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Masculinity, After the Apocalypse: Gendered Heroics in Modern Survivalist Cinema

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by

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Abstract

Emerging out of a tradition of dystopic and apocalyptic cinema, the survivalist film has arisen as a new subgenre owing to a collision of several divergent modes of cinema. While the scholarly discourse has been preoccupied largely with the task of setting up the parameters of this new cinematic line little attention has been paid to unraveling what the new modes of masculine performance within the films mean in the post-9/11 moment in which they have emerged. This paper looks at the ways in which the gendered heroics on the screen are indebted to the slasher and zombie subgenres in offering alternatives to performing and reclaiming masculinity in the modern survivalist film. Looking towards the collapse of society within these films and the historical preoccupation with these film's ancestral sources at moments when masculinity is threatened in new ways, I argue that when society collapses on the screen so too collapses the character's understanding of "proper" gender performance as well as the audiences expectations of appropriate response to this subversion. I find that survivalist films offer a new mode for exploring gender through the ways in which masculinity is performed, received, and reclaimed. Owing largely to the meeting of horror subgenres within these films masculinity can be encountered by the audience in a way that has until now not been possible for the spectator, presenting an opportunity to reevaluate how we recognize and regulate expectations of gender both on and off screen.

Chapter One: Introduction

In this thesis, I argue that contemporary survivalist cinema marries the zombie and slasher subgenres so as to supply the spectator with a male protagonist who can reflect and respond to socioeconomic threats to masculinity in post-9/11 America. By looking at *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012), *World War Z* (Forster, 2013), and *This is the End* (Rogan/Goldberg, 2013), I argue that male protagonists provide sites for reclaiming and enfranchising hegemonic white masculinity, presenting unstably gendered heroes so as to speak to unsettling transformations of labor and opportunity in America and the resulting injury to white men. This male protagonist is constructed for the audience as feminine enough to reflect the crisis of masculinity symptomatic of the increasingly globalized service-based economy, while at the same time, this hero presents in new and unexpected ways the benefits that come from the queering characters. Hollywood cinema has found itself obsessed with pairing such an emasculated male hero in a variety of dystopic settings whose mise-en-scène creates an outward environment to correspond to the unsettled psyche of American moviegoers. Endemic to these films are a recurring tension between prevailing modes of power and the alternatives which allow hegemonic control to be shored up by film's end. For even though these films work very hard to reconsolidate normative structures of power by film's end, they do not erase the fact that alternatives are lodged and privileged within the film along the way. Protagonists are queered through their emasculation to survive and while they emerge by film's end "recovered" from their emasculations, it does not take away from the fact that such a queering paradoxically

challenges and reclaims white masculine authority. Yet in spite of the fact that these films engage with divergent identity formations they nonetheless position the spectator to encourage an outcome that supports prevailing modes of power outside of the films.

Emerging out of the recent 2008 economic recession, the current crisis of masculinity is centered on the claim that white men, whose franchise on opportunity to achieve the American Dream in the United States has been supposedly revoked, are those most harmed by the social transformations of the post–Civil Rights era. The recurrent crises of masculinity within American history have centered upon the changes to social expectations of masculinity at a given time as tied to labor and personal relationships. It vilifies men who are not able to exemplify the codified ideal of masculinity at any one time even at moments when the opportunity to achieve such status remains elusive.[1] These anxieties are informed by the entry of women into the workplace, the increasing social acceptance of gay and lesbian headed households, and the American narrative of invasion as espoused by Right-Wing media coverage concerning illegal immigration.[2] However, far more the actual injuries to Americans both monetarily and emotionally are attributed to neoliberal policies that privilege the individual at the same time that they take away government assistance.

The discourse of American masculine crisis attempts to account for and to reorient these transformations in ways that recoup political, economic, and cultural authority that is perceived to have become destabilized in the face of an alleged war on men. This white male injury, though often framed as illusionary, is a phenomenon that holds quite a lot of weight both emotionally

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[1] Michael S. Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2013), pg. #31-60.
[2] Ibid, pg. #199-230.

and with felt economic consequences. As the labor and sociocultural landscapes of the contemporary United States have shifted since the end of the post–World War II economic boom, instead of implicating neoliberal economics in the steady decline in the income of white working- and lower-middle-class men fault has been placed on women, persons of color, gays and lesbians, and immigrants[3]. Through the films I analyze, I seek to prove that the perceived threat to white masculinity has significant cultural implications to respond to the anxieties that come from current formations of neoliberal selfhood and domestic anxieties of multiculturalism and global neoliberalism. By constructing ambiguously gendered male protagonists within the subgenre of survivalist cinema, I argue the films turn moments of crisis toward opportunities for hegemonic consolidation and do so in spite of the tensions endemic to zombie and slasher films. The opportunity for alternative ways of engaging with masculinity is mapped onto the male hero, as his ambiguity towards hegemonic gendered performance could be viewed as a positive change. Even still, while the films trace the opportunity for alternative ways of negotiating power by exposing the framework that creates it, they nonetheless reject such an opportunity through their usage.

Across the board, modern zombie films emphasize a sense of selfhood in opposition to a powerful mass collective and more importantly the threat of that selfhood's loss. The fear here comes from the fact that people do not believe that they are capable of acts such as murder and cannibalism and by virtue the loss of a sense of self-possessed individualism. However, in these films, it becomes clear that social protocol gives way to carnal desires and a part of the transformation is connected to a relinquishing of agency in favor of joining the group. This not

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[3] Ibid, pg. #199-230.

only underscores the terror of the loss of self that zombie films engage and seek to restore, but also the extent to which this loss of self might function more interestingly since it lends itself to posthumanist considerations. This tension between the desire to return to the past and the pleasure of emerging in the future in new and possibly more pleasurable ways persists throughout the zombie film and finds itself emerging in survivalist cinema at a time when the neoliberal construction of the "self" honors the individual over the collective; especially at such a time when the collective could rally to demand otherwise.

In similar ways, the slasher subgenre allows survivalist films to privilege the individual in ways that affirm queerness at a moment when American cultural discourse is perceived to be vilifying white men. Formulaic in structure, the slasher film follows a very rigid configuration. Usually beginning the film in the past, a community's perceived wrongdoing leads to the emergence of a killer who commits a murder of vengeance. The killer is usually constructed as a queer, childlike, psychosexual villain, an identity that stands in contrast to their constructions as a large, unstoppable male-bodied figures, a construction I would argue that reflects well on the male hero of survivalist cinema as much as it reflects the female hero of the slasher. Following a period of rebuilding and forgetting, a commemoration of the original event leads to the reemergence of the killer who re-identifies a new group of victims who resemble the original victims and proceeds to kill them in progressively more violent and ecstatic ways. Such a recycling is reflective of the reemergence of the crisis of masculinity which posits an idyllic community besieged by a blight of the past. While America writ large lambasts past systemic practices such as slavery or forced relocation of Native Americans, they are quick to call foul when they feel restitution might cause an inconvenience, even when no restitution has occurred. Within the slasher, one protagonist, usually an ambiguously gendered female, recognizes the

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danger but is unable to convince the community of its presence. By the end of the film, she stands as the lone survivor. Doing battle with the aggressor, she is able to subdue the killer but is not free from danger as the killer is far more apt to escape than be captured or permanently suppressed. With the addition of a queered male hero within survivalist cinema the film, it is possible then to see the tension that exists between a sadistic killer who is more like the hero than dissimilar.

To be sure, zombie films and their ability to speak to social anxieties have been more acknowledged in survivalist scholarship than the slasher, given the long engagement with zombies Americans have experienced throughout the twentieth century. However, I believe that the fear of loss of self that comes from the zombie subgenre alone does not reaffirm the injury that has been perceived against white hegemony. The loss of self insinuates a personal failure; one gave up their selfhood (and by virtue their white, male privilege) through weak character. The threat to masculinity, however, is one of attack, the blame being placed on women, weak men, and persons of color within the films. The slasher's preoccupation with privileging a queered protagonist who survives against an equally queer, deranged force speaks to the emasculated white male, punishes those who have not been queered on screen through death, and affirms the reoccurring nature of such a threat. Male protagonist and audience regain a sense of control and normalcy through the defeat of the killer, instilling hope by the end of the film that the masculinity of the protagonist has been regained while acknowledging that, as is common in the slasher, the threat will soon return in a new way. The slasher genre thus provides a missing piece to this arising need for cultural representations of both white male empowerment and blame on a force which seeks to usurp privilege entitled to white America. Slasher and zombie influences are conjoined in these films in the same way that whiteness and masculinity are

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symbiotically tied in American society. They can be disentangled but only once it is acknowledged that they feed into each other, which until now has been an overlooked phenomenon.

Zombie traditions present us with societies in ruin where social grace and tact mean little when selfhood is threatened and most of the community is lost. Slasher traditions present local threats where ambiguously gendered heroes can perform acts of masculine survival when death is imminent and no one is there to witness such divergence anyhow. The literatures surrounding these modes, however, have not yet addressed the meeting of the two in survivalist cinema in a substantive way. Zombie films have nearly always been read as historical allegories for America, signifying the changing social and cultural anxieties of the time[4]. The earliest of these films, such as *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (Jacques Tourneur, 1943), relied on distinctions between civilized white societies and the more primitive practices of black voodoo of the Caribbean. Proximity to America and the history of American occupation in Haiti brought the other uncomfortably close as it reminded white Americans of the anxieties associated with slavery, including slave uprisings, reverse colonization, and miscegenation. These fears were simultaneously compounded by the increase in black populations to the North from the First and Second Great Migrations. Literature about this moment has attempted to make connections between the zombie and the wider concept of slavery and colonization. Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz make the argument in their anthology *Generation Zombie: Essays on the Living Dead in Modern Culture* that first-wave zombie films materialized at a crucial moment in American society for labor, emerging out of "the mechanical servitude that

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[4] See Deborah Christie and Sarah Juliet. Lauro, *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011) and Kyle William Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2010).

resonated with the 'modern times' of 20th century industrialism and its abject instrumentalization and alienation of labor."[5] That the relationship in these films is a single zombie in a master/slave relationship should ring familiar to the connections to labor and the shifting American narrative of progress that often utilized language to signal the colonization of body and mind that come about as a result of the move to mechanization. However the danger here comes from the fact that these zombies are white women. As a form of displacement this allowed anxieties to be played out on a "safe" body; this being all the more important with the arrival of the female protagonist in the slasher film. These films registered a colonization of the mind that mirrored the emotional trauma resultant of mechanization and urbanization yet signaled for spectators more pressing fears of miscegenation and loss of white, Protestant control of America.

Second-wave zombie films are immersed in the tradition of George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and have sought to connect to the issue of the body as responding to the malaise of society, in particular to the social upheaval of 1960s Vietnam War era into the culture of the 1970s through a new lumbering, flesh-hungry ghoul. Though Romero has denied on many occasions a deliberate racial preoccupation in his film, the casting of black actor Duane L. Jones as the lead protagonist, Ben, gunned down at the end by a group of vigilante rednecks resulted in mass readings of the film centered on the social upheavals of the Civil Rights Movement. Kyle William Bishop traces the emergence of this form of zombie in his book *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture.* This proliferation of a new walking dead framework continues largely unabated until to the early 1990s, when we see the end of successful theatrically released films yet the continuation of "no-budget, direct-to-

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[5] Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz, *Generation Zombie: Essays on the Living Dead in Modern Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), pg. #4

video" entries.[6] Bishop connects this moment of serialization to a series of societal calming moments, significantly the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, and the apparent end of the Gulf War conflict. These events provided enough assurance to pacify the social anxieties of Americans but not enough to stop the flow of films all together. It can be inferred then that crisis specifically leads to the emergence of dystopic settings and, as such, the crisis of masculinity provides the same setting for which films can, and as I argue do, replicate such social upheavals through dystopic catastrophe.

