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SNAKE MIND, WOLF BODY, PANTHER COURAGE: JOJO RABBIT
AS A CRITIQUE OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

by

Christian W. Lippert

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Communication Studies

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ABSTRACT

Snake Mind, Wolf Body, Panther Courage: *Jojo Rabbit* as a Critique
of Hegemonic Masculinity

by

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Utah State University, 2021

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Department: Languages, Philosophy, and Communication Studies

The 2019 comedy-drama film, *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019), is a complex rhetorical artifact, released to substantial acclaim and controversy at a contentious period in U.S. history. Most of the critical dispute regarding *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) questions the efficacy and propriety of the film's ludicrous portrayal of Nazism and WWII. I contend that these criticisms judge the film too narrowly, mistaking it as a redundant rebuke of historical Nazism. Instead, I argue that *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) is a compelling critique of the performance, precarity, and policing of hegemonic masculinity. Considering the film in this light broadens the applicability of *Jojo Rabbit's* (Waititi, 2019) social commentary and sharpens its criticisms of present-day neo-Nazi and white supremacist movements. This analysis critiques hegemonic masculinity by a) exposing how it requires caustic and restrictive masculine performances b) highlighting how boys and men face immense pressure to demonstrate their masculinity and c) showing the policing of masculinity as harmful and problematic. Reading the film in this manner

exposes how hegemonic masculinity undergirds extremist ideologies and reiterates how an unequal gender system harms everyone, including those individuals whom it privileges.

(52 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Snake Mind, Wolf Body, Panther Courage: *Jojo Rabbit* as a Critique
of Hegemonic Masculinity

Christian W. Lippert

In 2019, the movie *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) was released to theaters. Because the film uses comedy and satire to tell a story about Jojo, a young Nazi who has Hitler as an imaginary friend, it received mixed reviews. This analysis focuses on how the movie sheds light on the negative influence of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the messages and actions that place men above women or types of masculinity above femininity and other masculinities. Jojo's desire to be a Nazi is deeply connected to his desire to be man. This analysis examines how hegemonic masculinity a) can limit the definition of manhood in negative ways b) pressures men and boys to prove or defend their manhood, and c) influences how boys and men use violence, threats, and public humiliation to police each other's masculinity. By understanding the film in this way, we can better understand how messages of hegemonic masculinity support extremist beliefs like white supremacy and neo-Nazism. We can also see how beliefs about male superiority harm everyone, even boys and men.

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No one has seen me through more in these last years than my wife, Bobbi. Thank you for believing in me. Your support and encouragement have meant everything.

Christian W. Lippert

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Chapter I

Introduction

Over seventy-five years have passed since the conclusion of World War II, yet the “last good war” continues to fascinate and inspire the imagination of U.S. Americans. The apparently insatiable appetite for stories involving WWII is evidenced by even a small sampling of modern films, from fictional accounts like *The Book Thief* (Percival, 2013) and *Inglorious Basterds* (Tarantino, 2009), to biopics like *Hacksaw Ridge* (Gibson, 2016) and *Darkest Hour* (Wright, 2017), to battle-specific films like *Dunkirk* (Nolan, 2017) and *Midway* (Emmerich, 2019). The allure of WWII can extend beyond historical education, entertainment, or even the nostalgic romanticizing of a heroic (and simplified) national past. The time period provides troubling inspiration for those who adopt the symbols and ideologies of Hitler and the Nazi Party. The alarming growth of neo-Nazi and white supremacist movements has been labeled a transnational threat by United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (Reuters Staff, 2021). In the United States, groups including the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation have documented increasing numbers of hate crimes, racist demonstrations, and hate group growth in recent years (Fieldstadt & Dilanian, 2019). These concerning trends correlate with the candidacy and presidency of Donald Trump, whose controversial rhetoric regarding racial issues and immigrants is frequently cited as contributing to the spread of white supremacy (Montanaro, 2019). The frightful impacts of neo-Nazism and white supremacy are evident in sobering violent events like the 2017 “Unite the Right Rally” in Charlottesville, Virginia and the invasion of the U.S.

Capitol building on January 6th 2021.

It is in the context of these circumstances that 2019's *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) stands out among contemporary cinematic depictions of WWII. The film mockingly portrays Adolf Hitler as a slapstick imaginary friend to Jojo, a ten-year-old Nazi fanatic who eventually renounces his radical views after he befriends Elsa, the teenage Jewish girl his mother has hidden in their home. Unlike other modern WWII films, *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) was marketed as "anti-hate satire" (Yamato, 2019). The comedic approach of the film draws comparisons to other WWII films like *The Producers* (1967) or *Life is Beautiful* (1997). Perhaps predictably, the movie evoked polarized responses. Some hailed *Jojo* as a "timely and subversive" film that "walks a tightrope with uncommon skill" (Travers, 2019, para 5-7). Other critics found the comedy-drama to be "both easy and pointless," arguing that it failed to exhibit real courage or creativity by only mocking an outdated and widely discredited manifestation of white supremacy/Nazism (Brody, 2019, para 8).

Most of the critical controversy around *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) questions the efficacy and propriety of the film's ludicrous portrayal of Nazism and WWII. I contend that these criticisms judge the film too narrowly, mistaking it as a redundant rebuke of historical Nazism. Instead, I argue that *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) is a compelling critique of hegemonic masculinity that speaks to present circumstances. The concept of hegemonic masculinity refers to any manifestation of masculinity or configuration of gender relations that encourages or legitimizes an unequal hierarchical gender order (Messerschmidt, 2019). Specifically, this analysis of *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) critiques hegemonic masculinity by a) exposing how it requires caustic and restrictive masculine

performances b) highlighting how boys and men face immense pressure to demonstrate their masculinity and c) showing the policing of masculinity as harmful and problematic. Positioning the film in this way broadens the applicability of *Jojo Rabbit's* (Waititi, 2019) social commentary and sharpens its criticisms of present-day neo-Nazi and white supremacist movements. Because *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) is a controversial, complex, and commercially successful communicative artifact, the film is well positioned to convincingly portray and critique hegemonic masculinity.

In what follows, I first introduce *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) in more detail. Then, I describe the methodological approach of rhetorical criticism that guides this analysis. After reviewing literature on hegemonic masculinity and the interrelated concepts of masculine performance, precarity, and policing, I proceed to apply those concepts to answer the research question: *In what ways does the film Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) *critique contemporary hegemonic masculinity?*

Chapter II

Jojo Rabbit

Film Background

Jojo Rabbit (Waititi, 2019) is loosely based on the 2008 novel, *Caging Skies*, by Christine Leunens (Rapp, 2019). The film was written and directed by New Zealander Taika Waititi, who began working on the script in 2011. The film did not premiere until September 8th, 2019 at the Toronto International Film Festival (Lang, 2019), where it won the prestigious Grolsch People's Choice Award (Pulver, 2020). The award indicates the favorite film of the festival audience and is considered an important predictor of Academy Award success (Hertz, 2017). Waititi describes the film as a “new and inventive” approach to portraying “the horrific story of World War II” (Waititi, n.d., para 5). *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) has enjoyed both critical and financial success. It was nominated for six academy awards: Best Picture, Best Supporting Actress, Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Production Design, Best Costume Design, and Best Film Editing (Variety Staff, 2020). It won the award for Best Adapted Screenplay, making Waititi the first Maori filmmaker to win an Oscar (Graham-McLay, 2020). Commercially, the film grossed over \$90 million world-wide against a budget of \$14 million (Box Office Mojo, 2020).

