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WHEN THE ALTERNATIVE BECOMES HEGEMONIC: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF *THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS*

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WHEN THE ALTERNATIVE BECOMES HEGEMONIC: A
TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF *THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS*

BY
PATRICK CROWE

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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MASTER OF SCIENCE THESIS
OF
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Abstract

Wes Anderson has been designated by many as one of the first ‘Indiewood’ directors. While his films possess a quirky, atypical, and oddball visual and aesthetic style, at least one of his films, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, offers performances of gender and race—particularly of white masculinity—that reinforce a number of gender and racial stereotypes (Beynon, 2002; Buchbinder, 2013; Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1996; Moss, 2011). In this thesis, I conduct a critical textual analysis on *The Royal Tenenbaums* to illuminate the retrogressive gender and racial ideas that Anderson uses to constitute various performances or models of white masculinity. Most of my focus will be on Royal Tenenbaum, the patriarch of the family who seeks redemption from his wife and children only after hitting rock bottom economically and needing a place to live. Royal’s absence as a father and criticisms of his children have lingering effects that seem to cause each of them to be emotionally stuck—child-like adults. By portraying upper class white masculinity in a ‘crisis’, Anderson ignores the social privilege his characters experience.

My analysis is grounded in a British Cultural Studies framework (Hall, 1989) and draws on the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2002; Gill, 2000). In contemporary times, portraying white masculinity in crisis is mainly through media such as film. Using these concepts, I argue how Anderson falls in line with typical Hollywood directors as eliciting the same problematic forms of gendered performances. In this project, I highlight how Anderson reproduces white supremacist patriarchal ideas to be continued through generations, aligns the main male characters

with ideas commonly associated with the 'new man' (Malin, 2005), 'hard body' (Jeffords, 1994), and 'man-boy' (Kusz, 2013, 2018), reduces the social world to the family (Wilkins, 2014) seemingly encouraging the audience to ignore the family's privilege, represents femininity in a superficially progressive manner but truly represents stereotypical ideas associated with femininity in his female characters, and how he reductively uses females and people of color for development of his white male characters.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Personal Connection

Wesley Wales Anderson, now an obsession of mine thanks to this project, has grown in stature and fame since I first stumbled upon his movies. The first film I watched, *Moonrise Kingdom*, is a tale about a pair of adolescents who leave their homes in search of happiness. Both are interested in resisting social norms and seeking a place where they can be themselves, away from the monotony of daily life on the fictional island of New Penzance off the coast of Rhode Island.

From the first moment I watched that film, I was instantly entranced.

Anderson's doll-house like opening of the movie, where the shots are static or slow moving and the entire house appears as if it's been cut in half for our viewing pleasure, was immensely satisfying. I was impressed by the ingenuity and spark the young couple, Suzy and Sam, possessed. Both children were easily relatable for me as a youth as well. I always wanted an escape from my repetitious world; life consisted of school, sports, homework, T.V., do it all again the next day to please my parents and fit their ideals of a good son. *Moonrise Kingdom* made apparent the idea of wanting to escape life being a common thread in youth, and also made me feel not so alone in the world.

As time went on, the movie stuck with me. Most other movies I watched couldn't compare to the intrinsic feeling *Moonrise Kingdom* conjured within me. Without the ability and language to discuss why I felt the way I did after viewing *Moonrise Kingdom*, I continued through life attempting to figure out why this movie stuck with me so much (as I often do whenever I see a film that captures my attention

to this magnitude). Anderson's next film released two years later, titled *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. I went to the theater to watch the movie with my mother, who was the one who initially found *Moonrise Kingdom* for us to enjoy. Before getting to the theater, I was hoping and expecting to walk away with the same sense of inspiration and awe that *Moonrise Kingdom* provided.

I was not disappointed.

The film continued Anderson's streak of quirky aesthetics with his now famous sensibility and stylizations he is known for, but he sets the film in a fictional country with hints at political references similar to Nazism in World War II. I was drawn to Anderson's fictional history and the way he presented historical happenings in a coded way, leaving much of the symbolization up to the knowledge of the viewer. I was also drawn to how one of Anderson's main characters, Monsieur Gustave, was able to elicit joy into everyone's life despite verbal torment from many of the males in the movie because he performed his masculinity differently than them. At that moment in my life, I was learning of the intricacies of the progressive/conservative debate in American society and couldn't understand why everyone didn't want equal opportunity for all peoples and would berate others for simply being different than them. M. Gustave had to endure unnecessary criticisms toward him and throw back a smile and witty banter despite the disgusting statements. In a world where Obama's presidential election further revealed a division amongst conservatives and progressives (which is not by any means his fault), I found value in M Gustave's ability to give others joy despite constantly receiving negative messages from others. M. Gustave's performance interested me because I spent years of my adolescence

bullied for being overweight. Through that experience, I realized it's extremely difficult to change people's perceptions of you. So instead of getting angry and confrontational, I found it worthwhile to 'kill them with kindness' in the hopes of reworking their opinions of me so they better suited my values and desires instead of theirs. In a nutshell, I was the butt of many jokes just like M. Gustave, but his ability to shed the negativities and continue his pursuit of his values strongly inspired me.

After the premiere of *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, Anderson had me hooked. Interestingly, I didn't go through and search for all of Anderson's previous work. I had read that his other films weren't as whimsical or strong as the two films I previously watched. A few of Anderson's films found their way in front of my eyes one way or another. For example, I first watched *The Royal Tenenbaums* late one night on HBO. Another night, a friend suggested we watch *Darjeeling Limited* together. *Fantastic Mr. Fox* was another film I caught late one night on HBO as well. The other Anderson films released at the time, *Bottle Rocket*, *Rushmore*, and *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, were more difficult to find and not as easily accessible as the others. When viewing these films, Anderson's style as a filmmaker and quirky, novel characters were instantaneously recognizable. Although his others films didn't capture me like the first two mentioned, his style and aesthetics are remarkably consistent since the inception of his first short film (*Bottle Rocket*) and his style has always given me great viewing pleasure. The level of detail in his mise-en-scene brought interest and excitement to me. I can't think of another director whose worlds are so specifically constructed and precise. His presentations are so layered and nuanced that blinking can cause an audience member to miss a vital part of a character or the plot.