The third wave of zombie cinema and the American cultural preoccupation which has accompanied it is indebted largely to the specific anxieties that supplemented the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and as such, entries into the academic discourse have been focused on the issue of disease, pandemic, terrorism, and the threat of global destruction. Images of deserted streets and noiseless metropolitan scenes resonate as particularly haunting following the news coverage of 9/11 and their reproduction within these films echo more modern fears of global terrorism. Meaghan Sutherland in her essay "Rigor/Mortis: The Industrial Life of Style in American Zombie Cinema" responds to the proliferation of zombie films and the critiques the genre has endured of being repetitive and unimaginative by positing that, while on the outset it is easy to inscribe social allegory onto the zombie film, it is far more an embodiment of the political discourse itself than a simple point-for-point piece on which to map political crisis of contemporary, neoliberal economics and the "bare life" they produce.[7] While the films tend to replicate dominant structures in times of crisis; we do not need to. The possibilities of dystopic loss are varied and value free, but they do not get the attention that the perceived problems

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[6] Kyle William Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2010), pg. #16.
[7] Meghan. Sutherland, "Rigor / Mortis: The Industrial Life of Style in American Zombie Cinema," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 48, no. 1 (2007): pg. #64-78, doi:10.1353/frm.2007.0008.

associated with the evacuation of selfhood receive.[8] Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry explicate the posthumanist potential of the "zombii" in their essay "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism." While they see anxieties registered by zombie losses of self they also see opportunities for collectivity in excess of individual humanist subjectivity.

Rather than celebrate the future of posthuman subject as Donna Haraway does in her treatment "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," they propose that the position of the zombie is simultaneously an evaporating and consuming force for it presents both the loss of individual subjecthood and admission into the monstrous horde at the moment of envelopment. An understanding of value, whether a "good" zombie or a "bad" zombie exists, remains an impossible construction because such extrapolations arise from a thinking "consciousness." As such, they posit that the future is anticapitalist, anticathartic and antiresolution. It is not a call for revolution but an understanding that the loss of the subject imposes the loss of such structures.[9] The focus on the loss of selfhood posits the zombie as a disappointing and disheartening individual-collective for the living whose membership is assured in death where death means loss of self over loss of life. But for Lauro and Embry, there is also promise in the loss of self. This double movement in their zombie is not unlike the double movement of the Final Girl. This loss of self has become a significant preoccupation for survivalist cinema. The world may be overrun by undesirable forces, but it is those who allow themselves to be swept away with it, which deserve to lose their selfhood.

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[8] Ibid, pg. #71-76.
[9] S. J. Lauro and K. Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism," *Boundary* 2 35, no. 1 (Spring 2008): pg. #105-107.

Because of these specific fascinations, gender has in general never been a wide preoccupation for literature on the zombie film. When it has, it has emerged as a discussion of gendered power dynamics within the interactions of the protagonists. Barry Keith Grant takes this on with regard to *Night of the Living Dead* and the way the film's female protagonist, Barbra, is presented as an incapable victim in opposition to Mr. Cooper's, the film's leading agitator, misogynistic stubbornness. In his essay, "Taking Back the Night of the Living Dead: George Romero, Feminism and the Horror Film" he argues that such a characterization does little to help perceptions of women or men[10]. Gender as a topic has been ignored as of late most likely due to the resulting loss of selfhood when zombification takes place. Male-bodied zombies have not been shown to be any more aggressive and masculine then their female-bodied counterparts. By the time we get to today's survivalist cinema, however, the discussion of gender with regard to the zombie has become inadequate, considering the modern anxieties associated to white masculinity with which it engages.

In contrast, the discussion of gender in the slasher genre is all anyone can seem to talk about. This is not a surprising fascination as the most significant tropes in the genre are ambiguously gendered protagonists and psychosexual killers. However, the attention given to the topic of gender within the slasher has caused scholars to become blinded to the evolution of its utilization when it emerges in new ways such as it has in survivalist cinema. With its entry into the American cinematic canon, slashers fell prey to attempts to discredit their relevance as nothing more than sadistic works allowing men the opportunity to watch women tortured and slowly killed in ecstatic ways. Carol J. Clover upset this reading, however, in her seminal work,

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[10] Barry Keith Grant, "Taking Back the Night of the Living Dead: George Romero, Feminism and the Horror Film," in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), pg. #200.

Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in Modern Horror by positing that these films do not act as conduits for men to exclusively take part in the sadistic pleasures of horror but also provide the opportunity for men to indulge masochistically through the ambiguously gendered heroine and then enjoy the righteous revenge that comes from defeating the psychosexual killer.[11] The ambiguously gendered heroine thus acts as a lens for engaging with subject matter that while enjoyably unsettling would otherwise be too terrifying to confront for men and maintains the illusion of male emotional control. Until this point, spectators were assumed to identify with only like-gendered characters on screen. This did not explain, however, why slasher films proved overwhelmingly popular for male audiences when the protagonists of the films were women.[12] To be sure, the male audiences were identifying with the male-bodied killer for a portion of the film, helped by cinematic conventions such as point-of-view shots which made the spectator experience the stalking of the films nubile prey. Approximately halfway through the film, however, this identification switched to the female protagonist who would survive the killer.[13] This was achieved by positioning the ambiguously gendered heroine on a vacillating scale of gendered performance. She allowed male spectators to identify with her when she fought back but created a shield through her female body which protected an audience's sense of masculinity which would have been threatened had the protagonist been male. Witnessing a male protagonist exhibit abject terror would prove unsettling on cinematic and cultural levels, even if the proliferation and popularity of horror films would suggest that male spectators do desire and seek out to experience the abject terror themselves.

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[11] Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pg. #23-26
[12] Ibid pg. # 3-7
[13] Ibid pg. #27-31

This same guarding of masculinity has found its place within modern survivalist cinema. By positioning emasculated male protagonists in dystopic settings, the protagonists are relieved of expectations of social norms. Male protagonists in these films are shed of the gendered baggage that at the start of the film read as emasculating and throughout the film can reconstruct a masculine identity by engaging with acts of terror not in spite of such occurrences. The loss of institutions then paves way for queer behaviors that also supply means for recuperating masculinity. The addition of male protagonists to survivalist cinema has not been overlooked by scholars; however, they have failed to acknowledge the complicated role that gender now plays in linking the slasher tradition to the survivalist film.[14] Most often, scholars have viewed the male protagonist as evidence that Clover's theory has been overhauled by changing rules to the slasher genre. This type of misreading is exemplified by Kevin J. Wetmore in his book *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*. Wetmore begins well in addressing the emergence of male protagonists in the slasher. However, he ends his analysis too quickly, playing off the shifting narrative to a male protagonist as being America's need for male heroes that reflect the 1980s Reagan era "Hard Body" and disregarding the characterization of these male heroes as emasculated and in roles associated with female-bodied protagonists.[15] Wetmore's oversight is a perfect example of what survivalist cinema wishes to do. We recognize the male protagonist but do not register the benefits of his emasculation because white masculinity is reaffirmed by the end.

Despite their emasculated status, these male protagonists are able to engage in action that, while threatening, serves to reaffirm white masculinity. This is most often achieved by placing

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[14] See Briohny Doyle, *The Apocalypse Is Masculine – Masculinities in Crisis in Survivalist Film*, Murdoch University, National Academy of Screen and Sound, 2012, http://nass.murdoch.edu.au/issue8/pdf/IM8-masculine-feminine-article-02-doyle.pdf.
[15] Kevin J. Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2012), pg. #192-200

the men in situations where there is something dire at stake, more so than preservation of their individual life. In its familial form this involves children being threatened by the larger action of the film. Men may not be allowed to experience traditional masculine action in the vein of the 1980s action hero, but protecting one's offspring emerges as one of the most primal masculine performances available while simultaneously remaining a feminine trait. Emasculation then does not mean erasure of masculinity but necessitates that it must be maneuvered in a new way. Facing this threat that emasculates, at the same time that it threatens society, leaves the film unresolved but instills a sense of hope that masculinity, by virtue of reaffirming hegemonic systems, can reestablish order in an increasingly chaotic and confusing world.

The emergence of emasculated male protagonists in the new subgenre of survivalist cinema signals that, in the post-9/11 historical moment, white masculinity has been threatened in a way that feels palpable enough to necessitate the addition of cultural texts which seek to offer the chance for reclamation after indulging in the loss of masculinity; an indulgence that is, in fact, a large part of the films' appeal to a heterogeneous audience, even if it reroutes that audience's pleasure to more problematic ends. The male protagonist has thus emerged in this new genre as a way to engage with such perceived injuries such that it utilizes empathy for such failings at the start and sympathetic victory by film's end. While its modes have been acknowledged as they emerge in films the combined influence of zombie and slasher genres within survivalist cinema has been overlooked. Because society has moved to deny white masculinity of its privilege, with resulting palpable injury, the need arises to either take it back through renegotiation. The history of America, however, demonstrates that white masculinity is not an essentialist identity but one that shifts and evolves. It changed to fit the needs of the Second Industrial Revolution and transformed to respond to the move to a service-based

economy. The perception of a new emasculation is thus only that, a perception. That does not mean, however, that such an imagining does not carry with it significant power. As white masculinity has never lost its foothold on hegemonic power in America, it presents itself with the desire and ability to renegotiate. From the outset, I think these films lure us to believe that they wish to offer alternatives; as the collapse of society implies that it will be rebuilt most likely in a new way. However these new possibilities that exist, similar to the possibilities that exist in posthumanist theories of these films, are discarded by films end. I place particular emphasis on protecting children in survivalist films to demonstrate that, while the films offer sites of alternatives to heteronormative action, at their root, they act as agents for white male masculinity's maintenance. The family man of the familial survivalist film remains tied to the duties of the films previous social order. The repetition of alternatives in queer theory, in particular by scholars such as Lee Edelman in his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* emphasize those alternatives to hegemonic gender and sex, namely homosexual sex.[16] Within this structure the fear is routed onto the children as they represent the pure and untapped opportunity for the future. And while this is played upon in in many different ways in the horror genre, within the structure of survivalist cinema it implies the necessity for familial responsibility and the masculinity tied to such a task.

Performance of gender in these films is clearly a historical construct. There is no essentialist gender identity to fall back on because there never has been. Gender is performed and affirmed through such a performance. While Judith Butler instigated a shift away from this natural gender and sex connection through her studies of performative gender, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* survivalist cinema wants the viewer to disregard this.

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[16] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), pg. #1-6

For Butler, gender emerged not as a natural phenomenon but through repetition of acts and expectations from the moment of birth when either a pink or blue hat was placed on a baby's head.[17] By abiding by the repetitive nature of gendered expectations, gender identity is internalized at the same time that it serves to influence those around us. Subversion of this, however, such as is seen in survivalist cinema serves the same purpose. Like society writ large gender only has the power to coerce and intimidate so long as we adhere to it and accept its inevitability. By presenting emasculated male protagonists in opposition to an understood normative gendered order, the films reaffirm proper performance by acknowledging that the new mode of gendered heroics at present is different than what has been normative and by reestablishing white masculinity by the end of the film reinforces its normativity again. Alternatives are again disregarded in favor of something familiar though not at all genuine.

Survivalist cinema suffers from the same assumption as American society writ large that positions white masculinity as the only legitimate form of masculinity. I make the delineation between masculinity and white masculinity to highlight that, in these films, masculinity is privileged to middle-class, white American assumptions and expressions. It is not masculinity at large which feels threatened in the post-9/11 moment but white males who have had the privilege to remain ambivalent to their privilege. Injuries are most always presumed to be responsible to race and gender but rarely if ever class. While Hamilton Carroll's *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity* is interested in the double work of queerness as offering a reclamation I highlight he only looks at the ways white masculinity envelops other marginalized identities so as to remain constantly on the move.[18] When attention does become drawn towards

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[17] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pg. #151
[18] Hamilton Carroll, *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pg. # 7

an emerging white identity politic such as "white trash", "Irish," or "homosexual" white masculinity makes for a new leap. The difference with this construction however is that queer identities in survivalist films are never hidden from view. They emerge as the desirable alternatives and even though the films end in ways that try to redirect away from this queerness the films nevertheless highlight and privilege the queer. Survivalist cinema does, however, attempt to regain preeminence because it disavows that it was ever preeminent. Attending to the shifting narrative of masculinity that followed September 11th and the amplification of the hero as male in the resulting media, Carroll argues that cultural texts shifted in such a way to engender heroics as a white, male identity.[19] That this has emerged, too, in survivalist cinema as the desired form for audience identification within sites of unsettled social space signals to me that echoing American structures of privilege have continued well past the initial aftereffects of 9/11 and have too remained unseen. By applying these theories of gender to the phenomenon of survivalist cinema I seek to highlight the methods the films utilize to criticize masculinity's real and presumed injuries as well as highlight the hidden structures that protect and perpetuate white masculinity.