Audience

Despite being released to markets around the world, it is safe to presume *Jojo Rabbit's* (Waititi, 2019) intended primary audience as Western viewers. The film was originally filmed in the English language and released in North America, and it was produced and distributed by Fox Searchlight Pictures, a U.S.-based company that is part of Walt Disney Studios (Waititi, n.d.). The PG-13 rating indicates an intended audience that includes teenagers as well as adults.

Plot Summary

The film begins six months before the end of World War II. Ten-year-old Johannes “Jojo” Betzler is irrepressibly eager to join the Hitler Youth and thereby become a man through military initiation. The camp is run by the sardonic Captain Klenzendorf, who tells the gathered boys the camp activities will be their first steps towards manhood. Not long into the training experience, Jojo gets singled out and mocked by older boys for not being able to kill a bunny, thereby earning the epithet “Jojo Rabbit” With the encouragement of his imaginary friend, Hitler, Jojo responds to the hazing by stealing a grenade and throwing it into the woods. It bounces back off a tree and the explosion gives him extensive scarring and a limp. Because of his wounds, Jojo does not return to the camp but instead spends his time posting Nazi propaganda and gathering scrap metal.

Jojo’s fanaticism is challenged after he discovers his mother, Rosi, is hiding a teenage Jewish girl named Elsa in their home. When they first meet, Elsa overpowers Jojo and tells him that reporting her existence will cause both him and his mother to be punished. The two youth establish an uneasy impasse that gradually becomes a

friendship, which strains Jojo's relationship with imaginary Hitler. After a tense encounter with the Gestapo, Jojo goes on a walk and finds the body of his mother in the town square; she was hanged for spreading resistance flyers. He returns home to punish Elsa for Rosi's death but ends up being comforted by her as they mourn together. When Allied forces arrive and take his town, Elsa is free, but Jojo initially lies to her about who won the war to prevent her from leaving him. Jojo has a final encounter with an angry imaginary Hitler, whom Jojo kicks through the window as he forcibly rejects Nazi ideology. He then leads Elsa out to the street where she sees the truth of Allied victory. The movie concludes as Elsa and Jojo dance.

Chapter III

Method

Rhetorical criticism can be understood as the “systematic investigation and explanation of symbolic acts and artifacts” (Foss, 2017, p. 6). Rhetoric, beyond performing pragmatic functions such as persuasion, is also constitutive: it is through the communicative negotiation of symbols that we (re)create our social worlds. As a qualitative research method, rhetorical criticism has multiple purposes that include expounding upon the pragmatic and constitutive properties of particular communicative artifacts or acts (including speeches, books, movies, comics, music, images, architecture and more); contributing to broader theoretical understandings of rhetorical processes; and improving the capacity of both critic and reader to more consciously, ethically, and effectively communicate and interpret the communication of others (Foss, 2017). Rhetorical criticism therefore performs valuable civic, social, and scholarly functions by helping create more informed and intentional consumers and producers of the various communication that shapes our world.

Although the study of rhetoric can trace its roots to antiquity, it is only in recent decades that rhetorical criticism has extended beyond the analysis of the spoken and written word to include a broader spectrum of symbolic human communication, most notably visual rhetorical artifacts (Foss, 2011). This transition is crucial to understanding a contemporary digital world that is increasingly inundated with visual messages. Rhetorical analyses that examine visual rhetorical artifacts, as does this study, tend to seek three ends: first, to illuminate the nature of the visual image(s) by describing both

the presented elements (observable features) and suggested elements (interpretations the presented elements are likely to evoke). Second, visual rhetoric considers the function(s) or impacts of the artifact. Lastly, visual rhetoric evaluates the visual artifact, considering if and how well the artifact fulfills the functions implied by its nature, as well as critiquing the functions' implications or consequences (Foss, 2011).

Jojo Rabbit (Waititi, 2019) is a complex communicative artifact, released to substantial acclaim and controversy at a contentious period in U.S. history. Rhetorical criticism is a useful tool for evaluating how the film functions as a visual artifact, how it speaks to the modern circumstances, and with what social and academic implications. In the present consideration of *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019), I conduct an ideological critique of the film. Ideological criticism focuses on identifying and evaluating idea systems or belief patterns that underlie a particular group's views about the world (Foss, 2017). Ideology, particularly when hegemonic or dominant, is frequently presented as normal or inherent, and therefore can be perniciously overlooked (Foss, 2017). In an initial viewing of the film, my attention was piqued by the humorous treatment of Nazism and WWII as well as the ambivalent tonal shifts. However, after carefully examining the movie, I came to see Jojo's journey to overcome the ideology of Nazism as deeply connected to his developing sense of white, heterosexual masculine identity. In fact, Jojo's desire to be sufficiently masculine helps explain his fanaticism. Furthermore, hegemonic masculine ideology influences and constrains other characters and the entire plot of the film. This analysis of *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) reveals the appeal, influence, and deleterious impact of hegemonic masculinity in the present-day. In order to systematically categorize and illustrate the underlying themes of masculinity manifest in the film and explain how

Jojo Rabbit (Waititi, 2019) works to critique hegemonic masculinity, I utilized three interrelated aspects of hegemonic masculinity: performance, precarity, and policing. I now turn to further explain the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the characteristics of masculine performance, precarity, and policing. I then provide examples of previous rhetorical scholarship regarding hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter IV

Literature Review

Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity refers to the diverse assortment of practices that function to promote, reify, or legitimize unequal gender relations (Messerschmidt, 2019). Rather than only referencing a particular manifestation of masculinity, the concept encapsulates all gendered configurations that place men over women, masculinity above femininity, or enforce hierarchy among masculinities. The result is a pervasive and often subtle phenomenon that persists even as the dominant form of masculinity in a given historical moment or society is contested and changed over time (Messerschmidt, 2019). Despite how hegemonic masculinity manifests in various forms, there are characteristics that indicate whether a given configuration of masculinity serves hegemonic ends of legitimizing gender inequality. These characteristics include: (a) physical force and control, (b) occupational achievement, (c) familial patriarchy, (d) frontiersmanship and (e) heterosexuality (Trujillo, 1991) and the avoidance of responsibility (Atkinson & Calafell, 2009). Hegemonic masculine ideology can be present in individual masculine performances, public discourse, and media representations of gender relations.