So how exactly did I relate to Anderson and his onscreen characters? What was about my life sense of identity that made me relate so quickly to this filmmaker? To find the answer to this question, we must discuss a bit of background about Wes Anderson. He grew up in Houston, Texas to father Melver, a public relations specialist and writer, and mother Texas, an archaeologist. His parents divorced when he was 8. Anderson lived with his mom and visited his dad with his two siblings, Mel (older) and Eric (younger) sporadically. Anderson was mischievous in school to which he blames the effects of his parents' divorce (Biography.com, 2018). Although they were a middle class family, Wes and his siblings would attend his mother's archaeological digs and some of the talks surrounding her research. I argue, these moments of seeing how life can be in the upper classes (here I presume that archaeologists are affiliated with the upper class, as is the case in *The Royal Tenenbaums*) shaped Anderson's perception of his social position. He wanted to be upper class and ascribed to upper class activities as a child such as reading world literature and creating movies. In his pursuit of knowledge, most of the films and literature he read had main characters whose values, norms, and identities aligned with typical upper class sensibilities. As youths, men and women tend to find archetypical representations to attach to and model themselves after (Moss, 2011). Anderson would be no different as his favorite films and books typically established the upper class as the class worthy of analysis and representation.

My social experience is also important to discuss as the similarities between me and Anderson explain much of the inspiration I see in his creations. I ascribed to upper class sentiments and attitudes while growing up. The sensibility I developed in

my youth could be seen in my choice of clothing, interests like top brand athletic fashion, art-house films, and top quality, expensive food, and the friends I affiliated myself with. My life progressed from lower-middle class to upper-middle class from my birth until now. My parents' aspirations and ability to reach a comfortable status financially definitely shaped my perceptions of class status. Subtly, I was taught the goal in life is to reach upper class social position because once you reached them, your life is set with comfort, travel, and the ability to purchase whatever you may desire.

I interpret Wes Anderson's ideologies about class positioning very closely to what I used to, and still somewhat, believe in. The ability to change people's perceptions of yourself was forefront in my mind, I just didn't have the language to describe it. A repeated theme in Anderson's characters are upper class social status. Not only is this apparent in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, it is also apparent in *Rushmore* where the protagonist, Max, lies and creates a façade for other students in his prestigious school to believe he grew up in the same high-class situation they did. It is also apparent in *The Grand Budapest Hotel* where a concierge leaves all his pride behind for the sake of his upper class guests' enjoyment during their stay at his hotel. In my own life, I may not have created a façade for people to believe I was upper class, but I recognize I tried to curry favor with upper class friends and people I've met in the hopes that they would like me more and my social status would be elevated (they never did).

Nowadays, Anderson's detailed sets and mise-en-scene, off-beat, atypical characters, and whimsical imagination draws me in to watch whatever film he creates. I acknowledge that some of these sensibilities will never leave my subconscious, but I

am now better equipped to identify the ideologies related to class and gender I am hailed toward when I consume media texts and shaping how I understand various social phenomena.

I find many parts in his films that are easily relatable, but I do recognize how class specific Anderson's creations are. As the self-proclaimed Cinephiliac in 2011 writes, "*The Royal Tenenbaums* is a slightly humorous and physically beautiful presentation of a dysfunctional family, yet it's the main Anderson film that I've always found myself praying for its ending half way into it. The characters are all so mellow and lethargic that they don't demand attention or sympathy and their relationship with one another is only briefly discussed in exposition at the film's beginning as opposed to being shown through dialogue and emotional moments between characters." While I may not agree with some points, especially that the characters' dialogue doesn't build the characters' relationships and how the lack of emotional moments are an important factor in understanding his characters, this quote displays some recurring criticisms in Anderson's films.

Another article by Louis Wise (2018) states that Anderson's aesthetics are unmistakable and his popularity has propelled his vision into everyday life. Wise even goes as far to say that the self-absorbed trend through social media is partly due to Anderson's precision and understanding that all parts of a person's image have a deeply tailored meaning. There have been recent films that seem to carry some aspects of Anderson's aesthetics and plot creation (which are not created solely by him, he's stated he consistently draws inspiration from other directors (Seitz, 2013)). *Hereditary* from Ari Aster uses a literal dollhouse in the opening sequence of the film,

reminiscent of Anderson's beginning sequence in *Moonrise Kingdom* and of his typical camera shots that shows the entirety of the room with a character in it filmed as if it was from the perspective of a child playing with a doll. Netflix's *The Umbrella Academy* has a scene in their first episode that cuts the house in half, showing all characters dancing simultaneously to the same song as if there were multiple children playing with their dolls in their dollhouse. *Napoleon Dynamite* from Jared Hess features deep, brooding colors that emphasize the whiteness of the characters and features off-beat, quirky characters that remind one of Anderson's characters. The AV Club (2007) even goes so far to say that the film wouldn't have happened without the influence of Anderson and includes *Juno* in the discussion as well. From Jason Reitman, the film features a character, Paulie Bleeker played by Michael Cera, who ascribes to adolescent sensibilities and performs child-like bouts of masculinity very similarly to many of Anderson's young, white, male protagonists. Richie Tenenbaum and Paulie share a number of similarities, and hopefully Richie's adolescent performance of masculinity will be apparent by the end of my analysis. Whether one relates to his filming style and character representations or not, one cannot deny the impact Anderson has had on contemporary American society and how he is one of the so called 'founding fathers' of Indiewood.