Chapter Two will look at the film *World War Z*, examining the ways that masculinity is recovered and hegemonic power is put back in place. Following a viral outbreak of what is at first believed to be rabies; zombies quickly decimate the world population and leave only small pockets of civilization. Brad Pitt emerges as a stay-at-home father (and former U. N. Investigator) who steps up to traverse the planet searching for a cause or a cure so as to allow his family to remain in safety upon a government ship in the Atlantic. This film presents the most

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[19] Hamilton Carroll, *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pg. # 10-23

tangible and recurrent strategies of reclaiming masculinity; i.e. emasculated father, children in danger, dystopic setting, etc. that reappear in similar narratives such as *The Happening* (Shyamalan, 2008), *The Road* (Hillcoat, 2009), and *Children of Men* (Cuarón, 2006). As such I take this to be the familial form of the genre's treatment of masculinity. Masculinity within the film is constructed within the context of family and children and as such proper performance is situated around ensuring for the survival of one's offspring. Neoliberal concerns in the film that challenge this are situated within the context of neoliberal fears of globalization. Within these films, emasculation leads to queerness in a way that permits him to survive. While the structure of the film would suggest that masculinity can be recovered like a lost article, it also leaves the door open for a sequel, as many survivalist films do, suggesting that, like white masculinity writ large, the reclamation of power is something that must be constantly fought for. Implicitly this signals to me that, as opposed to shoring up masculinity completely, the film's continuation of this model is a sign that white masculinity wishes to remain invisibly dominant by continuing cycles of injury and reclamation through cultural texts such as these. While they map alternatives to white hegemonic structures, they disregard such options in favor of returning to prevailing modes of power.

Chapter Three will look at the film *The Hunger Games.* Presenting a dystopic country known as Panem in place of where America once stood, *The Hunger Games* follows the yearly reenactment of a rebellion through sacrificial tribute. Following two ambiguously gendered protagonists unlucky enough to take part in the 74th annual version of this tribute, the film presents a slasher-structured narrative that, at the heart, wrestles over the loss of selfhood to a collective that arises from allowing the masses to persuade individuals to commit heinous acts. Emphasizing the way that gender, and specifically masculinity, is performed for the audience on

screen, I seek to address gender's existence as performativity over essentialist identity through the film's commodification of gender by the internal colonial structure of Panem. Here plot structure plays as important a role in necessitating slasher and zombie inclusion in the narrative as social necessity as proper gender performance can literally save one's life and for a successful Hunger Games the tributes must relinquish their selfhood for homage and the entertainment of the nation. I argue that the modes through which Panem is able to control the districts of the nation mirror modes which have been existed in America which privilege white, middle-class populations. This film is a move from the familial structure to one that privileges masculinity through heterosexual pairings. Such systemic structures which control social capital, in this case through gender, serve to perpetuate the gendered display integral to the plot of the film and are ignored in critical engagement while the voyeuristic nature of the Hunger Games as Reality TV should make such structures more visible. I believe that this film is important for highlighting the variance of modes through which these films respond to masculinity because it explicitly deconstructs the structure of gender and society at the same time that it reaffirms our desire to engage with the topic through its seriality. Audiences wish to revisit these characters in the same way they wish to revisit the male protagonist but this can only be achieved if society is stabilized at the end in order to be rattled in the sequel.

Chapter Four will look at the film *This is the End* and examine the ways that masculinity and an overt homosexual/homosocial aesthetic interact in the survivalist model. At a Hollywood house party hosted by James Franco, several actors from the Judd Apatow canon of films find themselves fighting for survival during the rapture of the Biblical apocalypse. *This is the End* is constructed in a way that reflects the phenomenon of homosocial bonding important to new emerging adulthood in America. As life for young twentysomethings in America changes so,

too, does desires and expectations. I feel this film is important then as an alternative to the other modes of survivalist film I discuss because the changing nature of young adult's relationships to maturity, and with that expectation of proper gendered response, creates a site for an articulation of masculinity which relies on notions of communal affection through the homosexual implications of the homosocial bonding within the film over the more time tested white middle-class family relationship. Because masculinity means different things to these characters than is typical of most American men the overt homosexual reading of the film addresses new areas of masculine performance with the freedom to subvert for comedy's sake. Proper masculine performance is constructed here in opposition to perceived negative masculine performance. That these men are characterizations of real-life actors allows the audiences to experience queer behavior with the understanding that it is all for fun and they will return to a more natural performance, or at least proper for the audiences understanding of the actors, when the camera stops rolling.

I will again assert that survivalist cinema creates a site where slasher and zombie genres combine so as to respond to the perceived injury to white masculinity following September 11th, 2001. I will highlight that the meeting of these genres creates many opportunities to address this threat of hegemonic power and that through the close readings of *World War Z*, *The Hunger Games*, and *This is the End* these texts have become sites of negotiation for a historical moment that has created shifting narratives of masculinity. I will argue that my notion of survivalist cinema upsets previously held views of gendered heroics and will highlight that literature has been ignorant that slasher and zombie have married in an attempt to recover from the same social ills that they have been unable to quench on their own. Recognition of the marriage between slasher and zombie subgenres in reconciling masculinity will open up the possibility for

unraveling other seemingly divergent cinematic pairings which remain invisible as they too seek

to respond to the cultural and sociopolitical anxieties of the American historical moment. I will

then postulate that the sequel within this genre signals not only the need for reclamation within

the films but that audiences do not want a shored up film. Though they offer unimpressive

conclusions they present queerness in a way that is exciting and enjoyable for audiences.

Chapter Two: My Father, the Hero - *World War Z* and Familial Hegemony

Matt Zoller Seitz, writing for Roger Ebert, articulated a common criticism of *World War Z,* when he expressed, "*World War Z* plays as if somebody watched the similar *28 Days Later* and thought, 'That was a good movie, but it would be even better if it cost $200 million, there were millions of zombies, and the hero were perfect and played by Brad Pitt.'"[20] This chapter looks at the emergence of survivalist cinema and its representations of masculinity through the lens of male heroes and their familial relationships, examining *World War Z* as a text that exemplifies this archetypal model of survivalist cinema. I argue that the marriage of zombie and slasher genres within the film allows the male protagonist to stand in for American anxieties tied to the crisis of masculinity in a way different than has been previously understood. Such anxieties come from the perceived instability of hegemonic systems and the imminence of their collapse. Within this film the relations between a male hero and his family are positioned as the extent of masculinity. Caring for ones offspring in particular results in survival as well as prestige within the film. This distinctive iteration of the survivalist film figures not just a queer performance of masculinity, but also a nostalgic apocalyptic wish through catastrophe and judgment that society will be renewed through a cleansing of those deemed undesirable.

A retired U. N. Investigator, Gerry Lane (Brad Pitt), is commandeered by his former employer to assist in the search for a source and cure of the global zombie pandemic in exchange

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[20] Matt Zoller Seitz, "World War Z," rogerebert.com, June 21, 2013, http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/world-war-z-2013.

for the safety of his family aboard an aircraft carrier in the middle of the Atlantic. Despite the

ostensible plot of familial empowerment through Pitt's drive to perform his fatherly duties,

World War Z primarily concerns itself with the recuperation of white patriarchy, a recuperation

that the film casts within the affective structure of a zombie drama. It achieves this

reenfranchisement of white patriarchal authority through its transformation of Pitt's character

from emasculated house-husband into emergent action hero. This film presents the most tangible

and recurrent strategies of reclaiming masculinity that reappear in similar narratives such as

Children of Men (Cuarón, 2006), *The Happening* (Shyamalan, 2008), and *The Road* (Hillcoat,

2009). As such, I take this to be the familial form of the genre's treatment of masculinity. While

the structure of the film would suggest that masculinity can be recovered like a lost article, it also

leaves the door open for a sequel, as many survivalist films do, suggesting masculinity is a

construct for which one must constantly fight. Implicitly, this signals to me that, as opposed to

shoring up masculinity completely, the films' continuation of this model is a sign that white

masculinity wishes to remain invisibly dominant by continuing cycles of injury and reclamation

through cultural texts such as these. This is not to say that anxieties felt on a social and cultural

level are not real but that the instigation of such are due largely in part to the changes in familial

and labor structures seen since the 1970s in America, a cycle of change which, while not quick,

is an aggressive and continuous process. The neoliberal source of crisis as constructed within

World War Z is thus indebted to fears of globalization at the same time that the individual is seen

as being more capable and warranted of success without governmental assistance.[21]

 The model of masculinity as it pertains to the 21st century is inherently complicated as it

takes into account cultural and social opportunities afforded by factors such as race, gender,

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[21] See Steven Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2010).

socioeconomic class, education, and location. What is considered hegemonically masculine for a southern farmworker will be vastly different than what is considered desirable for a middle-aged college professor at Yale. However, within the context of the films positionality and within a hegemonically understood social construct of the family, the familial structure of a father's responsibility to one's wife and child present the structure of masculine discourse within the familial model of survivalist cinema.

Integral, then, to the familial model of survivalist cinema is the emasculation of our protagonist father figures. The emasculation event always occurs off-screen prior to the film's start and is often tied to the wife's influence. For Gerry, we learn that he has retired from a field in which he has excelled to take on the role of house-husband. While he claims to find joy in his new life, knowing glances towards his wife, Karin (Mirelle Enos), would suggest that his decision was not solely his own. However altruistic his reasons for returning home, he clearly has left a career that caused him great pleasure. This antagonistic relationship to wives/mothers reappears throughout films in the survivalist canon, most often where wives have left their husbands or have cheated, emotionally or physically, on them.[22] This emasculating event serves to queer the protagonist at the same time it seeks to identify the weakness and fallibility of the mother figure in these films.

The crux of divergence between the relationship of husband and wife, however, relies on the addition of a child to the survivalist model. Children are usually small or often have special needs and rely on protection from the father. At best, mothers do not possess the skills to protect their children and, at worst, have abandoned their children altogether. This is articulated through

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[22] A deleted storyline of *World War Z* had Karin cheating on Gerry with his appointed helicopter pilot (Matthew Fox). Christopher Rosen, "Matthew Fox In 'World War Z': What Happened To The 'Lost' Actor's Role," Huffington Post, June 24, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/24/matthew-fox-world-war-z_n_3490000.html.

Karin who, while meaning well in procuring food for the family, is overtaken by looters at the grocery store. Fathers alone possess a key skill or strategy for survival of the child in custody. Gerry, for example, is able to ascertain that the time from transmission of virus to transformation takes approximately twelve seconds because the stopped to pick up his daughters bear, which counts, which was dropped in the chaos of Philadelphia's overrunning. And while this may seem a foolish waste of time given the circumstances it highlights that queerness through alternative modes of acting, especially when in the child's best interest produce results that lead to survival. The child always survives to the end because of the father, while mothers are constructed as liabilities to their children and themselves.

Fathers in survivalist films are nuanced, emerging in one of two roles: the protagonist Savior-Father and secondary foil, the Failed-Father. The Savior-Father follows the most important trope of survivalist cinema in that he provides for the children at all costs. This does not mean that Failed-Fathers are "bad" fathers but that they have diverged from providing for their children as their primary concern. This is exemplified in *World War Z,* when disregarding Pitt's advice in leaving the apartment building for his child's safety, an unnamed Hispanic father (Ernesto Cantu) is transformed into a zombie. It is only by following this prime directive of protecting the child that a parent may survive. It should not be discarded then that following the prime directive in this case meant listening to a white man's advice.

It is important then to note that, overall, these protagonists are constructed as white, heterosexual, and middle-class. This is central for the audience, as it signals to them that the crisis and concerns of the protagonists are constructed to reflect the concerns of a hegemonic America. I believe it is important to cast these male protagonists as such because the myth of

masculinity in crisis relies on a belief that, until recently, masculinity has remained an intact, historically sound construct.[23] As queer and non-white individuals have traditionally faced discrimination and societal struggles, the effect for the audience would not appear out of the ordinary nor would it read as urgent a reflection of the perceived current state of masculinity. Masculine-typed actors such as Daniel Craig or Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson would necessitate a very specific type of performance. On the other hand actors such as Pitt and Mark Wahlberg come with queer baggage when one looks at the queer intertextuality of films such as Fight Club (Fincher, 1999) or of Wahlberg's underwear modeling career. I argue they get cast not just for the sadistic pleasure of seeing them distressed, but also to serve as a stand-in for an unsettled masculine ideal. While they may not have the benefits of being a "man amongst men" as Arnold Schwarzenegger could claim they nonetheless retain a level of masculine desire for being desirable to women. [24] The audience can thus play out their anxieties and fantasies on Pitt in ways similar to Clover's Final Girl.