Hegemonic masculinity is frequently presumed to be both White and heterosexual and is “predicated upon violence and aggression” that is manifest both physically and discursively (Harris, 2011, p. 14). Because hegemonic masculinity depends on creating and sustaining a hierarchical relationship based on subordination, it caustically impacts those with marginalized identities including women, people of color, and LGBTQ+

individuals. Indeed, homophobia and the devaluation of women are central tenets to traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity (Anderson, 2005). These factors, combined with socialization in traditional hegemonic masculine norms like aggression and sexual dominance, contribute to vast societal problems like violent crime, especially against women, where perpetrators overwhelmingly tend to be male (Katz, 2006). The pressures to conform to unrealistic hegemonic ideals also harm boys and men, even though they stand to benefit from the unequal gender relations promoted by hegemonic masculinity. The negative consequences of hegemonic masculine socialization include experiences of isolation, emotional repression, and death (Prody, 2015). Boys die by suicide four times more frequently than do girls, and are also more likely to be diagnosed as emotionally disturbed, drop out of school, and get into fights (Kimmel, 2008). In sum, the detrimental impacts of hegemonic masculinity are widespread and evident on both the individual and societal level.

Rhetorical scholars have interrogated manifestations of hegemonic masculinity in diverse contexts including political discourse, music, and film. Harris (2011) examined the political speeches of male political leaders following Hurricane Katrina and found reiterations of hegemonic white masculinity. Rather than discussing the social inequities made evident by the storm's disparate impacts, the speeches instead emphasized the status of women as victims in need of male protection. This portrayal in turn framed violent masculine attempts to assert control as acts of compassion, a particularly problematic association considering the increase in gender-based violence after natural disasters (Harris, 2011). In their analysis of the music and influence of rapper Eminem, Calhoun (2005) claimed the musician's lyrics perpetrate the fictional ideation of white,

heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity though controversial displays of domination and violence towards women and LGB individuals. They claimed the artist uniquely constructs himself as a universal subject through contradictions, e.g., by evoking both homophobia and homoeroticism or by portraying himself both as a sensitive father and violent man. The analysis demonstrates how ideologies of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity discursively “adapt, change, and sustain themselves” through intentionally inconsistent displays (Calhoun, 2005, p. 289). The persistence of hegemonic white masculinity is further critiqued by King (2009) in her analysis of *Fight Club* (1999), a much-examined, archetypal film of white male violence. They argued that the film strategically adopts abjection in order for white hegemonic masculinity to “become everything and nothing” (King, 2009, p. 366). This ambiguity enables the perpetuation of white male privilege and helps to explain contradicting interpretations of the film.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate the ubiquity of hegemonic masculinity across contexts, the complexity of its shifting manifestations, and the need for continuing scholarly scrutiny. This analysis of *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) adds to existing work on rhetoric and hegemonic masculinity by explicating how a work of popular culture from a male perspective critiques hegemonic gender inequity (Prody, 2015). It also illustrates and critiques how hegemonic masculinity and the internalized need felt by males to demonstrate their manhood contributes to extremism (Kimmel, 2018). In order to more specifically illustrate how *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) critiques hegemonic masculinity, this analysis draws upon three overlapping aspects of masculinity: performance, precarity, and policing.

Performing Masculinity

Masculinity is not a built-in feature of male bodies, but instead the social construction of a masculine self, enacted in front of an audience (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Gender is created through what we do (West & Zimmerman, 2009), constructed through countless repetitive actions and interactions. Furthermore, gender is performative, “a construction that regularly conceals its genesis” and depends on “a tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders” (Butler, 1999, p. 178). The implication is that individuals have only limited ability to vary how they perform their gender, as they necessarily draw upon the past and present gender performances that collectively construct a cultural understanding of gender as a natural dichotomy (Butler, 1999). The performance of gender exists not only in the actions of the individual but also in how those actions are received and reacted to: “*Being a girl or being a boy is... something that is actively done both by the individual so categorized and by those who interact with it in the various communities to which it belongs*” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 17). In other words, gender is a repeated performance that is interdependent with an audience’s response.

The relationship of performed masculinity and an audience’s reception is further clarified by Manhood Acts Theory (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). The theory asserts that men have access to power because of their gender but realizing gender privileges requires men to convincingly perform masculinity before a social audience. Accordingly, masculinity is performed through manhood acts. A behavior functions as a manhood act if it demonstrates any of three purposes (each of which connects to characteristics of hegemonic masculinity): differentiation from women/femininity, capacity to assert

control, or ability to resist being controlled (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). In Western cultures and particularly in the contemporary United States, an important component of enacted masculinity is emotional stoicism (Kimmel, 2008). As succinctly noted by Prody (2015) “[Western] society celebrates a masculinity performed through isolation, limited emotional expression, and violence” (p. 455). The expectations and pressures to “correctly” perform masculinity are manifest throughout male experience, including friendship and work (Migliaccio, 2009). A failure to convincingly perform masculinity renders one vulnerable to social consequences which in turn reflects the precarity of masculinity.

Precarious Masculinity

Vandello et al. (2008) assert a thesis of precarious manhood that holds valid across cultures. They claim that, unlike womanhood, manhood is commonly considered to be an achieved status which can be easily lost and therefore must be confirmed through continuing public demonstrations. The implications of this conceptualization are far-reaching, and include an expectation that men undergo more anxiety and stress around gender status, are more likely to take risky or aggressive actions to prove or reclaim manhood, and will avoid or oppose femininity even to their own detriment (Vandello et al., 2008). Despite the lack of established rites of passage within modern Western culture, manhood is still broadly viewed as something that must be earned and can be lost (Scarduzio et al., 2018). When men feel that their masculine image is threatened, they may seek to reestablish credibility via compensatory acts that include violence (Morris & Ratajczak, 2019).

The impact of precarious manhood has been examined in different circumstances. Men within a drug treatment facility were observed to employ compensatory manhood acts in order to regain a sense of control (e.g., masculinity). These acts included increased aggression toward other residents, verbal subordination of women and gender nonconforming men, policing the masculinity of others, and regulating emotional display (Ezzell, 2012). Precarious manhood also helps to explain voter tendencies to support aggressive policies and political leaders (DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020). Because of its widespread impacts, further understanding of the discursive manifestations and implications of precarious masculinity are warranted. An internalized belief that manhood must be gained and can be lost is reinforced by the policing of masculinity.