On Indiewood and Anderson's Style

Indiewood refers to a time in the history of filmmaking in the US since the late 1990's when a significant amount of independent cinema has been financed by Hollywood, but movies created under this moniker still retain the aesthetics and style

typically correlated with independent cinema (Tzioumakis, 2013). Generally, independent filmmaking is considered non-normative compared to Hollywood's creations in terms of aesthetics, plot, and dialogue. In arguing how art cinema is a distinct mode of film practice, Bordwell (1979) suggests a schema for classifying said practice. It contains a definite historical existence, a set of conventions unique to the practice, and implicit viewing procedures. Staiger (2013) applies this schema to independent cinema saying indie cinema has always operated as a discrete historical practice (Tzioumakis (2017) elaborates on this idea), has specific conventions such as dialogue for purposes other than plot, odd or quirky characters, emphasis on creating verisimilitude in film, and ambiguity of narration or narrator, along with the viewer implicitly seeking emotional and intellectual engagement in the film. King (2009) suggests that a defining feature of Indiewood is that it does not displace interests of content to issues of aesthetic form. Art cinema is generally thought of not focusing a film's plot or characters, but more so focusing on distancing itself from the norm, challenging typical representational patterns of the cinematic human experience. Indiewood walks a fine line between Hollywood's hyper-emphasis on characters and plot while still pleasing the aesthete who appreciates the distance from normative representations. Usually Indiewood is thought of as a 'sophisticated' form of cinema associated with the upper classes, but King (2009) argues that Indiewood is accessible to those without high class affinity and integrates the most understood parts of art cinema, but also offers additional pleasures for those invested in distinctive qualities.

Tzioumakis (2013, 2017) outlines the history of independent cinema, stating the rise in popularity of independent film began in the late 1970's into early 1980's.

These films were marked by not receiving mainstream productions' finances and operated as low-key, low quality productions. This shifted in the mid-1980's with the establishment of a viable commercial distribution network that found popularity amongst the masses enabling independent directors to operate full-time. King (2009) argues that the rise in independent cinema comes off of the 1970's economic stagnation with mass Fordism production. He argues this led to a tendency for companies to target more niche markets, hence the rise in popularity of indie cinema. Succinctly, Tzioumakis (2013) defines the late 1970's to mid 1980's as low quality, economically independent films, the mid 1980's until the mid to late 1990's as a period he outlines as 'indie' cinema in which Hollywood began to finance many independent filmmakers, and the late 1990's until present when we are in the moment of 'Indiewood', a crossing of Hollywood and traditionally independent styles and characteristics. Many 'independent' studios now are subsidiaries of major corporations or are independent operations that have been taken over by major production companies (King, 2009; Tzioumakis, 2013, 2017).

Wes Anderson currently uses Fox Searchlight Pictures as his distribution agency which specializes in the production of independent American and British films, but is a subsidiary of 21st Century Fox, one of the remaining dominant major conglomerate distribution companies (Tzioumakis, 2017). In the past he received financial support from Buena Vista Pictures (even with his first feature film), an arm of Disney (Tzioumakis, 2017). Anderson produces under American Paintbrush which in itself is independent, but has a long-term deal with Fox Searchlight Pictures. Truly, the only wholly independent creation Anderson has ever crafted and released was his

13-minute short *Bottle Rocket*. Tzioumakis (2013, 2017) makes clear that independent cinema occurred in the mid-1980's and since the categorization popularized, the lines between indie cinema and Hollywood have blurred, formulating into what is now called 'Indiewood.'

In his list of conventions for indie comedy-dramas (which all of Anderson's films can be classified as), MacDowell (2013) states that these films have a combination of varied comic styles ranging from dead-pan to slapstick, a type of self-consciousness in visual style that hints at sense of surreal artificiality, a thematic preoccupation with childhood and innocence, and the film's tone is concerned with tensions between ironic distance and sincere engagement between characters.

MacDowell states that these conventions work to separate comedic indie cinema films from typical Hollywood creations. Newman (2013) states that tone and sensibility are the distinguishing factors of indie cinema, not a specific style. Newman's definition opens the door to films that lie outside the typical visual indie stylizations to focus more on the dialogue and delivery. He also goes on to state that countercultures, like hipsterism, which generally correlates to the audience who admires and relates to indie cinema, are movements of liminal post-adolescents struggling to negotiate a place in society that is different from their parents' without duplicating their ideological failures. Here he means young adults of American society attempt to find their own way through life that doesn't replicate their parents' way while also attempting to successfully maintain their own valued ideologies. The hipster counterculture is generally Anderson's main audience, so studying their traits and characteristics are important for understanding why Anderson chooses some of the imagery and dialogue

that find their way in the final product, which is interesting to ponder for future research but not my goal in this project.

Anderson's filmic style lies somewhere between what scholars call smart film (Sconce, 2002) and postironic (Shakar, 2002). Smart film is an indie dark comedy or disturbing drama that emphasizes the ironic tone that generally divides the audience between those who do and don't 'get it.' The American postironic shift blurs the lines between irony and earnestness in characters. Anderson isn't alone in the production of this filmic style as creators like Spike Jonze, Michel Gondry, and Charlie Kaufman (among many, many others) have been discussed in this fashion as well (King, 2009; MacDowell, 2013). 'Quirky' has commonly been used to describe Anderson's aesthetics and filmic presentation. Indie cinema's obsession with childhood being carried over into adulthood are promulgated by whimsical and quirky characteristics and aesthetics (MacDowell, 2010). This sensibility allows indie film to be categorized as different compared against the normative Hollywood filmic landscape and allows the audience who is watching the film to identify themselves on the outside margins of society (MacDowell, 2013).

In essence, Indiewood is an extensive, flowing categorization that marks itself as different compared to Hollywood films while maintaining some of the characteristics of a typical Hollywood production. Tzioumaki (2017) even goes so far to say that Indiewood has now become its own Hollywood film category, owing much of the current continued production to major conglomerates chronic usage of the usual conventions associated with the independent film sector. Most argumentation about the classification of independent cinema revolves around a stylistic or economic

interpretation for what defines independent filmmaking. The debate lies in the critic's perspective of the categorization- should economic independence or stylistic characteristics be the true marker of indie cinema? Tzioumakis (2017) argues the latter is a more recent development, having been brought to attention by critics in the 1980's whereas economic dependency debates have always circulated in film critics' discussions. I have outlined some interesting, differential thoughts from critics above, but all critics that I found agree that Anderson's films fit the characteristics often associated with the Indiewood film category (Kunze, 2014; MacDowell, 2013, 2014).