Survivalist films of the 21st century are nuanced away from the unhappy protagonists of the 1990's. While our hero protagonists are not in places they would wish to be their responsibilities as fathers in an apocalyptic setting allow them prestige in ways that earlier models of emasculated men did not enjoy. In "The Apocalypse is Masculine – Masculinities in Crisis in Survivalist Film," Briohny Doyle sets out to articulate the rising tide of survivalist films of the 1990s and early 2000s by setting up a typology of two forms of male protagonists: the

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[23] See Hamilton Carroll's *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) and Michael S. Kimmel's *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) for a more detailed description of the historical construction and politics of masculinity within the American discourse.
[24] See Michael S. Kimmel, Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men (New York: Harper, 2008).

Yuppy in Crisis and the Tough Guy Outsider.[25] The Yuppy in Crisis is commonly presented as a symbol of male repression. He is representative of the stifling nature of the service-based economy and suffers from the repressive nature of the drive towards middle-class values that are personally unfulfilling and professionally unattainable. Hidden beneath this feminized and inauthentic self however lies a liberated and essentially masculine self, the Tough Guy Outsider, which is repressed in the increasingly metrosexual environment of America. It is the tough, masculine, authentic self, which apocalyptic nostalgia expects will be revealed by the survivor in the face of catastrophe. In *World War Z*, the film exploits the romanticized war and catastrophe as well as the seductive tenets of survivalism by representing internal battle between men and their perceived slights to their masculinity by projecting their trauma onto the urban environment that caused them the distress.[26]Within the film sites of mundane family life are found to be implicated within the trauma of a zombie outbreak. We are introduced to the invasion during gridlock while carpooling and the marketplace, as exhibited by the grocery store, proves to be a dangerous place as opposed to one that provides resources.

The inherent complication with this construction of protagonists when survivalist cinema emerges, however, is that the men have been queered by their emasculation in such a way that their queered nature allows them to survive the apocalypse. This fact, however, is not acknowledged within scholarship of these films. Nor is it acknowledged that the events of the film that strip society map alternatives to gendered performance that are discarded. The film argues that Pitt as a character is strong, resourceful, and caring. However the film still reroutes us to understand that the world would be better if he were the one outside of the home while his

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[25] Briohny Doyle, *The Apocalypse Is Masculine – Masculinities in Crisis in Survivalist Film*, Murdoch University, National Academy of Screen and Sound, 2012, pg.# 2-7, http://nass.murdoch.edu.au/issue8/pdf/IM8-masculine-feminine-article-02-doyle.pdf.
[26] Ibid, pg.# 2-7

wife watches the children, even as shown throughout the film we see that Pitt is more capable a caretaker.

The arrested social systems and recurring theme of self vs. collective in the zombie tradition allow the performance of reclamation to take place for both the audience and the protagonists within the familial survivalist film. As these films present society and the changes to it as culprits to the emasculation of men at this historical moment it makes sense that these protagonists would excel in returning to a state where there is no governmental assistance. Neoliberal policies argue that governments inherently fail those who work the hardest so by taking away the systems themselves the protagonists are able to prove themselves.[27] Whether barren or surrounded by predators, nature acts in these films as a space for reclamation of masculinity where it provides both a place to play out primal masculine practices of protecting one's young as it acts as a mirror to the masculine crisis through its vulnerability in the present moment.

Zombies historically highlight the illusory construction of the "Other" through their bodily and psychological ambiguity.[28] By this I mean zombies work to upset the way we perceive boundaries. Very quickly the people we know and love cease to be themselves and this only makes it all the more frightening that we begin to lose faith in our own ability to maintain selfhood. Likewise, the fact that a body decomposes yet can still walk around is upsetting to an understanding of nature and its limits. Zombies are, in a sense, limitless in their ability to push past boundaries. There can be no "Other" when the veil between self and not-self is thin and

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[27] Deborah Tudor, "Selling Nostalgia: Mad Men, Postmodernism and Neoliberalism," Society 49, no. 9 (July 2012): pg. #333.
[28] Jeff May, "Zombie Geographies and the Undead City," *Social & Cultural Geography* 11, no. 3 (March 16, 2010): pg. # 285-286, doi:10.1080/14649361003637166.

getting thinner.[29] What the zombie tradition adds to the survivalist model is the freedom that comes from this erasure of physical, social, and cultural boundaries. Survivalist films highlight the social construction of space through their introduction of the urban center within the zombie narrative in the same way they highlight the artificial construction of self. In *Night of the Living Dead,* the farmhouse acts as an idyllic, neutral space in which the group meets to attempt to fend off the zombie horde. For *World War Z* and other narratives that make use of the urban city, the ambiguity of the zombie is transferred into the physical surroundings of the previously marked urban space.[30] This is seen when Pitt attempts to move his family through the apartment building and the space ceases to be a series of halls and staircases but acts as a funneling system for zombies to hear and attack them. Apocalyptic narratives, however, rely on this transitional nature of a dystopic moment. A lineal timeline is implied through an apocalypse that there was a time before the event and there will be a time following the event. The potential for change exists in this intermediate state between the rigidly categorized pre-zombie socio-spatiality and the new "normal" that follows.[31] Cities evolve past their purposes during this time into an impartial space devoid of meaning. Hospitals lose their connotation as places of healing when the staff and all those who would recognize its purpose have been zombified.[32] Similarly, as we shall see in the slasher tradition, spaces begin to take on more nefarious roles for the audience where safe places are transformed into cages and traps. What gets reflected in the physical space however remains true for the cultural.

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[29] Meghan. Sutherland, "Rigor / Mortis: The Industrial Life of Style in American Zombie Cinema," Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media 48, no. 1 (2007): pg. #64-70, doi:10.1353/frm.2007.0008.
[30] Jeff May, "Zombie Geographies and the Undead City," *Social & Cultural Geography* 11, no. 3 (March 16, 2010): pg. # 285-286, doi:10.1080/14649361003637166.
[31] Ibid, pg.# 290-292
[32] Ibid, pg.# 289-292

When society breaks down so, too, do the expectations of gender-appropriate behavior. Gendered performance means only so much to a person as it can get them through this transitional state and in the case of the survivalist film can get their child to live to the end. This erasure of hegemonic meaning allows for otherness and non-normative actions to become valued. A queered protagonist is not peculiar when survival is crucial and the queering provides them the skills in which to survive. Had Pitt not been a devoted stay-at-home father he might not have the skills to calm his daughter down during her asthma attack. This potential for change that exists within the apocalyptic moment would signal that ideological constructions of hegemony would not need to be rebuilt on the latter end of the apocalyptic timeline. Aboard the ship, Pitt's family stays it is run in such a way that every person needs to pull their own weight. People are divided based on skills, not identities. In fact, hypermasculine performance within these films is nearly always associated with villains or impending death. It makes sense then why the zombies are constructed as aggressive and Pitt is cautious and slow moving. Queering of men proves to be their salvation from destruction yet these films continue to privilege expressions of masculinity that caused the deaths of so many. While audiences respond to these films as they ostensibly map a reclamation they in the end highlight that divergence is more helpful and interesting an option. However as these films reproduce over and over again we are led back to the hegemonic systems at films start, ignoring the irreparable changes that have taken place within the narrative.

Central to the breakdown of the social within these films are the erasure of certain distinctions, the most obvious being the distinction between "us" versus "them" or more specifically to the zombie narrative "self" versus "collective." Zombie films writ large highlight the threat of opposition between the individual and the collective. What reads as terrifying to the

audience is that individuals do not believe that people could be capable of acts such as murder and cannibalism. Yet, repeatedly, we are faced with the disintegration of a group of individuals to an individual against a group. While the source novel, Max Brooks' *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006), privileged the many overlapping national identities and narratives which fought and preserved humanity through the aforementioned zombie apocalypse the film instead privileges American hegemony through its singular narrative.[33] This strategy attempts to speak to the transformations of labor and opportunity in America espoused by neoliberalism and the resulting injury to white men as a result of larger international influences, incriminating the global "Other" for making founded anxieties of multiculturalism and neoliberalism.[34] Presumably the film would wish to condemn certain aspects of geopolitical and postcolonial baggage as critiques of socio-political posturing are read through the apocalyptic narrative of *World War Z*. Pitt is mobilized through Korea, the Middle East, and finally into Great Britain to battle a problem that seemingly started with China. This is not to be taken lightly. To be sure, certain traditional markers of international political power are found to be culprits in the destruction of nations. Large land masses and high population density relative to urban development, which read previously as indicators for progress and authority, now act as liabilities in stemming the spread of the zombie pandemic.[35] However, the plot's trajectory in moving Pitt from nation state to nation state does more to implicate the "Other" over the financial and political systems themselves.

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[33] Brooks, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (New York: Crown, 2006).

[34] Hamilton Carroll, Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pg. #4-40.

[35] Robert A. Saunders, "Undead Spaces: Fear, Globalisation, and the Popular Geopolitics of Zombiism," *Geopolitics* 17, no. 1 (January 5, 2012): pg. #95-97, doi:10.1080/14650045.2010.523097.

Surprisingly, given the emphasis of importance on the family unit in the familial model, the zombie as familiar is rarely harkened in the survivalist film. A familiar zombie presents as a formerly "living" character with whom the audience has become acquainted and who stands in opposition to the anonymous, faceless horde.[36] One of the best examples of a familiar zombie is Johnny from *Night of the Living Dead*. Johnny is left by his sister Barbra early in the film to return at the climax, apparently killed by his blow to the head in the cemetery, now a member of the mass collective attempting to gain entry into the farmhouse. While Karen Cooper, the young daughter who reanimates and murders her parents, serves the same role as familiar zombie in the narrative, we are not given access to Karen as character. Johnny, however, is allowed screen time to develop a recognizable personality and relationship to his sister. The erasure of Johnny and the horror felt by his sister exemplify the sense of loss in a traditional zombie film and disrupt the anonymity of zombification. The familiar zombie however does not figure in the survivalist film. This is not to say that it could not be possible. In fact it could help to solidify the familial antagonism that much more to have witnessed the unnamed Hispanic father turn on his son and attempt to bite him. While the audience is given insight to what becomes of characters with whom we have become acquainted, those who succumb to zombification are largely those who are never considered "us." In these films there is no lamenting about extended family or friends. From the start, we are given access to a family in opposition to the world and it is the world that fails, not the central familial unit of parent and child.

Survivalist cinema borrows heavily from the zombie tradition so as to speak to the transformations and alienations to white masculinity felt palpable in America today. Similarly,

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[36] Jeff May, "Zombie Geographies and the Undead City," *Social & Cultural Geography* 11, no. 3 (March 16, 2010): pg.# 289, doi:10.1080/14649361003637166

slasher tropes play heavily in the characterization of the film's protagonists so as to untether expectations of gendered heroics from these films in ways that nonetheless allow hegemonic masculinity to be shored up by film's end. The ambiguously gendered heroes and the emphasis of the local, recurring threat in the slasher film combine with these zombie genre influences to allow for the audience to experience a recuperation of masculinity hidden within the universality of apocalyptic fantasy.

Through an exposition-heavy background of Gerry's character midway through *World War Z* we learn what we have already surmised throughout the film. Gerry is a man who possesses both the skills and the heart. His career sidelined three years prior to the events of the film, Gerry chose to retire over conflicts with his superiors. However, unlike what might have been expected, he did not betray the trust of his work through the timeworn benefits of lucrative offers for books or speaking engagements. He is a person of integrity, and that is what makes him strange. This is not to say that the clichéd action hero is not a person of integrity or honor. However the importance of such attributes is usually subverted for a more pressing matter at hand. The film spends too much time, however, signifying that Pitt is not like his peers both overtly and covertly to be ignored. He is a new queer hero and we should be like him.