Policing Masculinity

Policing of masculinity encompasses “any action that serves to prevent or punish individual or group behavior perceived as insufficiently masculine” (Reigeluth & Addis, 2016, p. 75). This definition reflects how policing behaviors vary broadly, from homophobic and misogynistic epithets (Martino, 2000), to physical challenges or dares (Reigeluth & Addis, 2021), to physical aggression and violence. Policing is primarily enacted by other boys/men because “masculinity is largely a ‘homosocial’ experience: performed for, and judged by, other men” (Kimmel, 2008, p. 47). In addition to having diverse manifestations, policing behaviors are also utilized for several purposes. Most obviously, they serve to enforce masculine norms by challenging the recipient to better perform masculine identity, as well as reminding both witnesses and participants what constitutes suitable masculine behavior in a given circumstance (Reigeluth & Addis,

2016). Policing behaviors also serve to protect or increase status, enabling boys to compete with other boys for hierarchical positioning. In other words, enacting policing behaviors offers social rewards. This comes at the expense of others, which is why policing can include the victimization of other boys through bullying or hazing (Kimmel, 2008). Surprisingly, the oppressive nature of policing behaviors is sometimes viewed by boys as positive. Some boys report that having their friends respond to unmasculine displays of emotion by ignoring them or cutting them off (responses that appear callous or cruel) in fact allow face-saving, and are therefore helpful (Oransky & Marecek, 2009). This suggests that oppressive gender norms can be internalized to such an extent that they are not viewed negatively.

In the following analysis, I posit that *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) critiques hegemonic masculinity through the interrelated lenses of masculine performance, precarity, and policing. First, I argue that the film calls into question the desirability of hegemonic masculine performances by showing how they restrict and harm both male and female characters. Second, I explicate the film's critique of masculinity's precarity and how it promotes caustic attempts to prove, defend, or regain masculine standing. Third, I analyze the film's treatment of the policing of masculinity, revealing the cruelty of peer gender enforcement and internalized policing behaviors. These critiques help to reveal the negative influence of hegemonic masculine ideology that permeate contemporary society and suggest areas for societal progression.

Chapter V

Analysis

Performed Masculinity

Jojo Rabbit (Waititi, 2019) critiques hegemonic masculinity by showing how the masculine performances it inspires are undesirable. This is primarily accomplished through the character development of Jojo and how the film connects Nazism to hegemonic masculinity. The film's plot revolves around Jojo's initial Nazi fanaticism, his efforts to successfully perform that identity, and his eventual rejection of Nazism as befriends Elsa and loses his mother. Jojo's desire to be a Nazi is paralleled by and rooted in his desire to be masculine. In the film's opening scene, Jojo dons his Nazi uniform in preparation to join the Hitler Youth and addresses himself in the mirror: "Jojo Bezler, ten years old...today, you become a man" (Waititi, 2019, 1:03) Masculinity is a repeated achievement through individual actions and the response to those behaviors by the surrounding community; it is shaped and constrained by previous and current gender performances (Butler, 1999). The gender performances that inspire Jojo's imitative efforts are grounded in Nazi ideology. While Jojo's attempts to perform masculinity engage various audiences throughout the film (e.g., his mother, Captain Klendendorf, other boys), it is only the movie audience that is positioned to witness the entirety of Jojo's journey. To this audience, it is obvious that Jojo is not really a fierce Nazi or yet a "real" man. He is incapable of tying his own shoes, of winking, and of snapping his fingers, and he still looks like a child with his soft facial features and diminutive stature

(though, at 10-years old, this is hardly surprising). Jojo's ineptitudes combine with his sympathetic youthful appearance to act as a buffer against the horrifying hatred that spews out his mouth. This is evident in the scene when he and his friend Yorki are lying in a tent after their first day of camp. Jojo is brandishing his new knife and claims that if he saw a Jew, he would "Kill it like that!" but fails to snap on demand (Waititi, 2019, 8:46) After a few tries, he has to drop his knife to clap his hands as illustration. The awkward delay and clumsy efforts render comical his attempted ferocity. Jojo performing Nazism/hegemonic masculinity has a similar effect as a puppy growling or a child dressing up as a monster for Halloween: his cuteness renders the threat an obvious and endearing charade. The contrast permits the audience to nod in agreement as Elsa later proclaims "You're not a Nazi, Jojo. You're a 10-year-old kid... who likes dressing up in a funny uniform and wants to be part of a club" ((Waititi, 2019, 1:04:51). Jojo is incapable of a convincing masculine performance. This results in him being targeted by bullies and not being taken seriously by those around him. In other words, Jojo's failures at masculine performance prevent him from accessing the power and status afforded to men in his society (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009).

However, Jojo's physical and behavioral childishness also performs a crucial rhetorical function by calling into question the value of hegemonic masculine performance. It is Jojo's inability to enact a masculine performance that permits Elsa and the film's audience to eventually overlook his avowed Nazism and instead view him as a sympathetic, misguided character who should be allowed redemption. Audiences of the film are positioned to positively interpret Jojo's incompetence at performing hegemonic masculinity because it directly connects to his inability to successfully perform Nazism.

If failure or incompetence is viewed something positive, it implies that the end goal (in this case, a convincing hegemonic masculine/Nazi performance) is actually undesirable. The film therefore critiques the value of hegemonic masculine performance by showing that Jojo's likability, growth, and progression come not by better embodying hegemonic ideals of stoicism, strength, violence and control over women (Prody, 2015), but by rejecting these in favor of qualities traditionally dubbed as feminine like kindness and sensitivity.

An important facet of the film's critique of hegemonic masculinity is how Jojo's initial masculine performances are not merely informed by Nazism in general, but by the boy's perception of Adolf Hitler. Hitler, one of history's most infamous examples of authoritarian brutality and the horrific potential of demagoguery, is softened by Jojo's imagination into a supportive father figure. Jojo's own father is absent from the film entirely, save a picture on the wall and an impersonation by Rosi. Imaginary Hitler encourages Jojo when the boy is nervous to go to the first day of camp, telling him "You're going to get out there and you're gonna [sic] have a great time, ok?" (Waititi, 2019, 2:04). He also appears to comfort Jojo after he is bullied by the older boys, asking "What's wrong, little man?" (Waititi, 2019, 12:23) and telling him to not worry about the name-calling. It is taken-for-granted that the film audience knows the immorality of idolizing Adolf Hitler: the humor depends on the violated expectations of proper role-models for young men. Imaginary Hitler reflects and supports the racist and sexist beliefs that undergird Jojo's misguided confidence in his own superiority as a white, heterosexual male. At first glance, Waititi's comic portrayal of the Führer seems a mocking subversion of hegemonic masculine ideals. Waititi is Maori and has Jewish

heritage and so his very casting, perhaps as the first non-white actor to play the role, mocks Hitler's racism and antisemitism. Waititi's portrayal further reduces the fearsome dictator to slap-stick buffoonery. However, it is the very affability of Jojo's Hitler that demonstrates one of hegemonic masculinity's most dangerous characteristics: it is able to poke fun at itself in an apparently subversive way that in actuality enables it to reiterate and survive. This characteristic is described in Hanke's (1998) interrogation of mock-macho TV sitcoms, where he posits that the ambiguity of parodic portrayals of hegemonic masculine norms permits hegemonic masculinity to adopt a guise more suited to modern tastes. In other words, some comedic portrayals of masculinity, rather than rejecting hegemonic masculinity outright, strategically function to merge positive values like sensitivity and problematic traits like sexism (Zimdars, 2018). Hence, the comic portrayal of Hitler could facilitate a modernization of the caustic hegemonic ideologies he embodies.