Indiewood may be the film category that Anderson's films most often fit within, but he has also had a number of critics give him the moniker 'modern-day auteur' (Godfrey, 2012; Petra, 2018; Redmond & Batty, 2014). Auteur theorizations for explaining the social meanings in movies began in 1954 with Francois Truffaut stating that some critical fields created a binary making critics *for* some directors and *against* others which he titled 'Politique des Auteurs' (Staples, 1966). The debate or 'politiques' refers to who critics believed to be the true author of a film; the director or writer. Truffaut called into question the authority of the director's role and placed the director at the center of critical analysis. Andrew Sarris is the theorist credited with coining the term 'auteur' in American culture (Sarris, 1963). The theory has since evolved into an understanding that the director, the overseer of all audio and visual elements, should be considered the true author of a film instead of the writer. This auteur theory that many film analysts and critics use when analyzing Andersonian texts disallows the ability to critically examine his creations as more than a genius at work. British Cultural Studies practitioners recognize the relation of Anderson's life to

his movies, but still use a skeptical lens to critically examine the ideologies he proliferates into society. Being popular in a cultural form like media generally means some of the ideologies used in the text aligns with the societal elites' ideals that help maintain power and control over a society.

In describing how authorship is relevant in the life of Wes Anderson, Orgeron (2007) states that Anderson's DVD commentary carefully constructs his public image as an auteur. Not only do his films reflect aspects of his life experiences, his DVD commentaries also frequently represent him as the one true author of his films. As these commentaries reveal, Anderson seems to revel in the auteur claim that's been attached to him. Anderson seems motivated to show the audience how he wants to be perceived as the one master and true creator of his worlds. In doing so, he takes all credit for his creations, but this also enables all criticisms to fall directly in his lap.

When one reads up on Anderson's story and biography, it becomes obvious that his films are generated and anchored in his life experiences. In *Bottle Rocket*, Anderson co-wrote the film with his best friend from college, Owen Wilson, and included his friends in production of the film after the short version impressed film industry members (Taylor, 2016). In *Rushmore*, Anderson uses his high school as the setting of the film, making the comparisons between Max and Anderson as a youth pertinent. Max aspires to create a façade of being in the upper class to the students of the school. He also is involved in an insatiable amount of extracurricular activities that correlate to Anderson's childhood fascination with the arts and atypical school work (Biography.com, 2018). Anderson and Max both engulf themselves in literature, plays, and films. Max directs and creates plays during the film, much like Anderson's

productions he created while attending school. In *The Royal Tenenbaums*, Etheline is an archaeologist like his mom, Texas. There are three siblings in the film, Anderson was part of a threesome of children as well. The parents are separated while the children are young, similar to Anderson's parents' divorce.

In *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, Anderson uses his love for Jacques Cousteau as a basis for the character of Steve Zissou. I also argue the redemption arc for Zissou and Royal Tenenbaum in their respective films are Anderson's desire for reconciliation with his father (again, not the point of this essay, but an interesting aside). In *Darjeeling Limited*, the theme of three continues with three brothers perusing the countryside of India in search of a spiritual conquest and eventually their mother. In *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, Anderson pays homage to one of his favorite childhood authors, Roald Dahl, with an imaginative recreation of the story. In *Moonrise Kingdom*, the theme of three again continues as Suzy has two brothers. Suzy's parents aren't divorced, but their discussions and actions suggest that love is lost and they just haven't taken the final step yet.

Starting with *The Grand Budapest Hotel* Anderson's direct connections to his personal life aren't as explicit as his previous films. Yet, the film still places characters with the urge to ascribe to upper class sensibilities, much like Max does in *Rushmore*. His latest film, *Isle of Dogs*, departs from most of his traditional sensibilities, yet the characteristic style and dialogue that separates Anderson from other filmmakers is still there. His themes generally follow a pattern of estranged fatherhood (*The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, *Darjeeling Limited*), have a deep obsession with childhood and the innocence that is associated with it, has untraditional

aesthetics and an affinity toward precision and organization, ascribes to upper class sentiments and sensibilities, and dialogue being monotonistic and deadpan for comedic and ironic purposes.

The detail Anderson includes in his films and the level of precision in his work indicate a mark of a pure craftsman, someone who thinks about almost every minute detail and the effect that detail will have on the story (Figueroa, 2015). Other critics find his directorial style excessively precise, that he overdetermines the placement of characters as if they were play things in a diorama (Edelstein, 2012). His style and aesthetics emphasize deep, rich colors, deadpan vocal delivery, and quirky sensibilities within his characters' interactions. In fact, his worlds are so hand crafted, Wilkins (2014) argues it is difficult to see an Andersonian character outside of their filmic world. The universes Anderson creates in his films often portrays the family as the center of the world. The whimsical processes behind the creation of an Anderson film highlight his imagination and attribution to projecting his values onto the world.

His usage of city spaces gentrifies the area and ignores the historical happenings that occurred in the neighborhood (Kredell, 2012). Anderson prevents the city his films take place in from asserting their own identity; he chooses to treat a location as a space to construct his own social universe (Kredell, 2012). The house in *The Royal Tenenbaums* is in Harlem, New York City, one of the most famous sights of historical gentrification in America.

Apart from his setting, Anderson's plots center on white masculinity and the white male protagonist in all his creations to this date except *Isle of Dogs*. Most features of his films work to create a universe where the white male is unapologetic,

the white male's desires take precedence above others, and ethnic or feminine Others are in place to help the white male develop and overcome his ailments. Orgeron (2007) argues that auteurs are enthralled by white male fantasies; they act as an attempt for adult males to justify their adolescence, harkening for a time in which masculinity and adulthood looked great and weren't as complex as they remembered.