Carol J. Clover's articulation of the "Final Girl" in her seminal work, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in Modern Horror* posits an ambiguously gendered heroine thus acts as a lens for engaging with subject matter that would otherwise be too terrifying to confront for men while maintaining the illusion of male emotional control. The cliché of the "Final Girl" has become so engrained within the genre that even in the face of an increasingly confusing self-reflexive narrative the audience expects the "Final Girl" to be characterized in a certain way. She

must be queer to her peers, which, through a variety of means, highlights her difference from the group.[37] She must be observant, nurturing, resourceful, and be constructed in a way that she reflects the articulation of the antagonist. Even as survivalist cinema increasingly relies on the tropes of the slasher, it is in the casting of the protagonist that shields the effects of such an inclusion.[38] Gerry passes as a normative action hero because he is Pitt. He also suffers less than the "Final Girl" because he is Pitt. The "Final Girl" vacillates between kicking ass and being a victim; her role as a lens necessitating a more complicated relationship between masochism and sadism. Pitt serves, however, a larger purpose of recouping masculinity by the films' ends. The sadistic and masochistic pleasure is still there, but it is largely engaged with by being transferred onto the apocalypse which cleanses earth of the sin of upsetting hegemony. Gerry's queering does more to identify him with the audience then it does to identify him with the antagonist. He is not something the audience needs to hide behind; he is the audience.

Segan (Daniella Kertesz), an Israeli soldier whom Gerry meets and rescues during the assault on Jerusalem presents as a typical "Final Girl" iteration seen many times before in the action/slasher genre. After suffering a zombie bite, Gerry reflexively slices off her hand in a bid to save her from contraction of the zombie scourge. While she lives and flourishes as a hero alongside Gerry, even with her infirmity, her inclusion serves to highlight that within survivalist cinema queer individuals are to be punished when they are not the white protagonist. Clover's

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[37] While many have viewed this difference through the equation "sex=death" to characterize survival within the slasher it is however in the abnormal behavior of the final girl which allows her to live on. Sex between teenagers is considered normative as is experimentation with drugs. While it is not necessarily desirable within society it is understandable. The Final Girls reluctance to partake queers her in the same way that the "killer" is queer to normative behavior and allows her to survive to the end. It is not that sex kills but that because sex is normative it kills. See Carol J. Clover, Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[38] While male protagonists have increasingly been featured in slasher films as "Final Boys" they have been added to subvert the expectations of the audience in accordance with the slashers emphasis on "pulling the rug out from under the audience". In survivalist cinema however the protagonist serves the same purpose as a "Final Girl" but is relieved from some of the baggage that comes from a female-bodied hero.

"Final Girl" is queer often queer because of pathology, often tied to a shared past with the killer.[39] The male protagonist in survivalist films however is queer due to circumstance. We are led to believe that it was the pre-film queering event which changed the protagonist; regardless of the many instances that show that the queer characteristics of Pitt are a more natural and fulfilling manifestation of their personality. While the film might demonize Pitt's retirement and privilege him returning as an investigator, his role as nurturer to his family may be a task for which he is at least equally qualified. While his daughter criticizes his role as househusband as amounting to little more than making pancakes for his family, Gerry replies that it may be true, "but I'm really good at it."

Slasher tropes such as inept experts (scientists) and police (military) do double duty to privilege the skills of the survivalist protagonist in vein of the slasher tradition as they seek to serve the zombie emphasis of Us vs. Them. Clearly there have been people who have messed up the system and created a world where white men have been subjugated, and zombies are allowed to run afoul. These experts, be they political or academic, take the blame for the current anxieties tied to the crisis of masculinity. Not surprisingly, then, in these films the experts are often cast as racial minorities or foreign to reflect the blame that is felt at this historical moment. Though these experts are the ones who leave behind clues for the protagonist to pick up on they are marked as being complicit in the unsettling of cultural hegemony in their characterization and are dispatched accordingly. Whether it is the Ethnic Harvard Virologist Dr. Andrew Fassbach (Elyes Gabel) who plants the seed in Pitt's mind that the zombie plague will reveal its own weakness or the hippie, nursery owner (Frank Collison) in *The Happening* who postulates that the plants may

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[39] Carol J. Clover, Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pg. #21-65.

be responding in a means of self-defense, these experts are made to be inept through early death, often by not heading their own advice. The protagonist is thus luckier to have witnessed these theories then skilled to have come up with them on their own. However the observant nature of the "Final Girl" leaks into the survivalist hero, allowing them to glean needed information from the populations who would be identified as dangerous to white masculinity. The final act of *World War Z,* set within the WHO research facility, relies on the same cinematic tactics of the slasher genre; strategies which have made themselves well at home within the model of survivalist cinema and reflect the collapse of perceived global boundaries.[40] While the hordes of zombies are an impressive sight, it is the danger of a close and local threat that makes the scene tense. From the opening zombie scene to the film's end, we encounter scenes that privilege less and less zombies until Pitt comes face to face with only one, and then we are left with Pitt.

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[40] These tropes are not new to survivalist cinema nor to proto-survivalist cinema such as *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993). *Jurassic Park* follows the conventions of the survivalist film up to the point of a queer protagonist. While Dr. Grant (Sam Neill) plays a father figure to Lex (Ariana Richards) and Tim (Joseph Mazzello) he fulfills more of the role of the late-1980's early-1990's father figure as seen in films such as *Kindergarten Cop* (Reitman, 1990) where a gruff everyman is coaxed into fatherhood and is all the better for the experience. See Susan Jeffords' Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era.

Chapter 3: The Girl on Fire and The Boy who Baked: Reconsolidation of Normative

Gender Relations in *The Hunger Games*

If American audiences have grown keen on recognizing an emasculated hero who can save the world from alien invasion or singlehandedly take down a zombie apocalypse, *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012) emerges as an apparent wrench in such a privileged male position in survivalist cinema. Released in March 2012 and earning $691,247,768 worldwide, the emergence of a new young-adult phenomenon seemed cemented with the introduction of Katniss Everdeen as survivalist cinema's premier "Final Girl."[41] Offering the audience a wide range of themes to be dissected, from liberal concerns about social welfare to libertarian fears of authoritarian government, *The Hunger Games*'s more lasting preoccupation comes about through its construction of a young female protagonist with the skill and determination to bring down an oppressive system, or so the film wishes for us to believe.[42] She is neither passive nor weak and acts selflessly for her family during a righteous revolution. She is the best of an action hero, a western hero, teen idol, and romantic heroine.[43] This heroine, however, is not as revolutionary a character as the rebellion would want the audience to believe. In this chapter, I argue that while ostensibly providing the opportunity for social criticism *The Hunger Games* engages its viewers by reenacting the propaganda and social control it wishes for the audience to disdain. While it presents a strong and capable heroine for the audience in Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence),

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[41] "The Hunger Games," Boxofficemojo, accessed Spring 2014, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=hungergames.htm

[42] Vera Woloshyn, Nancy Taber, and Laura Lane, "Discourses of Masculinity and Femininity in The Hunger Games: "Scarred," "Bloody," and "Stunning"" International Journal of Social Science Studies 1, no. 1 (2012): pg. #150-158.

[43] Ibib, pg. #150-158.

her success only comes through a negotiation of audience expectations of feminized performance that subtly condemns her queerness and pressures her into heteronormative roles. All the while Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson), Lawrence's love interest in the film, is allowed to remain largely unchanged through the narrative in ways that privilege his convictions to the audience despite his marginalized masculinity. Such maneuvers allow the film, the first in a quadrilogy, the benefit of critiquing corrupt social systems without implicating itself within their structures or offering an alternative that would steer audiences away from partaking in the abject display of death for entertainment.

Set within a dystopian North America in the indeterminate future, *The Hunger Games* presents Panem, a futuristic construction of what used to be the United States. Divided between 12 resource-heavy districts and governed by a wealthy Capitol located within the Rocky Mountains, Panem is an internal colonial system built upon a structure of shame and repentant homage to the Capitol. As a punishment for a past rebellion in which one district, 13, was destroyed and so as to reinforce the power of the Capitol, a boy and girl between the ages of 12 and 18 are selected at random from each district to participate in a nationally televised pageant during which they fight to the death until a lone victor remains; this yearly event being known as the Hunger Games. This victor is then returned to his or her home district and is afforded a life of relative affluence in comparison to the circumstances that are most common for citizens of the districts: poverty, starvation, homelessness. The survivor then becomes a mentor to future tributes and a symbol for future oppression as an emblem of the Capitol's mercy. The film takes place during the 74th annual version of the games and follows tributes from District 12, Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark. Katniss emerges as the favored protagonist within the film and is characterized within the games as a martyred hero, having volunteered to compete in her young

sister's place. The games become complicated when Peeta, in a strategy devised to elicit support

for himself and Katniss, professes his unrequited love for her to the television audience. This

endears both to the citizens of the Capitol and forces the government, led by autocrat President

Snow, to renegotiate the structure of the games so as to maintain support for the volatile structure

it validates. Katniss thus becomes embroiled in a stirring revolution as an unlikely and unwilling

symbol of rebellion.

For the socioeconomic moment, *The Hunger Games* feels palpable to current moods of

failure and futility. Within the narrative of American success tied to neoliberal individuality the

idea persists that social mobility exists and it can be achieved by determination and skill.[44]

However in the absence of safety nets and belief in a communal welfare such opportunities have

been evaporating due to the increase of neoliberal business practices which negate the ideal of

individuality espoused by its proponents.[45] The American Dream has presumably failed and en

mass white men in particular seek to blame the "Other" for their failures. Such anger felt from

the recent 2008 economic crisis is not necessarily unfounded. About 80 percent of all jobs lost

since November 2008 were jobs held by men; so prevalent that some economists began calling

this gender skewered phenomenon a "he-cession."[46] Yet the blame has been rerouted towards

minority populations as opposed to implicating American institutions, which, in becoming more

visible, these minorities take on the blame for lost opportunity. Rather than question the rules of

the American Dream that men have been told will result in rewards comparable to effort, they

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[44] Deborah Tudor, "Selling Nostalgia: Mad Men, Postmodernism and Neoliberalism," Society 49, no. 9 (July 2012): pg. #333.
[45] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pg. #20-46.
[46] Michael S. Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2013), pg. #10-25.

instead try to eliminate the competition.[47] If a woman, or an immigrant, or a tribute from District 4 stands in one's way to the American Dream, then why not attack? In a society where there is no such outlet for frustration of lost opportunity, survivalist cinema offers the chance to return to a primal state where the best man does win.

Issues of globalism within this political structure are unclear in *The Hunger Games* because we are not treated to evidence that Panem exists within an international community. If globalization has changed economic system that would privilege white men, then Panem fills in for a microcosm for America made wrong. The specific reasons for internal colonial systems emerging in Panem are unclear, though that ambiguity serves to complicate the relationship of the nation to its people. Subjugation is presented as a basic, integral feature and not a side effect of its systems. Isolation between districts both prohibits communication at the same time that it others even the closest geographic neighbors. When the only time you have contact between districts is when they are attempting to kill one of your own, it does less to establish friendships of mutual respect. Regardless, within Panem, the struggles appear to be largely men's troubles. Within district 12, for instance, it is men who are the workers and women who stay at home. Likewise, footage of rioting in District 11 shows men venting their frustrations over the Games rather than privileging the families and community writ large who have lost their children. The film does not discount the experience of women necessarily but makes sure to highlight that men have it bad in this system.

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[47] Ibid, pg. #21-50.

The Hunger Games works through the phenomenon of capital so as to coerce the populace into accepting a hegemonic system of advantage.[48] Three forms of capital seem integral for not only life, but also success within that existence: Economic, Social, and Cultural. As such they highlight the thread of social mobility that the film privileges. Economic capital represents all forms of economic resources such as real estate, wealth, and means of production that one might use to exert power or influence. Social capital represents relationships which might be utilized to navigate the larger system, effectively "who you know." Cultural capital represents all of the intangible knowledge and skills which may be drawn upon to maneuver the system. For example, standardized tests in America are written in such a way that they utilize cultural topics such as lacrosse or crew which might be better known by white students or students in the eastern United States but not by those who have not had access to such cultural practices.