Jojo Rabbit (Waititi, 2019) successfully avoids the potential pitfall by moving from the initial comic and friendly portrayal of Hitler, to a threatening and angry Hitler, and ultimately to Hitler as a pathetic and discredited figure. The relationship between Jojo and Hitler sours once Jojo comes to know and admire Elsa. Hitler aggressively berates Jojo for his growing affection towards the Jewish girl in a manner imitative of the real Hitler's barking oratory. This scene is important in showing the threat of violence to enforce ideological conformity. Jojo is able to see the true nature of his imaginary friend, and therefore of hegemonic masculinity, after his mother is killed. In Hitler's final scene he approaches Jojo disheveled and with his self-inflicted gun wound. His threats turn to begging as he is desperate for Jojo's admiration in order to exist. Jojo unequivocally

rejects his previous idol, and therefore rejects the violent, militant, racist, and sexist components of hegemonic masculinity that Hitler represents. In doing so, Jojo moves towards freedom from the pressures of proving himself a man through the unattainable and damaging standards of hegemonic masculinity. In an early scene, Jojo stands in front of the mirror and pledges his life to Hitler and Germany, claiming to have a “snake mind...wolf body...and panther courage” (Waititi, 2019, 1:32). Right before his final confrontation with Hitler, Jojo is able to look himself in the mirror and say, “Today, just do what you can” (Waititi, 2019, 1:38:44). This is his mother’s legacy to him, a liberatory and achievable set of standards that reflect a “vision of manhood that does not depend on putting down others in order to lift itself up” (Katz, 2006, p. 270). This interpretation of the various portrayals of Hitler and his interactions with Jojo demonstrate the potential allure of hegemonic masculinity and extremist ideologies to a lonely and insecure young boy who wants to be a man, as well as the caustic consequences and ultimate emptiness engendered by such beliefs. It also provides a healthy alternative of self-acceptance.

Female Masculine Performances

A significant means by which *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) attempts, with mixed results, to critique hegemonic masculinity is through its portrayal of the masculine performances of female characters. Masculinity is not “solely the domain of men” and can be enacted by individuals who do not inhabit a biologically male body (Dozier, 2019, p. 1222). However, individuals are subject to performative restraints on and hegemonic masculinity is particularly limiting. Jojo’s mother, Rosi, wears bright red lipstick and fashionable clothes and her hair is always immaculate. Her mannerisms indicate her to be

a traditionally feminine woman. Rosi frequently is the feminine foil to Jojo's most ardent attempts at masculine performance. This is not surprising considering the widespread Freudian belief in Western society that connection to one's mother is emasculating and that a boy must reject her influence to become a man (Kimmel, 2008). However, Rosi also enacts masculine performance in the film, a key illustration being the dinner scene. After turning on some music, Rosi expresses happiness at the progress of Allied Forces. In response, Jojo curses loudly and slams his hands on the table (accepted masculine expressions of anger), accusing Rosi of hating her country and fuming that his absent father would better understand. Rosi storms away from the table, grabs a military coat, rubs ash from the fireplace on her chin to approximate facial hair. Without breaking stride, she then forcefully hits the table in front of Jojo and yells, "Don't you ever talk to your goddamn mother like that!" (Waititi, 2019, 41:58). As the scene continues, Rosi imitates both her husband and herself, instructing her "husband" to apologize for yelling, recruiting Jojo to help care for his mother, and getting him to dance with his "parents".

Beyond being a potent tribute to the challenges faced by single mothers, the scene critiques how hegemonic masculinity restricts Rosi's agency in gender performance. To some degree, the scene depicts Rosi's agency: by "dressing up" and aggressively performing the role of her husband, Rosi violates expected gender norms and illustrates her own capacity to enact a masculine performance and blur the gender binary. The demonstration proves that she does not use humor, love, and encouragement to parent Jojo because of an inherent femininity that prevents her from turning to masculine anger or domineering: she chooses to. However, "individuals are not free to construct simply any version of identity that they desire; identity construction is influenced and

constrained by a number of micro and macro social processes” (Anderson, 2005, p. 348). Rosi’s red lipstick shows cleanly through the ash-beard, indicating that Rosi’s masculine performance is less convincing than her feminine or “real” gender identity, though both are gender performances (Butler, 1999). Furthermore, the scene shows how Rosi is subjected to gendered rules restricting emotional expression and how the hegemonic status-quo resists change. Rosi’s initial outburst shows an unfeigned rage that frightens not only Jojo, but herself as well. Rosi dresses up as her husband (a literal performance of masculinity) in order to express her anger, rather than expressing anger in her own voice and manner. This indicates her internalization of the widespread belief that “women’s anger [is] always unacceptable” (Potegal & Novaco, 2010, p. 16). However, I contend that Jojo and Rosi are also frightened by how Rosi’s anger initially creates a convincing masculine performance, despite the lipstick and other indicators of femininity. The credibility of Rosi’s masculine performance threatens the clear-cut gender distinctions that order their typical interactions. This interpretation is supported by Rosi’s behavior following her expression of anger. In an additional layer of gender performance, Rosi proceeds to imitate herself, adopting an exaggerated feminine voice and posture in contrast to the deep voice and gruff manner of her masculine/husband performance. Thus, Rosi reestablishes the gender binary in order to reduce the emotional tension between her and Jojo. The relief experienced by both characters, and by extension the film’s audience, speaks to how the hegemonic status-quo places certain gender configurations as “normal” and comfortable, while positioning alternative gender performances as transgressive and threatening (Butler, 1999).

Another way Rosi violates gender role expectations in the film, and one I consider to be problematic, is through enacting violence, which is historically the purview of masculinity (Atkinson & Calafell, 2009). When Rosi first sees Captain Klenzendorf after Jojo's grenade injury, she promptly knees him in the groin. As he collapses in pain, she says "It's because of you my son cannot walk properly and has a messed-up face, so you're going to...make sure he has a job and feels included, got it?" (Waititi, 2019, 18:39). She talks over Klenzendorf's explanation that Jojo stole the grenade and dismissively slaps him with her leather gloves. Later, when Rosi encounters Captain K at the swimming pool, he cowers away from her, despite being a war veteran whose own violent masculine proficiency is demonstrated by his officer status. Enacting masculinity via violence does provide Rosi power that may otherwise be denied her. However, though it is praiseworthy to portray women as strong, capable, and assertive, it is problematic to reify the connection between physical violence and power. This is in part due to how Captain K is portrayed as a passive, weak, feminized recipient of Rosi's violence, which is also the case in the violence enacted by Elsa against Jojo in their first three meetings. King and Gunn (2013) critique the "tendency in Western culture to conflate victimization with feminization, to equate being the object of violence with being the object-as-woman" (p. 206). They further contend: "in Western fantasy misogyny structures violence, whether or not the disciplined, violated, or destroyed body is female" (p. 207). Hence, though Rosi and Elsa appear to be empowered by switching traditional gendered roles with Klenzendorf and Jojo respectively, their violent behavior still preserves the tenets of hegemonic masculinity. Trying to address problematic associations of masculinity with violence by proving women can also excel at violence

does not solve the problem of violence. In their consideration of media portrayals of violent women, Minowa et. al (2014) came to a similar conclusion: “violence, regardless of the gender of the aggressor, is cultural regression rather than empowerment” (p. 220).