As I elaborate more fully in the following chapters, America has come into a time of man-boy images and adolescent masculine performances becoming more and more normalized in media representations (Kusz, 2013; 2018). While not exactly matching a typical man-boy description, Anderson's white male characters often times concede to pubescent tendencies in their performances of masculinity, much like the mainstream renditions of Hollywood masculinity in this contemporary era. While possessing a unique quality that positions his creations on the fringes of popularity, many of the ideologies that societal elites want elicited to the masses still reside in Anderson's films, they are just not as apparent as in many Hollywood films.

While *Moonrise Kingdom* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel* will always have a special place in my heart along with Anderson's style and aesthetics will always have the ability to grab my attention, I recognize how the white male patriarch is central in his plots and the consistent framing of the white male as protagonist subordinates people of color, women, and the working class because they are repeatedly used to develop the white patriarch. Analyzing and challenging the proliferation of these views is essential in a mass mediated society where individuals can model themselves after media characters. But while many fans, film critics, and even academics may think Anderson's films are chic, different, or cool, the ideologies that organize the

storylines and characters that inhabit his films are not that different from those found in typical Hollywood films. This analysis looks to expose some of the ways Anderson and his films are interpreted as ‘going off the beaten path’ from typical Hollywood fare, or how his work is imagined through the category as an independent auteur, the representational patterns that structure *The Royal Tenenbaums* still participate in proliferating traditional and problematic racial, classed, and gendered performances, especially when it comes to the white men that appear on the screen.

Chapter 2: BCS, Power, and Masculinity

On Cultural Studies

Cultural studies has become a scholarly field since the 1950's beginning in Britain. British Cultural Studies (BCS) emerged from the work done at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in the 1960's and 1970's led by Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart (Fiske, 1996). Hall provides an essential summary of the social conditions that enabled the formation of the field of cultural studies in 1989:

“Cultural studies provided answers to the long process of Britain's decline as a world superpower. It also investigated the impact of modern mass consumption and modern mass society; the Americanization of our culture; the postwar expansion of the new means of mass communication; the birth of the youth cultures; the exposure of the settled habits and conventions and languages of an old class culture to the disturbing fluidity of new money and new social relationships; the dilution of the United Kingdom's very homogeneous social population by the influx of peoples from the new Commonwealth, the Caribbean, and the Asian subcontinent especially, leading to the formation, at the very heart and center of British cultural life, of Britain's cities, of their social and political existence, of the new black British diasporas of permanent settlement.”

These conditions created a new Britain- one whose culture changed dramatically after World War II. BCS was a mode of studying culture and making sense of the politics of

these social and cultural changes. Also, the field rejected high/low class distinction and popularized the idea that people consuming popular and folks culture were an active audience shaping how they made sense of the social conditions in which they lived and their social experiences (Hall, 1980).

A key focus of BCS work is to explain the meanings articulated in cultural texts. The field examines how meaning gets made from specific historical forces and conditions. BCS elaborates on how power connects with culture and explains the role and significance of social structures, institutions, and hierarchies in giving meaning to perceptions of lived experiences and cultural representations/performances. An important cultural category worthy of further analysis in my study is youth culture and how the rise of mass media affected adolescents.

Youth subcultures arose due to the conditions of a shifting society. Youth didn't need to rely on parental or familial traditions to be passed onto them post-World War II, they could develop values and belief systems outside of their families from a multitude of mediums they found values in such as television, advertisements, and film. This was a far cry from the intergenerational familial mode previously enlisted in establishing cultural norms and values (where traditions were passed down from older to younger generations) (Kusz, 2019). BCS helped Britain's youth fight the invisible regime who systematically pushed ideals onto the adolescents through forms of mass media (Durham & Kellner, 2006). Studying any and all forms of culture, especially various forms of popular culture like television, film, and sport, became an important piece of cultural studies because all forms were believed to be constitutive of the cultural shift Britain found itself in during the rise of mass/popular culture (Hall,

1980). BCS foci on youth and media cultures are especially pertinent to my project of studying how white masculinities are constructed in Wes Anderson films, as many of his white male characters that I focus on in my analysis ascribe to adolescent forms of masculinity that arose due to the boom of mass media.

Culture is not a singular practice created by a specific group of people, it is interwoven in all parts of life and is the product of the inter-relations of social, cultural, political, technologic, and economic forces and conditions. Historically, the study of culture by BCS scholars was approached in two different ways- structuralism and culturalism. In Stuart Hall's *Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms* (1980), he elaborates on these two different ideals for studying culture for BCS practitioners. Culturalism is a way of analyzing how everyday people give meaning to their social lives through the everyday cultures they produce. The understanding of culture as the product of multiple forces and conditions (and not reducible to economic conditions and relations) is aptly explained in Raymond Williams' *The Long Revolution* when he writes "... [culture is a product of] a radical interactionism: in effect, the interaction of all practices in and with one another, skirting the problem of determinacy. The distinctions between practices is overcome by seeing them all as variant forms of praxis-of a general human activity and energy." (2001). What Williams means here is that culturalism is a radical contextualization, one that emphasizes studying many factors that create everyday practices people give meaning to and how they create that meaning. Williams' piece rejects the notion of studying only the dominant or mainstream culture. Culturalists valued studying how lower-class individuals implement and develop a culture unique to their location, history, and everyday

interactions- they looked to shift studies from the aesthetic (high culture) to the anthropological (everyday culture) (Sparks, 1996). In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams argues against orthodox Marxist approaches that tended to be more structuralist in their methodology, stating “Thus, contrary to one development in Marxism, it is not the base and the superstructure that need to be studied, but specific and indissoluble real processes, within which the decisive relationship, from a Marxist point of view, is that expressed by the complex idea of determination.” (pg. 30-31 cited in Hall, 1980). Culturalists do not assume pre-existing power structures into their analysis, rather they look to examine how these structures manifest into ‘specific and indissoluble real processes’ like the everyday interactions and how individuals carrying out these processes and give meaning to them.