I argue though that this film utilizes a fourth form of capital as a companion to the cultural capital of Panem, that of survival capital. In Panem, gender has been transformed into a commodity in such a way that it is held in monopoly by the Capitol as a form of hyper-performance. Within the Capitol fashion and consumerism have become the only real exchange of personality. On the extreme, we see that gender expression within the districts is at a minimum. In fact, the clearest delineation of gender and sex by the districts appears associated with the reaping of tributes, when once a year, the boys and girls must dress in "gender appropriate" attire, inappropriate for their district occupations, and are sent off to fight. Gender expression becomes something to be feared and accounts for much of the repulsion by the

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[48] See Mary Pharr and Leisa A. Clark, *Of Bread, Blood, and the Hunger Games: Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, Publishers, 2012).

tributes to the capitol citizens they do encounter.[49] Katniss and Peeta are rich in this survival

capital, however, as correct utilization of such is marked by a vacillation of masculine and

feminine performance. Whereas hypermasculine performance would appear to be a desired trait

in the realm of fighting to the death, it ignores the desires of the Capitol citizens who watch these

games and bet on their favorites to win. The hyper-performance of gender within Panem is one

of control and consumption simultaneously. The viewer desires love as much as they desire hate

and this interplay between survival and performance can only be achieved by those that walk a

tightrope of the two. Because of this, the last characters alive are ones who are rich in survival

capital. That these characters are largely made up of minorities can mislead the viewer to think

that such an inclusion is affirming, whereas I would argue survivalist cinema only privileges

minority populations in the short term so as to serve a larger patriarchal affirming purpose.

What separates *The Hunger Games* from the familial survivalist model is this privileging

of minority characters. While *World War Z* would highlight the difference between Brad Pitt and

those who are dissimilar from him to privilege his skills for redemption to the audience, *The

Hunger Games* does more to showcase how much Katniss and Peeta are minorities compared to

the more hegemonically gendered tributes from districts 1 and 2. This assures the audience that

they have been victimized and any actions taken by them will be necessary for righting a wrong.

The film achieves this by highlighting the varied strategies of each. The career tributes are cast

as the preferred performers for brutal behavior within the realm of the Games. Marvel and

Glimmer from District 1 represent the preferred gender performance of a young male and

female. Both have the confidence and assuredness for the roles they play for the television

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[49] See George A. Dunn and Nicolas Michaud, *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2012).

audience while maintaining relatively honed fighting skills. Cato and Clove from district 2, however, are cast as the villains, both possessing formidable training and hypermasculine aggression. Cato and Clove serve to highlight just how divergent Peeta and Katniss are from this ideal. While Katniss is arguably as formidable a fighter as Clove, it is Katniss' trepidation to fight that the film uses to make a clear delineation between hero and villain. By making this clear, it is then possible to lump Peeta and Katniss together with Rue (Black female), Thresh (Black male) and Foxface (White female) as the underdogs. The film, however, does not allow these characters to survive to the end, allowing sympathies but ultimately privileging our white protagonists. Yet by marking these tributes as heroes it allows the opportunities for divergent audiences to enjoy and support the film, and the film's message of restoring normative gender, even when they would not normally support the white male domination it engages.

I argue that this film privileges the potential loss of selfhood as the most recurring theme, not surprising as coercion to commit murder for the sake of entertainment comes with it certain moral tangles and privileges those who contest against such a loss. The film attempts to position the audience's distaste for the structure of Panem through Peeta over Katniss. While she emerges as symbol of rebellion, Peeta is sole among the tributes to express a disdain for the games or for the system that allows it to continue on moral grounds alone. While Katniss detests the Games, her annoyance comes less from ethical implications and more from the extravagance and blindness of the capitol towards those from whom it draws resources and from the interruption it causes in her ability to protect her sister. For Katniss, the Games prove to be an obstacle to ensuring the survival of her sister. By volunteering in her sister, Prim's, place she delays her sisters seemingly imminent death; however, there is a clear drive in the film that Katniss is fighting to ensure a continued protection that would more than likely end should her sister be

forced into her mother's care. As such, Katniss is disinterested in the larger scheme of social critique. She wants to get in and get out. Peeta, however, is vocal about the system being corrupt and expresses distrust for government. Still, the film does not engage the audience in an understanding of what would come should the system fall.[50] The tension within the film that questions governmental systems comes from Peeta, even when the film wishes the audience to place commendation and heroism on Katniss.

For all of Peeta's bravado, however, he comes up short in emerging as a morally grounded hero. While he espouses concern for a loss of self, he is, in fact, the least changed from the games themselves. Prior to the start of the games, when Peeta confesses his fears to Katniss that the games might change him, he nevertheless relents that he will more than likely kill when the time arises. However, Peeta is able to survive the games having killed no other tribute intentionally. Katniss herself is able to emerge with only three kills, one unintentional, one in self-defense, and one an act of mercy. Peeta's concern, though admirable, sadly has little use within the context of the Games. Still, he utilizes his relative weakness as an advantage. When he expresses his love for Katniss, endearing her to the throngs of Capitol citizens, his protection of her is far different than what would be expected from the more masculine Katniss. Instead of violence, he uses ingenuity and intellect to best the sentimental strategies of the Games. If the tributes are supposed to become fan favorites, what better way than to do so through love as opposed to actual fighting, especially when you lack the skills to wage battle?[51] Regardless, Peeta is portrayed as less skilled than Gale in the context of the Games, having limited survival skills and no real opportunity to develop a proficiency at hunting. Gale, Katniss' hunting partner

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[50] The final two films, due out in 2014 and 2015, respectively, may bear this theme out.
[51] Vera Woloshyn, Nancy Taber, and Laura Lane, "Discourses of Masculinity and Femininity in The Hunger Games: "Scarred," "Bloody," and "Stunning"" International Journal of Social Science Studies 1, no. 1 (2012): pg. #150-158.

and possible love interest, is constructed as the hegemonic equivalent to Katniss. The audience can glean that he is a strong and capable hunter as well as a devoted provider due to his dealings with Katniss. Peeta is located in a place to be compared to Gale through his lack of skill. Peeta is proficient at camouflage, and uses this to his advantage; however this has relatively little value compared to more offensive tactics, especially as it is a technique only applied once he has been injured.[52] Furthermore, his skill is feminized in that he equates his skills as coming from decorating cakes through his work as a baker. When Katniss is reunited with Peeta following a rule change to allow both tributes from a single district to win during the Games, he becomes a burden to her because of his injury. However, his usefulness being established through their portrayal of love allows him to be a valuable tool. So while he is denoted as a weak and a victim in comparison to his peers, an important trope of marginalized masculinity, the film finds ways to privilege such emasculation that allows for survival and reparation of prestige. By pairing with Katniss, he is able to take credit for being morally minded without having to make the actual hard choices; thus remaining pure, alive, and ever likeable.[53]

Katniss has drawn much of the attention in way of gender performance due to her striking similarities to the slasher horror heroine the Final Girl, however Peeta is equally queer a character and is far more a representative of the kind of masculinity that would develop in such a rigid colonial structure. In District 12, we see that coal mining is one of the only occupations for its citizens, important, too, because it is a job only available to men. Peeta, as the son of a baker, is in a privileged position within his district to not have to labor as others do but not so privileged as to live without fear of destitution.[54] Yet this privilege marginalizes his masculinity to peers

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[52] Ibid, pg. #150-158.
[53] Ibid, pg. #150-157.
[54] Ibid, pg. #150-158.

such as Gale, who in becoming a coal miner enacts the type of masculine performance deemed acceptable to District 12.[55] While Gale turns 18 and becomes a coal miner, Peeta will turn 18 and remain the son of a baker.[56] This works to "other" him to his male counterparts, presenting him with neither the ability to challenge the inherent structure of the system nor a real economic desire. Fear of losing what privilege he has marks him as analogous to a "mixed-race inhabitant" of the internal colonial structure. Not a capitol citizen but not indigenous like Katniss he exists in an advantaged yet lonely and ultimately powerless state. This othering of Peeta to his peers mirrors the same othering of Katniss and other "final girl" constructions and marks Peeta as a "final boy."[57] While the "final boy" construction has been argued as of late to signal among other things the death of the "final girl," here and as I would argue more recently the "final boy" serves to accentuate the "final girl," as both possess skills the other lacks and survive in tandem rather than in opposition.[58]

Katniss performs a complex fusion of masculine and feminine characteristics when compared with Gale and Peeta. Unlike Gale, who is represented as a strong masculine protector, and Peeta, who is morally good but weak, Katniss is presented as flawed in spite of her strength in survival and battle. At the start of the film, Katniss is presented as possessing many hegemonically masculine attributes. She is determined, independent, and proficient. She acts as a protector for her sister and a critical voice towards her mother who is unable to function as a caretaker following her husband's death.[59] While Katniss can ostensibly recognize her mother's

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[55] Ibid, pg. #150-158.
[56] Ibid, pg. #150-158.
[57] See Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
[58] See Kevin J. Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2012).
[59] Vera Woloshyn, Nancy Taber, and Laura Lane, "Discourses of Masculinity and Femininity in The Hunger Games: "Scarred," "Bloody," and "Stunning"" International Journal of Social Science Studies 1, no. 1 (2012): pg. #150-158.

lapse most likely emerged from depression at her father's loss, she nonetheless resents her weak character and is incredulous of her ability to care for her sister.[60] Had Katniss's father remained alive, the audience could have assumed that her attributes and behaviors were connected to a normative expression of herself; however, instead, we are to read that she took on such a role out of necessity. This reinforces that this behavior is not normative but an expression and performance of sacrifice and without the need to care for her sister and mother Katniss would revert back to a more feminized self as opposed to playing the role of ersatz father.

Yet her role as masculine provider only satisfies one side of Katniss. That Katniss volunteers in Prim's place at the reaping is equated with a mother's sacrifice for her child.[61] Her relationship with her sister is paralleled, too, with her bond to Rue, a young girl from district 11, in the Games. Both small and ostensibly the same age, we can replace Rue for Prim and assume that when Katniss looks at Rue she sees Prim and assumes she will die quickly. This is evidenced in the betting odds, which place Rue's ability to win at remarkably low in comparison to her fellow tributes. The audience is encouraged to bond to Rue however because of her innate skills of working within the woods in ways we are not able to bond with Prim. Years of working in the fields of a farming district have enabled her skill to climb and maneuver in the woods. When the audience is privy to bond with Prim, we do so in a way that privileges her fear and weakness. When Katniss teams with Rue, then, and sees that she has a compatriot of skill, the bond leaves the mothering realm over Prim, and they become far more sisterly.[62] This change only occurs to work the audience to bond with Rue. When Rue dies and Katniss mourns her death, the role

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[60] Ibid, pg. #150-158.
[61] Ibid, pg. #150-158.
[62] Ibid, pg. #153-155.

switches and she again becomes motherly, with the audience that much more invested because we see the death of what could have been a young Katniss in training.

Katniss's role as a heteronormative object of desire is highlighted within the film, with how she looks and is desired often viewed as more important than who she is.[63] As she begins the Hunger Games, Katniss is forced to assume characteristics related to ideals of feminine beauty. This works to tell the audience that beauty is not only promoted but gets rewarded. While Katniss seeks to resist this emphasis on her appearance, it is made clear that in order to gain support from sponsors who can provide resources during life-or-death situations, Katniss needs to look beautiful and feminine at the same time she needs to refuse emotions that mark her as weak to the other tributes.[64] This play between hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity provides much of the thrust for Katniss's character development. Had she been able to stay out of the Games, there would have been no need for her to attend to her appearance in ways that would reinforce emphasized femininity and complicate her self-identity. While arguably much of what was done to make Katniss desirable was a shower and new clothes, the credit for making Katniss an object of desire comes from Peeta's role in proclaiming his love for her. This signals to the audience that, until a woman is desired by a man, she is not yet herself desirable. Because of this, within the context of the games and the propaganda behind them, Katniss and Peeta are bound by compulsory heterosexuality, although it is Katniss, not Peeta, who is made to be more desirable by the romance. While he asserts his heterosexuality through his declaration because he is the first to do so he is able to maintain sincerity of his feelings and reaffirm himself as "good." Katniss's hegemonic masculine traits, however, must be hidden from the television

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[63] Ibid, pg. #150-158.
[64] Ibid, pg. #150-158.

audience until the moment when they would help her most to maintain her façade of femininity. While it serves Cato better to emphasize his role as a warrior upfront, it serves Katniss better to play the role of nurturing sister who is the object of desire to a man and then reveal her survival skill when the moment presents itself. She then becomes the whole package with the understanding that such masculine attributes remain dormant when not of necessity; normalizing her through heterosexual romance and compulsory heterosexuality.