Precarious Masculinity

Jojo Rabbit (Waititi, 2019) critiques the precarity of hegemonic masculinity by showing the negative consequences of having to constantly prove and defend one’s masculine status (Vandello et al., 2008). Even at 10 years old, Jojo knows that manhood is something that needs earning, rather than something that he already has as an inheritance. One of the clearest tokens of masculinity bestowed, and at risk of being lost, is the knife Jojo and the other boys are all issued by Captain Klenzendorf on their first day at camp. The boys are instructed that they must always have these weapons on their person and that they are very special. Jojo immediately brandishes his knife and lays awake on the first night of camp fingering the weapon and fantasizing about capturing a Jew in order to befriend Hitler. The knife is the equivalent of a man-card, the visible credential of membership within the club of men. The fact that it is a weapon bestowed by a military man as the boys begin training to join the German army reinforces the connection between violent capacity and masculinity (Prody, 2015).

The knife serves as a recurring symbol of Jojo’s precarious masculinity throughout the film. When Jojo first encounters Elsa in the storage space of his home, he screams in fear and drops his knife as he scampers away. Elsa catches him in the hallway, slams him against the wall, and forces him to acknowledge that she is not a ghost but “something worse”, a Jew (Waititi, 2019, 25:21). He reaches for his knife sheath and

finds it empty as Elsa brandishes the weapon, threatening to behead him if he tells Rosi that he knows about Elsa's presence. Elsa then saunters away and informs Jojo she will keep his knife because "it's pretty" (Waititi, 2019, 26:21) The incident is no less than a symbolic castration of Jojo, a forcible removal of that which grants him masculine membership. This is made more threatening by how Elsa feminizes the knife itself (or mocks its masculine potential to cause injury), by asserting that she only wants it for its aesthetic qualities. Because being a victim is a feminized position (King & Gunn, 2013), and therefore antithetical to his masculine aspirations, Jojo seeks to deny the occurrence in a couple of ways. First, rather than accept the reality that he, an Aryan male, was overpowered by a Jewish female (no matter the substantial influence of a 7-year age difference) Jojo and imaginary Hitler conclude that Elsa must have used "mind-control" (Waititi, 2019, 26:25) Thus, the hegemonic gender hierarchy is preserved because the usurper cheated! The more obvious conclusion, that Jojo is simply not stronger than Elsa (and by extension that masculine/Nazi ideology underpinning Jojo's understanding of the world is flawed), is thereby avoided altogether. The second response of Jojo is to compensate for his threatened manhood by attempting to reassert control of the situation, which aligns with the expectations of both precarious masculinity (Vandello et al., 2008) and manhood acts theory (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Armed with a kitchen knife and metal bowl as a helmet, he returns to Elsa's room to demand that she find somewhere else to live. This effort to reestablish his control/masculinity fails drastically. Elsa was not in the side storage where Jojo expected her to be. She comes from behind Jojo and with one push disarms him. With an easy flick of the kitchen knife and toss of her head, Elsa orders "Get the hell out of my room" (Waititi, 2019, 28:04). Despite the problem of

violence already noted (and granted, Elsa threatens harm more than she actually hurts Jojo), these initial experiences are critical for Jojo. He begins to realize that neither Jews nor girls are what he has been told they are and that his gender, race, and nationality do not provide the superiority of which he was certain. This scene reveals the ironic fragility of hegemonic masculinity, particularly when threatened by a female. It also illustrates how attempts to protect and defend masculinity include the blatant denial of contradictory information, meaning that efforts to persuade individuals to reconsider hegemonic gender beliefs need to do more than simply address factual inaccuracies.

The precarity of masculinity extends beyond actions and behavior to include physical appearance as well, as demonstrated when the Gestapo investigate Jojo and Rosi's home. Though the propaganda in Jojo's room inspires the Gestapo leader to wish all boys shared Jojo's "blind fanaticism", his suspicion is aroused once he notices that Jojo does not have his knife on his person (Waititi, 2019, 1:08:26). Because "every mannerism, every movement contains a coded gender language", the way in which you dress, eat, walk and talk are all subject to scrutiny and the "possibilities of being unmasked are everywhere" (Kimmel, 2008, p. 48). As Jojo fumbles to explain the absence of his knife, Elsa appears, dressed as Jojo's deceased sister Inga, saying she took the knife because Jojo would not stay out of her room. While the presence of the Gestapo is an obvious threat to Elsa as a Jew, it is also a threat to her as a woman. Her earlier emasculation of Jojo, though unable to be redressed by the boy himself, now exposes her to societal enforcers of the gender hierarchy, men who are willing to kill to maintain the system. Jojo is also at risk in this scene. By not having his knife on his person, Jojo provokes doubt regarding his Nazi/masculine identities. Indeed, both Elsa and Jojo are

presented with similar questions. Asking the location of Jojo's knife is the equivalent to the request given to Elsa to show her identification papers: both questions ask for a demonstration of their identities' legitimacy.

The threat faced by Jojo and Elsa is alleviated as Captain Klenzendorf helps to reestablish their gendered identities. He helps Jojo and Elsa maintain their charade by taking the identity papers Elsa finds in Inga's desk, asking a few questions to verify Elsa's identity, and pronouncing her answers as correct (despite Elsa actually giving the incorrect date of birth). In this scene, Captain K functions as a rhetorical fourth persona on two levels. The fourth persona references an audience that, because they themselves are conducting the same subterfuge, can "see through" the discursive and behavioral efforts of another to successfully pass as something they are not (Morris III, 2002). In this case, Klenzendorf not only recognizes that Jojo and Elsa are passing as Nazis, but also that Jojo is attempting to pass as masculine. Because Klenzendorf is a gay man (indicated as he and his assistant/love interest Freddy Finkle adapt their uniforms with pink triangles for the final battle), and because of his ambivalence towards the war effort and Nazi cause, we can assume Klenzendorf's own experiences have included passing as a heterosexual man and fervent Nazi. After the Gestapo leave, Captain K once more gives Jojo his knife, telling him to stay home and take care of his family and the weapon. Once again, Jojo is granted his token of masculinity by a military man. This restores the gendered division that was threatened when Elsa overpowered Jojo. The near disaster prompted by the knife's absence emphasizes the danger inherent to both males and females who disturb the balance of precarious masculinity.

