¹ Long 43.

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- ⁵² Kimmel 6.
- ⁵³ Kimmel 6.
- ⁵⁴ Butler 33.
- ⁵⁵ According to Harris' study, "Men take risks and have adventures. They are brave and courageous" (12).
- ⁵⁶ Long 48.
- ⁵⁷ Glazier 151.
- ⁵⁸ Leslie Fiedler, 1st Anchor Books ed., *Love and Death in the American Novel* (N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1992) 381.
- ⁵⁹ Matt Theado, *Understanding Jack Kerouac* (Columbia, SC: U of SC P, 2000) 57.
- ⁶⁰ Ranganath Nandyal, "Kerouac in the Light of Buddhist Thought," *New Waves in American Literature*, Ed. Desai A. A. Mutalik, V. K Malhotra, T. S. Anand, and Prashant K. Sinha (New Delhi, India: Creative, 1999) 127-32.
- ⁶¹ James T. Jones, *Jack Kerouac's Duluoz Legend: The Mythic Form of an Autobiographical Fiction* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1999).
- ⁶² Ben Giamo, *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2000).
- ⁶³ In Davenports critical essay, "Road Work: Rereading Midcentury Melodrama of Beset Sonhood," in *Boys Don't Cry?: Rethinking Narratives of Masculinities and Emotion in the U.S.*, Eds. Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis (N.Y.: Columbia UP, 2002) 167-84; he examines Kerouac's biographical information in light of the "Duluoz Legend" in order to establish a pattern of loss and subsequent searching for father/brother figures in both

Kerouac's real and fictional lives. The "Duluoz Legend" is a commonly held idea that together Kerouac's novels comprise a larger, collective story; this idea is heavily supported by Kerouac's correspondence with friends, family members, and literary figures (much like Hemingway's Nick Adam Stories).

⁶⁴ In Leavitt's critical essay, "On the Road: Cassady, Kerouac, and images of Late Western Masculinity," in *Across the Great Divide: Culture of Manhood in the American West*, Eds. Matthew Basso, Laura McCall, and Dee Garceau (N.Y.: Routledge, 2001) 211-30; he compares the characters Sal and Dean to their (argued) real life counterparts Kerouac and Neal Cassady. Leavitt seems especially interested in Cassady's real life and its inconsistencies with Kerouac's fictional version of him.

⁶⁵ In the first chapter of Savran's critical work, *Taking it Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998); he examines, among other things, the Beat's depictions of the "white Negro" (a term popularized by Norman Mailer) and the "rebel male" ("the man on the move, the one who refuses to be tied down" [58]) in relation to the Sal's and Dean's characters, to Kerouac's and Cassady's real lives, and to the cultural and political environment in which the Beats produce their texts.

⁶⁶ Harris 98-9.

⁶⁷ Theado 61.

⁶⁸ Harris 13, 138-42.

⁶⁹ Sal does not explicitly explain what he means by "white ambitions," but the context of the quote implies that these ambitions concern financial success and the lack of excitement

that accompanies such security: “[...] wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music [...] I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a “white man” disillusioned” (179-80).

⁷⁰ When Judith Butler argues that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results,” she not only argues that gender identity is performed she argues that one’s performance is “constituted” by “expressions” (33). I take her reference to “expressions” as a reference to one’s behaviors, because a performance is nothing but a reenactment of stereotyped behaviors.

⁷¹ Harris 12.

⁷² Harris 110-1.

⁷³ Kimmel 26.

⁷⁴ Harris 13.

⁷⁵ Harris 12.

⁷⁶ Giamo 29.

⁷⁷ Leavitt 219.

⁷⁸ Leavitt 219.

⁷⁹ Leavitt 220.

⁸⁰ Savran 48.

⁸¹ Leavitt 223.

⁸² Leavitt 223.

⁸³ Based on a composite of my critical, sociological, and historical readings, of this time period (1950's) I hold that while men receive multiple messages concerning their masculine identities, the overriding message rejects compromises: one is either a Man (socially respectable and responsible) or a rebel (like Dean et. al.).

⁸⁴ Consistent with both the text and fellow critics, I refer to the club described in the novel using lower and normal case but capitalize and italicize the novel's title, and as the text capitalizes Project Mayhem I do.

⁸⁵ Mark Pettus, "Terminal Simulation: 'Revolution' in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 6.2 (2000): 111.

⁸⁶ Krister Friday, "A Generation of Men Without History: *Fight Club*, Masculinity, and the Historical Symptom" *PostModern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism* 13.3 (2003): para. 4, 12 Jan. 2004
<<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.503/13.3friday.txt>>.

⁸⁷ Friday para. 7.

⁸⁸ Kevin Alexander Boon, "Men and Nostalgia for Violence: Culture and Culpability in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*," *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 11.3 (2003): 267.

⁸⁹ Boon 267-8.

⁹⁰ Boon 271.

⁹¹ Kimmel 19.

⁹² Harris 1.

⁹³ Harris 9.

⁹⁴ Kimmel 6-8.

⁹⁵ Butler 33.

⁹⁶ Kimmel 9.

⁹⁷ Pettus 118.

⁹⁸ Harris 184-5.

⁹⁹ Kimmel 6.

¹⁰⁰ Kimmel 6.

¹⁰¹ Harris 22.

¹⁰² Eve Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Michael Kimmel, Ian Harris, etc.

¹⁰³ I do not know exactly where I first heard that explanation for the Deist philosophy of God, but it reflects the idea that God created the universe according to logical natural laws and then left the universe alone to operate under the governance of those laws.

¹⁰⁴ “The first rule of fight club is you don’t talk about fight club...the second rule about fight club is you don’t talk about fight club” (48).

¹⁰⁵ I purposefully use the indefinite article “a” here in order to suggest that this pattern represents one of possibly several patterns of masculine development in America literature.

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