Katniss is perhaps the most conflicted character in terms of gendered societal norms. Before the start of the Hunger Games and outside of the Capitol's influence, Katniss's views herself only in positive ways. She is able to survive under the most difficult of circumstances, but also maintains a kindhearted relationship to her sister.[65] It is only after Katniss is exposed to the Games, and the Capitol's media, that she must begin to change her appearance and manners. Characteristics such as of mistrust, hostility, and restraint, which prove inconsistent with idealized femininity, are depicted as negative qualities, as opposed to necessary survival skills in a precarious situation.[66] By glamorizing her through the sumptuous wardrobe of her dresser, Cinna (Lenny Kravitz), she is portrayed as delicate and demure. Such a construction both hides and emphasizes the display of aggression that will occur once the games begin. In order to gain audience approval and sponsorship, she needs to adopt a feminine, romantic orientation as the object of heterosexual desire to survive. It is within this role that Katniss is most imperfect – she struggles against the expectations of her to act feminine while simultaneously refusing to participate in the hegemonic masculine acts of violence the Games demand. Instead of understanding that her decisions are a necessary part of survival, she is also often self-critical and

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[65] Ibid, pg. #153-155.
[66] Ibid, pg. #150-158.

depreciating, comparing herself to Peeta in ways that highlight his moral grounding and her ambiguity.[67] The Games force her to question her identity and her actions and within the context of the Games as she is neither sufficiently feminine nor masculine she, thus, appears flawed.[68] Katniss's contempt for having to be required to conform to hegemonic norms of female beauty can be perceived as an invitation to the watcher to question the necessity of those rules and the systems that enforce them. However, since the viewer is not made to choose between a clean and pretty Katniss and a warrior Katniss, such an invitation to question is left moot. Thus even in a dystopian future the utopian desire for a happy, heterosexual union appears and draws the viewer in. For like the capitol audience watching the Games, we believe that Katniss could be a kick ass warrior and a loving mother just as much as we believe that Peeta would stay virtuous as he is made more of a man by having the two unite. While the queer construction of these characters allows for alternatives to be engaged they in the end act to normalize the characters.

The lead tension at play with *The Hunger Games* within the scope of survivalist cinema is the interplay of gender between men and women. From the outside, this film highlights the possibilities that can occur when a woman is allowed to be a hero. However, the film's structure acts to endear this heroine to us as the film does its best to regulate her to heteronormative roles. This film, more than any, addresses alternatives to dominant modes of gendered performance can be acceptable. While *World War Z* seeks to privilege the father figure as a hero over women and minorities *The Hunger Games* offers a way to conceptualize men and women as queer-natured heroes so long as they remain constrained within a larger system of hegemonic control. I equate this move to the increased societal acceptance within America of Same Sex Marriage. So long as

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[67] Ibid, pg. #150-158.
[68] Ibid, pg. #151-152.

the family structure remains situated towards an ideal heterosexual model of two parents and child then it becomes easier to accept alterations. So long as Katniss and Peeta can utilize their queerness to reaffirm systems that work (Heterosexual union) and undermine systems that don't (Panem) they will be allowed to remain queered.

Chapter Four: "Fucking civilization has broken down, there's no more reason for this false bullshit": The "Bromance" when *This is the End*.

In this chapter I seek to explore the contemporary sub-genre of the "bromance" within the lens of survivalist cinema through the film *This is the End* (Rogen, 2013). The bromance offers by way of confused homosocial/homoerotic relationships between straight male characters the opportunity to engage with new constructions of masculine identities that both affirm and challenge preexisting formations of hegemonic masculinity. Such strains present themselves in perfect harmony with the same tensions endemic to the zombie and slasher narrative and as such this film suggests that the romantic comedy by way of the bromance is but one apocalypse away from releasing men from the stifling existence that is hegemonic control. The bromance film, emerging in popularity largely due to the additions to the genre by director Judd Apatow, is indebted to the romantic comedy, or "rom-com", in many ways; premier amongst them that they work through fantasy and wish fulfillment to postulate the question "what do women/men want"? Critics such as Richard Corliss and Joseph Aisenberg have viewed the bromance pessimistically as a reactionary response to changes in social equality due to the ways that the films position the audience to side with the men over the women.[69] The films they argue present women as controlling and destructive to the positive relationships that men are presented as possessing and cherishing. I believe these discounts the ways these films work more covertly to

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[69] John Alberti, ""I Love You, Man": Bromances, the Construction of Masculinity, and the Continuing Evolution of the Romantic Comedy," Quarterly Review of Film and Video 30, no. 2 (2013): pg. #164-169, doi:10.1080/10509208.2011.575658.

subvert the codified conventions of the traditional romantic comedy through conflicting representations of masculine identity. While such cinematic posturing to privilege males is not new and is certainly present within survivalist cinema as I have shown, I feel it does not tell the whole story as it ignores the self-loathing and gender confusion that accompanies the hunt for female connections as it also discounts the concerns women might have in being steered toward the heterosexist constraints of marriage these films push. My argument is not meant to deny the androcentric and even misogynist cultural logics at play in these movies but to suggest another way of understanding their particular versions of objectification and gender panic in terms of the current moment: as part of a project of reconstructing the heterosexual male hero, a hero who preserves the logic of heterosexual desire but who also questions the very subject position of masculinity itself within the romantic comedy. *This is the End* works within this framework to renegotiate the subject position of the male hero by way of subversion of the many overlapping and conflicting genre codes that the bromance has embraced on its way to prominence.[70]

To understand the subversion that goes on within *This is the End* one has to first understand the construction of the male hero within the bromance that this film wishes to challenge and evolve. They are always fashioned as not only romantically unattached but also socially unattached and isolated within their sphere of influence.[71] Under or unemployed, the state of perpetual adolescence associated with the bromance hero derives not so much out of selfishness as aimlessness; specifically, the lack of clearly defined social roles that are necessarily encoded for masculinity. Much of the appeal for this type of character is for sure indebted to the appearance and acceptance of "emerging adulthood" as a recognized new period in the life of

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[70] Ibid, pg. #159-172.
[71] Ibid, pg. #159-170.

young adults. Such a moment is characterized by the postponement of major life events such as marriage and the extension of college and living at home due to changes in the financial opportunities available to many young Americans.[72] Yet these characters are not just positioned as ugly ducklings or diamonds in the rough; they are aggressively unattractive and personally dedicated to rejecting qualities that would render them as good candidates for any kind of stable long-term relationship, whether economic or romantic.[73] Their position in an arrested state of development is not meant to be enviable to the audience. Within these movies we see these male characters wrestling with the personal inadequacy and social anachronism of hegemonic masculinity that has largely been excised from the film. Unlike *The Hunger Games* where male gendered performance is always placed in opposition to an Alpha male, such a comparison is absent. Not only are they unable to achieve success that affirms heteronormative male achievement through heterosexual masculinity, they struggle to express their desires at all.[74] The male characters within bromances constantly foreground the question of what men (really) want, assuming that the answer must be sexual in nature, as popular culture constructions of masculinity keep insisting, with sex functioning as a surrogate for power, mastery, and social acceptance.[75] At the same time, they constantly question their own inability to access and perform this supposedly innate desire, a confusion expressed in the multitude of bromance films

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[72] Jeffrey Jensen. Arnett, Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pg. #1-20.

[73] John Alberti, ""I Love You, Man": Bromances, the Construction of Masculinity, and the Continuing Evolution of the Romantic Comedy," Quarterly Review of Film and Video 30, no. 2 (2013): pg. #159-165.

[74] Ibid, pg. #162-172.

[75] Maria San Filippo, The B Word: Bisexuality in Contemporary Film and Television (Indiana University Press, 2013), pg. #152-201.

by positing that the inability to form an easy and legitimate heterosexual union stems from some form of abnormal pathology.[76]

This is the End initiates its own confusing quest for power through the audiences understanding of the repetition within these bromance films. Repetition of casting actors as "types" results in the audience being unable to separate the actors from the coded behaviors and desires of the characters. In *Knocked Up*(Apatow, 2007) for example Seth Rogen's "Ben", a character type found throughout the bromance and often played by Rogen or the younger Jonah Hill, we find the perpetual adolescent slacker, uninterested in and seemingly incapable of adult ambition or responsibility, whose main interests are pot and pornography. So prevalent is this character type paired with Seth Rogen that when we are introduced to "Seth Rogen"[77] in the first moments of the *This is the End* we are to assume that he carries with him the baggage of his bromance archetype. This is further highlighted by the paparazzi videographer who follows "Seth Rogen" out of the airport and reminds both him and the audience that Seth Rogen plays the same character in every film. The film casts its actors as exaggerated, though we are never really sure how exaggerated, counterparts of themselves and while there surely exists enough deviation we are led to believe that the clever, pot smoking "Seth Rogen" is a reasonable facsimile for Seth Rogen the actor.

The film surrounds the friendship between "Jay Baruchel", an occasional supporting actor in the Judd Apatow canon of film and television, and "Seth Rogen." After arriving in Los Angeles, California to visit with his old friend "Rogen," "Baruchel" is brought to a

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[76] John Alberti, ""I Love You, Man": Bromances, the Construction of Masculinity, and the Continuing Evolution of the Romantic Comedy," Quarterly Review of Film and Video 30, no. 2 (2013): pg. #160-170, doi:10.1080/10509208.2011.575658.

[77] For sake of clarity as this film casts it's actors as exaggerated versions of themselves, when a name is highlighted in parenthesis that will signal that I am referring to the character and not the actor.

housewarming party hosted by "James Franco". At the party celebrities drink, take drugs, and commit other immoral acts to comedic effect. "Baruchel" finds himself uncomfortable being around many people he does not know well including "Jonah Hill", "Michael Cera", "Craig Robinson", and "Emma Watson". Briefly escaping to a convenience store for cigarettes with "Rogen", "Baruchel" is witness to beams of blue light emanating out of the sky suddenly carrying away several people. Fleeing through a chaotic Los Angeles to "Franco's" home they find the party uninterrupted. The partygoers ridicule "Baruchel's" account until a large hole opens in the ground and most of the celebrity cameos are killed. "Rogen", "Baruchel", "Franco", "Hill", and "Robinson" survive. Believing that as famous actors they will surely be rescued from the disaster that has befallen Hollywood they board up the doors and windows and await help. The next morning, "Danny McBride" who, unknown to the others had crashed the party and fallen asleep, wakes up first and ignorant of the crisis wastes much of the remaining food and water. The men pass their time by taking drugs and filming a homemade sequel to the film *Pineapple Express* (Green, 2008), which most of the group appeared in. Tensions rise, however, due to various conflicts within the home, including "Baruchel" and "Rogen's" growing estrangement, "McBride's" clashes with "Franco", and the others' skepticism of "Baruchel's" belief that the disaster might be the Biblical Apocalypse. Tensions reach an apex when "McBride's" behavior results in the loss of even more of the groups remaining water supply and the others make the decision to send him away. "McBride" tries to kill the others but fails as the gun he attempts to use is a prop and he angrily leaves the home. "Robinson" begins to believe in the theory of the Biblical Apocalypse and volunteers to explore a neighboring home for supplies with "Baruchel". "Hill," meanwhile, secretly prays to God for "Baruchel" to die and is raped during the night by a demon. Now possessed and paranormally strong, "Hill" chases "Franco"

and "Rogen", while "Robinson" and "Baruchel" flee from a demon a few houses away. The group overtakes "Hill", but during an attempted exorcism a fire destroys the home, killing "Hill," and forcing the four outdoors. Regretful for the mistakes in his life, "Robinson" volunteers to sacrifice himself so the others can escape a large demon that has spotted their group. The plan succeeds but, unexpectedly, "Robinson" is taken in the Rapture because of his good deed, giving hope to the group they they might still escape hell on earth. When cannibals led by "McBride" capture the men, "Franco" similarly volunteers to sacrifice himself. Although the plan succeeds and a blue beam begins to take "Franco" to heaven, his boastful taunts to "McBride" cause the beam to vanish, and the cannibals eat "Franco". Satan then appears and as he is about to consume "Rogen" and "Baruchel" they reaffirm their friendship and embrace their impending death. A blue beam abruptly envelops "Baruchel", who tries to pull "Rogen" up with him, but together they fail to reach Heaven. "Rogen" releases his grip to allow his friend to ascend to heaven, and just before being eaten by Satan is also taken up into heaven.