The inability of hegemonic masculinity to provide adequate tools for emotional management is showcased when the knife makes its final appearance in the movie. After Jojo finds his mother's body hanging in the town square, he confronts Elsa with the knife clenched in his pudgy child's hand. Hegemonic masculine norms socialize boys to associate feeling and expressing emotions with femininity (Kimmel, 2008), and so Jojo tries to transfer his crushing grief into the more acceptable masculine emotion of anger as he stabs Elsa in the shoulder. It is unclear whether the superficiality of the wound reflects Jojo's lack of physical strength or lack of vengeful conviction. In either case, the knife is left on the floor, and the two children find comfort in mourning Rosi's death together. The knife does not appear again in the film. Despite its promise of access to power, respect and standing, the weapon actually does nothing to either protect what Jojo loves or to help him process his loss. Rather than reflecting an individual failure of Jojo's masculinity, I suggest that this scene implicates hegemonic masculinity and society's failure to provide boys with the proper tools to navigate adulthood and emotional loss.

The film does provide an illustration of emotionally healthy masculinity in the character of Jojo's friend, Yorki. His presence effectively challenges masculinity's dependence on hierarchy. A critical component to masculine precarity is the existence and perceived importance of hierarchy, not only between masculinity and femininity, but also among different versions of masculinity. This hierarchy is integral to hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2019). Kenneth Burke (1963) claimed that man is in part defined as being "goaded by the spirit of hierarchy" (p. 505). Yorki is the only male character who seems to be beneath Jojo on the masculine hierarchy: he wears spectacles, speaks with a slight lisp, and has a plump appearance that suggests he is softer (e.g. less

masculine) than Jojo. It would be logical to assume that any suffering Jojo endures by failing to be sufficiently masculine, would be amplified for Yorki. Yet, Yorki seems to have passed through the Hitler Youth experience and the end of the war relatively unscathed while Jojo, who was never a soldier despite desperately wanting to be, is physically and internally scarred by his attempts at adhering to masculine norms. A key to understanding the discrepancy is how Yorki does not appear to be motivated by masculine precarity like Jojo. He tells Jojo he “cried for ages” upon hearing of Rosi’s death (Waititi, 2019, 1:24:43). After the battle ends, Yorki wants to visit his mother because he “need[s] a cuddle” (Waititi, 2019, 1:32:49). Crying in grief and seeking emotional comfort from your mother are clear violations of hegemonic masculine norms that encourage separation from femininity (Kimmel, 2008). But boys who are able to resist pressures to conform to hegemonic norms of stoicism and physical toughness have been found to be healthier both psychologically and socially (Way et al., 2014). Hence, in the contrast between Yorki and Jojo, the film critiques hegemonic masculinity by showing that it is not solely that low hierarchical position causes harm, but the obsession with hierarchy that does damage.

Policed Masculinity

Throughout the film, and particularly in the scene where Jojo receives his nickname, *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) exposes the role that boys and men play in the stringent policing of one another’s masculinity (Kimmel, 2008). At the Hitler Youth Training Camp, Jojo draws the attention of two older Nazi youth, who notice him flinching and cowering during a violent game of capture the flag. The next morning, Jojo,

his friend Yorkki, and a group of other new recruits are standing in the forest before the same older boys. The older boys are in their later teens and tower over the 10-year-old recruits. The darker-haired teen begins to speak, explaining that “there is no room in Hitler’s army for those who lack strength”, and therefore the ability to kill at will is mandatory (Waititi, 2019, 9:52). He asks who in the group believes they are capable of killing and the boys’ hands go up with varying degrees of hesitation. He then singles out Jojo: “Johannes, can you kill?” (Waititi, 2019, 10:04). Jojo, briefly looks to his peers before scoffing “Of course...I love killing” (Waititi, 2019, 10:09). The dark-haired teen hands Jojo a rabbit, and commands, as the tense background music builds, that Jojo kill it. As Jojo hesitates, the other teenager explains how to wring the rabbit’s neck, laughing as explains that they can always “use the boot to finish it off” (Waititi, 2019, 10:56). He starts the group chanting “Kill. Kill. Kill” (Waititi, 2019, 11:02). Jojo attempts to set the rabbit free, but the second teenager picks it up and snaps its neck while staring at Jojo, before tossing the limp body into the woods, again to more chuckles from the group.

This scene interrogates how boys are policed by their peers to perform hegemonic ideals of masculinity like stoicism and violence through physical challenges (Reigeluth & Addis, 2021). Jojo, by demonstrating sensitivity and mercy (i.e., feminine traits) represents a threat to the values of the masculine community. Therefore, he fails the initiation and needs to be made an example of, lest his “deficiencies” spread like a contagion. The teens mock him for being frightened, shove him to the ground, and hover their boot above his face while suggesting that his fate should be the same as that of the rabbit. Jojo pushes the boot and runs away, followed by mocking chants of “Jojo Rabbit! Jojo Rabbit!” (Waititi, 2019, 12:13). It was Jojo’s visible discomfort with the violence of

the previous day that made him the hazing target in the first place. The teenagers are higher on the masculine hierarchy by virtue of being bigger, older, and more ruthless. Where Jojo's fanaticism is laughable, the conviction of these boys is frightening. Gone is the baby-fat that indicates the childishness of Jojo and the other 10-year-old recruits. These older boys are lean and hungry, towering over the new recruits and seeming to relish their power. The callous ease by which they kill the rabbit and lead the group humiliation of Jojo suggests even darker capacities. The threat of violence is one way that policing of masculinity takes place within the scene. Even without being threatened physically, being mocked in front of your peers and excluded from the group serves as potent punishment. By targeting Jojo, the teenagers make an example to the other boys, showing the consequence of resisting masculine norms and discouraging affiliation with the traits that Jojo showed like compassion, hesitation, or mercy (Reigeluth & Addis, 2016).

An important aspect of the scene's critique is the presence of female onlookers. The teenage girls' high-pitched laughter and chanting of "Kill" suggest that some women want men to conform to hegemonic masculine norms, that they in fact admire strength and violence and stoicism. It is eerie to have a crowd chanting to pressure Jojo to violence and perhaps most discomfiting is the way the girls present chant intently while also twirling their braids, giggling, and smiling. The contrast between traditional girlish behavior and bloodlust is unnerving. The presence of the female other can be a powerful policing force, however these girls are not present as agents themselves, instead reflecting how "women often become a type of currency by which men negotiate their status with other men" (Kimmel, 2008, p. 47). Their presence solidifies the legitimacy of the older

boys' hierarchical positioning, an illustration of the power and perks that are supposedly available to those who successfully enact hegemonic masculinity. The girls are not the intended audience whom the policing display is supposed to impress, they are part of the presentation. The audience is the new recruits/young boys. In all, this scene comments upon the intricate and horrifying process of masculine self-regulation that occurs as older boys act as gatekeepers for younger boys, brutally protecting misguided standards of masculinity, all without the presence of adult men to intervene (Kimmel, 2008). Hazing, bullying, and initiation all share the underlying function of policing masculinity, and experiences similar to what Jojo faced continue to be manifest in schools, gangs, fraternities, the military, and sport teams (Kimmel, 2008). Hence, the scene shows how hegemonic masculinity promotes damaging policing and that remains contemporarily relevant.