Structuralism refers to studying the content of a culture that prioritizes how structures (re)produce ideologies that predominantly serve, or, at least, fail to threaten, the interests of the dominant political and economic classes. Karl Marx laid the groundwork for structuralism with his work in which he coined the term ‘ideology’ and applied his theorizations to representations in social order in which he states that it is impossible to escape ideology, one only has the ability to recognize the ideology and resist or conform to its principles (Durham & Kellner, 2006). One such example we can look at for a social structure is how class operates. Class is determined mostly by your economic income and a social subject’s financial prosperity boundaries their ability to purchase goods and services. Those with more money can afford a list of products lower-income people cannot and their economic relations dictate their perceptions of the world. Those with power and money (bourgeoisie) disseminate

ideologies in an effort to maintain power in their communities through generations. The oppositional fields can be roughly distinguished and contrasted from a top-down approach (structuralism) and a bottom-up approach (culturalism). A top-down approach looks at the meanings imposed on forms of culture by economic and cultural elites that are produced through capitalism and social institutions like the media and sport (i.e. through the production and consumption of clothing, music, television shows, film, etc.) while a bottoms-up approach studies how people give meaning to culture in ways that follow, negotiate, or oppose (Hall cited in Fiske, 1996) the meanings imposed and preferred by those in power.

A point embedded in BCS analysis is a concern with how social subjects make meaning in life. Social subjects' experiences can only be perceived through the culture that the individual lives within. Language is the true marker of how one can create a discourse surrounding lived experiences. De Saussure (2010), through the field of semiotics, explains that all language is the formation of dyadic signs through the use of a signifier (the word or sound) and signified (the image related to the sound). Depending on which culture one resides in, the signified can be perceived substantially differently depending on the language used within that culture to interpret or create meaning. In other words, language constitutes the varied ways humans' experience the world and what they call 'reality.' The signs any of us use to make sense of ourselves, others, and the social world is enabled and constrained by the elements of language one speaks. All social relations are totally imaginary, yet these imaginary relations create our perceptions of the world through language and semiotics. For example, Germans have a word *Waldeinsamkeit*. The best English

translation for this word is ‘the feeling of being alone in the woods.’ This translation doesn’t do the word justice, as Germans generally use this word as a metaphor for a physical place one can retreat to in times of turmoil. English language constrains the translation and forces the word to alter its original meaning.

A seminal text for the understanding of how language operates structurally is Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies*. In his book he describes how “designed artifacts operate in a mass consumer culture: less as functional objects, and more as metaphorical vehicles of collective desire” (Huppertz, 2015). ‘Designed artifacts’ refers to the symbolic value of things in the world and how socially constructed meanings given to certain events or objects very often serve the ruling class’ prerogatives and operate as a form of social power. Barthes’ purpose of his book was to critically examine the cultural and political meanings of common ‘myths’ or ideals that seem commonplace, but truly signify something more than what is superficially apparent. A myth is a way to subtly communicate particular ideologies, a way to represent values as natural order of the world. The ideologies behind the myths Barthes describes can only be made sense in a particular culture at a particular time. The deeper meaning holds greater significance, and his book displays the complexity of meaning behind events, images, and historical happenings and how they serve certain political and social ideologies. Furthermore, he explains how minute details of mediated representation can serve a dominant class which, on the surface, seems unrelated to power and class. These details can be represented in film and Wes Anderson, and other filmmakers, are given ability to shape how the public perceives white masculinity because of the representational power directors are given. Cultural representations will be taken up in

different ways depending on the cultural ideas of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation that circulate in the social context in which they are consumed and given meaning.

My cultural studies methodology will be guided by Rosalind Gill's 2000 article, "Discourse Analysis" in *Qualitative Research with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*. In the spirit of Barthes' work, Gill's way of doing discourse analysis calls for skepticism toward taken-for-granted knowledge that the world generally accepts as true, a conviction that knowledge is socially constructed, a recognition that the world is culturally and historically specific and relative, and a commitment to exploring the way that knowledges are linked to actions/practices and social power (Burr, 1995 cited in Gill, 2000). My analysis also falls in line with Fairclough's (2002) discussion of critical discourse analysis (CDA) which examines how language used in communication transforms meaning. CDA is interested in the way speaking gives meaning to experiences from a particular perspective in a particular event and social field (Markula & Silk, 2011). BCS and CDA both assume and acknowledge the relationship between media and social power and how those with power control the way people discuss phenomenon and shape perceptions on the event, subject, or object in examination. Social power is the ability to get one's groups' interests served by the social structure as a whole whereas social struggle is the contestation of subordinated groups resisting the dominant groups' ideologies and attempting to construct and gain legitimacy for their ideologies and counter-narratives (Fiske, 1996).

The concept of poststructuralism will help guide my analysis as well.

Poststructuralism calls into questions the structuralist view of determinacy. The ideology believes that structures matter, but they are not the determinant factor in a culture. Althusser's (2005) idea of overdetermination is another foundational theory for a poststructuralist view. He states that most social formations are constructed by contradictory forces that both affect and are affected by one another. The conditions of a certain text or subject/object shape and boundary perceptions of that phenomenon. Those who recognize and witness patterns in discourse and language through history can recognize repeating themes and predict outcomes. Overdetermination and poststructuralism both place emphasis on the language and signs used to create a discourse surrounding a certain event, object or subject in a historical context through analyzing power in structures. An emphasis in my analysis will be placed on both the language used in Wes Anderson's films, and also how his representations of white masculinity is the culmination of a number of discrete historical forces that mark whiteness and masculinity as natural in the Cineplex.

BCS work began in the 1960's and has continued to grow into an important field of study. The field progressed into an argument between culturalism and structuralism and which form of study should take precedence in BCS scholarship. Now, both are used, to an extent, and are bridged by Gramscian theory (Leitch, 1991) in an attempt to explain the complexities of cultural formations. Poststructuralism is also a relevant field for analyzing culture that doesn't view structures as the determinant factor. Where humans live and the ideologies disseminated into the masses heavily determine how people interact and interpret different cultural forms.