The crisis of masculinity expressed within the film has a more complicated relationship to neoliberal constructions of selfhood than in others I highlight specifically because the actors and their character counterparts are far better off financially and socially. If emasculation writ large in America were constructed to be merely about opportunity and income then these protagonists would throw a wrench in that system. However this film privileges the individualism heralded by neoliberalism at the same time that it stresses commodification as the ideal.[78] While the bromance does not argue for the happiness and fulfillment made possible by the nuclear family ideal of children as in *World War Z* or the benefits of heterosexual bonding as

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[78] Deborah Tudor, "Selling Nostalgia: Mad Men, Postmodernism and Neoliberalism," Society 49, no. 9 (July 2012): pg. #333.

in *The Hunger Games* it surely espouses that happiness and fulfillment comes from acquiring the appearance and lifestyle of a successful career within a capitalist system. If there is an example of alpha masculinity at the start of the film it surely belongs to "James Franco". The audience can recognize that Franco's versatility in film and his success on screen have made his career the most "legitimate" of all the actors in this group and the film highlights that he is the locus from which the films action will take place by drawing the two main protagonists, "Rogen" and "Baruchel", to his house. "Franco's" home thus lends itself as a barometer of success. As we have just been shown "Rogen's" home which too reads as successful and modern Franco's home feels exaggerated and forced in comparison. So much so that with the apocalypse, and the death of the many celebrities which validate Franco's success with their presence, it soon cracks open and the cold, sterile mansion which spoke of success reveals itself to be as illusionary a symbol of masculinity as much as it proves illusionary a safeguard to the dangers that lurk outside.

While this film is made in such a way to privilege the ensemble group of actors I argue that the film wants to privilege "Jay Baruchel" as the legitimate hero of the film. From the start he is placed in opposition to the success of the other actors. While Baruchel has been critically successful within Canadian cinema his transition to American screens has been lackluster compared to the runaway success of his peers. His most visible hit, *Million Dollar Baby* (Eastwood, 2004) is referenced by "Mindy Kaling" during the party and while it is meant as a legitimate compliment to his performance it is a backhanded reminder that he has been fairly unseen to American audiences for almost a decade and this serves to separate him more from the group. From the start then "Baruchel" is a victim of the neoliberalism ideal subject in that his peer's success works to highlight what can be possible working in the system so his failure must be his own. Once the apocalypse begins however he is stripped of the illusionary freedoms that

accompany the neoliberal subject. When the ideal was success within Hollywood the rapture is effective in stripping away these capitalist markers of success at the same time that it reaffirms the rugged individualism espoused by neoliberal ideology. With no systems left to help our protagonists, salvation becomes the new marker of "success" and our protagonists must harness their entrepreneurship to continue on. Yet neoliberal ideals of commodification are unavoidable even in heaven. In a space where ones every wish could come true we are shown that the desire to possess, in the case of "Rogen" a Segway scooter, proves to be an enduring draw. Regardless whether success is found individually or through their homosocial bonds will be their own choice as is the prevailing thread of the bromance.

For this film the issue of "Us versus Them" is complicated because "us" and "them" are continuously switched in value. By this I mean the desirable position the film wishes to articulate for the audience is to be raptured to heaven (them) whereas the current group of survivors (us) is both undesirable and an affront to opportunity for salvation. For this reason the posthuman implications of the loss of selfhood through death really complicate the audience's relationship to the desired outcome. To be sure rapture appears to be desirable. However we are never shown what damnation looks like. This is a noticeable omission considering how enjoyable an experience it is for the audience to experience the abject behavior of those individuals who are not arisen to heaven. Yet this film more than any other really pushes that to transcend the current state of selfhood is a more desirable outcome than remaining an autonomous individual on earth. All the while the issue of "Us versus Them" begins to splinter the group. Clearly "Baruchel", "Rogen", and "Robinson" are constructed as likeable characters, both in this film and in previous films. "McBride" and "Franco" however become singled out through their conflicting relationship as undesirable. "Franco" wishes to remain in control as the Alpha male at the same

time that "McBride" is attempting to assert power in a world where now power is up for grabs and this antagonism leads to much of the films internal tensions. In many ways this could be read as a continuation of the common bromance reading of a man in opposition to a group that is holding him back from a better future, in this case rapture.[79] Such a reading would not necessarily be wrong; however this should not deter a reading that postulates that internal tensions do more to transform the individual in ways that do not necessarily alienate a man from his homosocial group. The rapture nonetheless occurs at the moment when each individual admits that they are flawed in some way. While the film would construct the event as a sacrifice, for our protagonists the moment is tied to choice. For "James Franco" his choice to not admit a failing and instead assert his masculinity in the face of a world he would have left behind regardless negated his entrance to heaven. However unlike "Seth Rogen" who had to be forced into a situation to admit his actions would have destroyed his friends chance at happiness, "Robinson" and "Baruchel's" entry to heaven is far easier considering that by being constructed as black and emasculated, respectfully, to their peers each of them is far more aware of the anxieties tied to hegemonic forces and they have more to say. Such an admission of anxiety pairs itself with the Men's movement and the innate desire for a homosocial bond where men can commiserate their emotions.[80] The successful homosocial bond is thus constructed to be one where emotions and fears can be articulated. Once this happens heaven is not a place for religion as much as it is a place where true desires, whether commercial or queer can be expressed and delivered.

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[79] John Alberti, ""I Love You, Man": Bromances, the Construction of Masculinity, and the Continuing Evolution of the Romantic Comedy," Quarterly Review of Film and Video 30, no. 2 (2013): pg. #159-164, doi:10.1080/10509208.2011.575658.
[80] Ibid, pg. #159-164.

The construction of a queer protagonist however is largely indebted to the horror conventions which this film borrows heavily from. Most notable are the ways in which this film privileges the psychosexual leanings of the protagonists in ways that run counter to as well as reinforce prevailing modes of power.[81] These pleasures are both integral to the heroics of the slasher as well as of the bromance. What leads to most of the tension within the bromance hero's interaction with his peers both male and female specifically is the representation of the pathology implicit within the comic situations of these isolated male characters. Specifically we see over and over again that each hero possesses some moment within the film where they are mistaken for either a sexual deviant or at worst a serial killer. Early in *The 40 Year Old Virgin*(Apatow, 2005*)*, for example, Seth Rogen's character of "Cal" remarks to his other dysfunctional male co-workers that he seriously wonders whether the melodramatized title character of Andy, played by Steven Carell, might be a serial killer. This is further accentuated when later in the film his relationship with Trish, played by Catherine Keener, comes to head when she assumes a similar conclusion that his reluctance to have sex with her and his childlike behavior must stem from a sexual repression manifesting in psychosis.[82] In the many instances where this occurs however the assumptions are always exaggerated and wrong but they stem from a very real condition of the hero that places them in opposition to the people around them. In *This is the End* we see such a situation repeat when "Emma Watson," played by Emma Watson breaks her way into the house and reveals to the group that she has survived outside on her own since the collapse of society. As the group welcomes her and encourages her to rest "Baruchel" brings up to the group the observation that with a young women in a house full of men during an unsettling moment such as the breakdown of society she may find herself nervous about unwanted sexual advances.

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[81] Ibid, pg. #159-170.
[82] Ibid, pg. #159-172.

While his motives are altruistic they become misconstrued, especially by his peer group who had not thought of "Emma Watson" in a sexual way due to her time spent acting in the *Harry Potter* series of films. When she overhears them discussing this she reacts violently, steals their supplies and leaves brandishing an axe. I highlight this scene for a number of reasons. First it highlights that however much these characters strive towards masculine performance they at best reflect the cinematic pattern of the Oedipally-damaged serial killer, the pathological horror movie equivalent of the Alpha male. Second "Emma Watson's" characterization gives tension to the argument that women are the inhibitors towards men in these films. In this film we side with "Emma Watson" and though we know that she is mistaken in her assumption of the motives of these men, her fear is real. Thus in every film where these men possess a pathological ineptitude towards their sexual desires we should be viewing these women as sympathetic victims to the hegemonic masculinity. It is for this reason that "Emma Watson's" destruction of the penis sculpture is such a powerful symbol for the film. Arguably it could be contended that "Watson" like all over women are merely trying to emasculate men and her skill with an axe positions her as a Final Girl within the film. However the penis as a symbol within the film appears three times: First "Franco's" sculpture, second the incubus that rapes "Hill," and third Satan. The penis does not then represent masculinity but hypermasculinity and implicitly sexual violence. It is not unreasonable then why Satan is castrated at the end of the film once "Rogen" and "Baruchel" are taken to heaven. By renouncing the posturing of hypermasculinity they escape both death and the film would argue escape a fate that positions them as evil.

Epilogue

As I have shown in this thesis the marriage between slasher and zombie subgenres within contemporary survivalist cinema has occurred so as to supply the spectator with a male protagonist who can reflect and respond to socioeconomic threats to masculinity in post-9/11 America. By examining *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012), *World War Z* (Forster, 2013), and *This is the End* (Rogan/Goldberg, 2013) I have shown that male protagonists provide sites for reclaiming and enfranchising hegemonic white masculinity in ways that are indebted to historical methods of retreat from a perceived crisis of masculinity. Presenting unstable gendered heroes so as to speak to the unsettling transformations of labor and opportunity in America and the resulting "injury" to white men these films rely on the recurring tension between prevailing modes of power and the alternatives which allow hegemonic control to be shored up by films end. By pairing an emasculated male hero in a variety of dystopic settings whose mise-en-scène creates an outward environment to correspond to the unsettled psyche of American moviegoers these films work very hard to reconsolidate normative structures of power by films end. Yet still it does not erase the fact that alternatives are lodged and privileged within the film along the way. Protagonists are queered to survive and while they emerge by films end "recovered" from their emasculation it does not take away from the fact that such a queering might, to the audience, be deemed novel at best and at worst preferable. Yet in spite of the fact that these films engage with divergent identity formations they nonetheless position the spectator to encourage an outcome that supports prevailing modes of power.

The next stage in the emergence of this phenomenon I feel can be found within the sequel cycles that are emerging within this survivalist canon. The repetitive nature of zombie and slasher films to reproduce similar structures in slightly new ways lends themselves to audience's desires to continue cinematic threads that leave open endings. As these films work to shore up masculinity but never quite achieve it they allow the opportunity for the continuation of these apocalyptic narratives. This can be seen in *The Hunger Games'* sequel *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (Lawrence, 2013) in which the privileging of minorities and queered characters occurs once again at the same time that heterosexual bonding is privileged for the audience regardless of how desirable a queer character might be. Suzanne Collins in speaking to Variety about the promotional campaigns for the film articulated the reflexive nature of the marketing: "I'm thrilled with the work Tim Palen and his marketing team have done on the film, it's appropriately disturbing and thought-provoking how the campaign promotes 'Catching Fire' while simultaneously promoting the Capitol's punitive forms of entertainment. The stunning image of Katniss in her wedding dress that we use to sell tickets is just the kind of thing the Capitol would use to rev up its audience for the Quarter Quell (the name of the games in "Catching Fire").[83] That dualistic approach is very much in keeping with the books." As affirming as her statements are they highlight that the film series is continuing to harness strategies that the film would position audiences so as to distain. However they are done in such a way that they can be sumptuously entertaining and thought-provoking at the same time. Such strategies follow the survivalist cinemas approach of hiding within the structure of the apocalypse the systems it wishes to condemn.

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[83] Marc Graser, "Suzanne Collins Breaks Silence to Support 'The Hunger Games: Catching Fire'," Variety, October 29, 2013, section goes here, http://variety.com/2013/film/news/suzanne-collins-breaks-silence-to-support-the-hunger-games-catching-fire-1200775202/.

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