Another critique the film offers regarding the policing and perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity deals with the internalization of hegemonic norms by the individual. Jojo aches to be taken seriously as a man, which renders him especially vulnerable to Nazi/masculine ideology and propaganda. After the rabbit scene, Jojo apologizes to Hitler, his masculine idol and stand-in father figure, for being unable to kill the rabbit. It is startling that Jojo is so deeply invested in Nazi/masculine ideology that he views the affair as a failure on his part, rather than an inappropriate and cruel incident of bullying. At this point, he has no means to critique the system, only his own inability to live up to its standards. Furthermore, because Jojo views the rabbit affair as a humiliating failure that threatened his precarious masculine identity, he is driven to reestablish masculine credibility through a compensatory act of violence (Ezzel, 2012). He steals a

hand grenade from Captain K and throws it into the woods. The grenade ricochets off of a tree to land at Jojo's feet before detonating and seriously injuring him. Though the film portrays the scene with a ludicrous comedy, Jojo's turn to weapons and violent demonstrations have terrifying real-world equivalents: emasculating bullying and a feeling of failed masculine performance are common factors that influence the perpetrators of school rampage shootings (Farr, 2018).

Captain Klenzendorf reiterates the insidious appeal of hegemonic masculinity once internalized. Klenzendorf is one of the only grown men that Jojo interacts with in the film, reflecting not only the reality of a nation at war but also the contemporary dearth of male role models who reject hegemonic norms. He has lived the soldier life that Jojo dreams of and it left him with physical scars (strikingly similar to Jojo's own, when we see them both at the pool scene) and an attitude of jaded disillusionment. Klenzendorf is first introduced after the title sequence and gives an informal "Heil Hitler, guys" to the crowd of new recruits, speaking around a mouthful of apple which he tosses away after a single bite (Waititi, 2019, 4:36). His hip flask of alcohol seems to be the only thing getting him through his supervisory responsibilities; he drinks frequently as he watches activities like the frenzied book burning and grenade throwing. Klenzendorf knows the war effort is doomed to failure yet works to defend the city from invasion. He references "leading my men in battle towards glorious death" (Waititi, 2019, 5:04), and tells Jojo "get in line, kid" when the youth asks to be sent to the warfront (Waititi, 2019, 19:32).

Rather than advocating against the Nazi/masculine ideology that cost him his eye and prevents him from freely expressing his sexuality, Captain K seems to resent being twice demoted down the masculine hierarchy, first after his injury and again after Jojo's

grenade incident. The demotions are an interesting example of precarity and policing, because the audience never encounters an individual who is higher ranked than Klenzendorf or see anyone actively policing his masculine performance. It is therefore suggested that masculine performances are also evaluated by an ambiguous and omnipresent audience of “them”, somewhere “out there.” In other words, policing of white, heterosexual masculinity functions like a panoptic prison, where inmates are unable to see their captors but are aware they may be observed at any time, and therefore self-discipline even in the absence of a guard’s physical presence (Booth & Spencer, 2016). Captain K is, in many ways, his own oppressor. He is unable to greet the idea of the falling regime with joy like Rosi does, only with a resignation that suggests he would prefer it to survive and himself to fit the hegemonic ideal. This illustrates how hegemonic masculinity “influences the oppressed to maintain the rightfulness or naturalization of their oppression” (Anderson, 2005, p. 339). The internalized policing of hegemonic masculinity helps to make sense of Klenzendorf’s ambivalent character. Though older and less starry-eyed than Jojo, Captain K appears equally unable to truly critique or resist the system despite intimately knowing how it harms everyone, even those it privileges. Klenzendorf does eventually don pink triangles as visible markers of his gay identity, but even this gesture of resistance seems a type of resignation; he is still fighting for Nazi Germany and seems to be accepting death rather than living with the ramifications of his non-hegemonic masculinity. Klenzendorf’s relationship to hegemonic masculinity is well symbolized by the injury that cost him an eye: he is both able to see the futility and flaws of Nazi/hegemonic masculine ideology, and yet is blind to his own role as self-oppressor;

both willing to resist by saving Elsa and Jojo's lives through subterfuge and unwilling to truly oppose the system or believe in a viable alternative.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

This analysis positions *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) as a critique of the performance, precarity, and policing of hegemonic masculinity. In some ways, the pressures, restrictions, and negative impacts of hegemonic masculinity encountered by the characters in *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) differ from those faced by the film's Western audience; the Gestapo is unlikely to knock and ask for identification papers or to inspect a Hitler Youth uniform. However, hegemonic masculinity continues to detrimentally impact individuals and society in ways exposed by this analysis. First, it promotes undesirable masculine performances. For both U.S American boys and men in the 21st century and German boys and men in the 1940's, it is equally true that "war requires individual performances of masculinity marked by violence, emotional repression, [and] duty..." (Prody, 2015, p. 444). Second, hegemonic masculinity restricts the individual agency of men, women, and gender nonconforming individuals (Butler, 1999). Third, the preoccupation with hierarchy that is characteristic of hegemonic masculinity promotes precarity and pressures boys and men to enact violence in order to prove and defend their manhood (Vandello et al., 2008). Finally, men and boys are socialized to use force, threats, and public humiliation to police one another's masculinity (Reigeluth & Addis, 2021), and also suffer from self-enacted policing that results from the internalization of harmful hegemonic beliefs (Anderson, 2005).

Beyond reiterating the caustic consequences of hegemonic masculinity, this analysis of *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) articulates how hegemonic masculinity undergirds

extremist ideologies. After interviewing over 100 active and former white nationalist, neo-Nazi, and jihadist members in the United States and Europe, Kimmel (2018) observed that “joining-up is a form of masculine compensation, an alternate route to proving manhood” (p. 10). Societal attempts to address the painfully relevant issues of ideological extremism, especially attempts geared towards undermining recruitment efforts and helping people (frequently young males) find their way out of such caustic belief systems, cannot afford to ignore the influence of hegemonic masculine ideology (Kimmel, 2018). There is a desperate need to shift from easy explanations of individual deviance to explain extremism and instead focus on the complex ways by which society promotes hegemonic masculinity and thereby helps create extremism.

Finally, this analysis helps address the need identified by Prody (2015) to evaluate critiques of hegemonic masculinity produced by men within popular culture. In order to mobilize change to inequitable gender structures within our society, it is important to reach those who currently benefit from the status quo. This reading of *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) compellingly illustrates how hegemonic masculinity simultaneously harms those it privileges. Jojo, who bears all the external markers of privilege within his society, loses his mother and is physically and emotionally wounded because of the very ideologies that elevated him. Captain Klenzendorf lives with an internalized belief in a system that criminalizes his sexual orientation and discards him despite his sacrifices on its behalf. Only Yorkki, the least masculine figure of all, is unscarred; protected by a rare ability to resist the siren call of valuing hegemonic masculinity. By positioning the film in this way, this analysis invites men to abandon futile and caustic attempts at hegemonic conformity and instead support a more equitable gender system.

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