On Hegemony and Power

Discourse and media representations are controlled by those who control the production of media content. They dictate how certain events and characteristics are portrayed and modeled. According to Durham and Kellner (2006) "...feminists, multiculturalists, and members of a wide range of subordinate groups, detected that ideologies also reproduced relations of domination in the arenas of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and further domains of everyday life" (pg. xiv). Most pertinent in our discussion is how these ideals are reproduced in film and television shows. Furthermore, the ruling class promote their world views and constantly reproduce these beliefs so that their view becomes the commonplace way of understanding society. When it becomes the norm, the ideas that form hegemonic cultural ideologies become naturalized as facts and are difficult to see through their socially constructed character. This process of redefining values and ideologies to serve society's elites is called cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). Over time, these processes become invisible, effectively misleading the people of the society into believing that the ideas of the ruling class represent the social material interests of all citizens. Gramsci created this theory based off a proletariat and bourgeoisie class based system and attributed much of the subordination strictly to lower classes, but this ideal has and can easily be implemented in our contemporary American society. The American system preaches meritocracy, egalitarianism, and bootstrapism (or pulling yourself up by your bootstraps and immediately getting back to work) (Leonard, 2017). An example of how hegemony operates is the ruling elites appeal for equal opportunity for all peoples, no matter what race, gender, or class position one resides in American

society. This sort of ideology doesn't confront the subordination of marginalized communities that continue to date and ignores the white, patriarchal background that founded this nation (Alexander, 2010; Hinton, 2016). Part of the work cultural studies scholars perform is exposing the motivation behind the ideas made important or 'normal' in popular culture.

Cultures are formed around the knowledge the masses receive. According to Michel Foucault, power directly impacts the production of knowledge through the privileging of particular language/discourses in particular social and institutional context over others (Hall, 2001). The conversations one has or can have about certain stories are determined by the historically specific discourses available to a person because cultural discourses govern the way a(n) subject/object can be meaningfully talked about (Foucault, 1972 cited in Hall, 2001). Alternatively, selecting and normalizing a particular discourse in a given space and time can rule out ways of discussing a subject. As Fiske (1996) explains it, discourse is a complex product of "... [a] reference to the area of social experience that it makes sense of, to the social location from which that sense is made, and to the linguistic or signifying system by which that sense is both made and circulated." (pg.129). Discourses are impacted by the geographic location of the people discussing the phenomenon, circulating ideologies available to the people experiencing the phenomenon, and presentational form through a medium for the phenomenon in question. The constraints of discourse disallow competing interpretations of a particular phenomenon, and the hegemony can effectively control the masses through these constraints.

Control of discourses is achieved through the Althusserian idea of ‘interpellation.’ Otherwise known as ‘hailing,’ it is defined as how individuals’ sense of self is in fact shaped for them by forces beyond our control and even their awareness (Althusser, 2010). Interpellation calls into question that state of humans’ agency and if people are passive or active in their interpretations of the world. Being ‘hailed’ is turning an individual into a subject because once a person responds to the hailing, they take part in an ideology. Althusser (2005) explains it as “a material ritual practice of ideological recognition in everyday life.” These normalized practices work to shape and constrain how one responds and perceives ideologies. Interpellation is a determining factor in constituting how an individual’s performances of masculinity are (in)appropriate in a culture and what the consequences are for not conforming to dominant boundaries of performativity.

On Masculinity

Masculinity is another important topic that will be broached in my analysis. In this thesis, I assume that gender expectations are not biologically determined traits innate to particular bodies but are a set of cultural ideas that people learn to follow and embody through processes of socialization. The idea of expected gendered roles being socially constructed goes unacknowledged for most of the Western world as individuals believe the social world to be an objective reality rather than a product of humans’ interactions and interpretations’ based off of their cultural ideologies (Martin, 2004). Many modern day biologists/geneticists are still searching for a specific gene, hormone, or biological factor that differentiates gender formation from one another in

a biological perspective (Kruijver, et al., 2000; Schneider, Pickel, & Stalla, 2006). Some people today still ascribe to an essentialist point of view of gender that argues masculinity and femininity are intrinsically entrenched in bodies (Buchbinder, 2013). Opposing essentialism, constructionists believe the idea of masculinity and femininity is learned through ideas and behaviors from the culture(s) in which one is socialized (Beynon, 2002; Buchbinder, 2013). The binary idealism behind essentialists' theorizations comes from Darwinism and the idea of 'obligatory heterosexuality' (Rubin, 1997 cited in Buchbinder, 2013). Rubin used this phrase to describe how non-heterosexual practices are marked as unnatural, which can be traced back to the idea that all societies need to continue procreating in order to reproduce itself. This type of ideology has allowed heterosexuality to be normative in American culture for years and still guides much of Hollywood's representations of romantic relationships.

Throughout history, gender ideals have changed and continue to change as our society shifts. The following section is a broad historicization of how gender ideals have changed. In the 1950's our ideas and conceptions of masculinity were that men should toil in the workplace, supporting their families financially, while women should control the domestic sphere, supporting their family through housekeeping and caregiving (Kimmel, 1996). The norms began to change with the fall of unions and stagnating wages as America's labor and culture transitioned from industrial to post-industrial. More families now found themselves in the need of more than a single financial provider and as a consequence, the idea of women working became more commonplace. Although much emphasis will be given to the 1990's 'crisis in masculinity,' it is important to note that masculinity has been labeled in crisis since the

Victorian era. The idea of woman raising the boys equated emerging masculinities with femininity (Bly, 1990 cited in Jeffords, 1994; Buchbinder, 2013). Yet, if men retreated to the domestic sphere they would become feminized as well. This dichotomy created contradictions that many ‘masculinity in crisis’ theorists couldn’t account for (Buchbinder, 2013).

Progressive movements also became an important part of the 1960’s and 1970’s where African-Americans, women, and LGBTQ+ communities rose up and fought for their rights with more vigor, political progress, and national coverage than previous generations (Beynon, 2002; Kimmel, 1996). The rising tides of these progressive movements and our economy transitioning to a two provider income along with the societal shift from Fordism to Post-Fordism (Beynon, 2002) helped propel a complicated social gender construction or a perceived ‘crisis in masculinity.’ The service industry (Post-Fordism) was a far cry from the previous industrial one (Fordism) - one in which the idea of men typically working with their hands and continuing the manual labor form of masculinity their fathers pursued (Beynon, 2002; Kimmel, 1996). This created a ‘feminization of employment’ that refers to more woman being in the workplace, but also to the idea of new technologies feminizing the role of workers, taking tools out of males’ hands and making them less ‘manly’ (Beynon, 2002).

Without the ability to pursue the same masculinities as their fathers before them, a new social construct of masculinity emerged and became dominant (Kimmel, 1996). Culture is constantly negotiated, there are always residual, emergent, and dominant cultural forms at any given time (Williams, 1980). Dominant are the main

ideas being perpetuated in media representations that serve majority groups- these are every day practices and rituals individuals are immersed and normalized in that serve the majority's interests, emergent are the non-dominant representations that are becoming more and more popularized and can further be broken down to oppositional (against the dominant) or alternative (a different, new way of representing ideologies that champion hegemonic beliefs), and residual are the influences of previous generations' cultural practices on modern society, whether consciously or unconsciously implemented. The image of the always knowledgeable, forever having the answer man (typical of the 1950's and 1960's, emphasized in shows like *The Andy Griffith Show*) became residual to a man more in touch with progressive movements in media representations of men in the 1990's (Beynon, 2002). Masculinity that is dominant during the 1950's is residual today, but still has effects on contemporary masculinity. One contemporary example is the rise of Trump's political administration. The residual effects of older masculinities hold pertinence to his claim of 'Make America Great Again.' His slogan conjures images of traditional forms of masculinity that are espoused to ideologies that call for a reduction in non-white, non-hetero initiatives to make way for masculine pursuits of individualized, white heroism. The emphasis in 'Great Again' calls for a time when America was perceived to be great to white males, a time when white males were unapologetic for their racist, classist, and sexist remarks that perpetually subordinated Others and could get away with devious actions that are sanctioned, or at least frowned upon, in contemporary times. The shifting tides of economic relations forecast a newly appropriated construction of masculinity to fit within the confines of what majority groups deem as

necessary for proliferation into society based upon their aspirations for control of certain ideologies. Cultural masculinity is a constant struggle between conformity to dominant ideologies and resistance to said ideologies (Fiske, 1996).

Media representations are a key cultural site through which youth are exposed to various models of masculinity and learn ways of performing masculinity (Moss, 2011). Through mediated representations of masculinity, individuals perform (Butler, 1990) these ideals to conform to the tropes one is wishing to emulate that has been effectively disseminated into mainstream culture. Those who do not conform their masculinity in culturally appropriate ways can be ostracized or even punished (Beynon, 2002). Media representations of masculinity and femininity are an ideal way to carry out social messages for furthering the majority group's control (Moss, 2011). Societal elites are constantly working to control the messages the masses perceive as 'true.' Masculinity is always under threat and needs to constantly be reachieved. This is why televisual displays of effective male performance are incredibly popular (Fiske, 1996). Furthermore, traditional socially constructed ideologies of masculinity are constantly placed in contemporary media (i.e. the Western genre as the embodiment of white male freedom in films like *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* and the remake of *3:10 to Yuma*) as men wish for a time where they could chase the similar initiatives their fathers and forefathers pursued and television and film allows them to vicariously live their fantasies without failure, injury, or leaving their family.

Male role models are media fabrications that, when read critically, can be seen as an index of the cultural ideas about masculinity that are made popular at a particular time in history because they are useful to political and economic elites in garnering

public consent for particular ideas, ways of being and knowing the world, and social relations that serve the power bloc at that time (Moss, 2011). Relatedly, media representations of masculinity influence how men think of themselves. Generally media representations of masculinity in film and television—like the popular John Wayne frontiersman figure of the 1950's—are unattainable for most men in their actual lives (Moss, 2011). The social process through which men construct their masculine identity via established archetypes and contemporary figures of masculinity is what Moss (2011) calls 'modeling.' For many men, specific models of masculinity visible in media culture become a goal for how they should perform their masculinities, despite the unreachable status of many forms of mediated masculinity (Moss, 2011). Modeling after mediated representations of masculinity often includes consumption of goods and services (Moss, 2011). Entire industries have been and continue to be created for men to pursue mediated models of masculinity. Magazines were created for male self-help, listing tips and tricks that would help one appear more masculine and become closer to the idealized model men were searching for, among an extensive list of other 'masculine' tips and tricks Moss (2011) details.

Self-help books and idealized performances of masculinity differ between groups of men. There are many forms of masculinity and not all forms can be claimed by men because of the color of their skin color. While not the focus of my analysis, it is important to note how race is currently discussed because one of the characters under analysis shows strong racial resentment. Critical Race Theory (CRT) gives a tool in which one can study race as a social construct (Delgado, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Race has no true and absolute biological basis, it derives from the

cultural social conditions of a particular society at a given moment in time. A poignant example is Obama and his campaign run. To some members of society he was seen as ‘too black’ and yet others didn’t think he was ‘black enough’ because he didn’t descend from slavery. The perception of Obama’s ‘blackness’ was determined by the geographic location and cultural implications of their social constructed ideologies of race. CRT helps further the idea of race mattering at all times in every social setting despite discussions of America living in a post-racial society (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). It also examines how oppression works in sexed, classed, raced, and gendered ways, not ignoring one for another (Delgado, 2002). Boundaries depending on race now work in a hidden manner as race related ideologies are embedded in American society and are not as explicit as years prior (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Whiteness is normative in American culture and cultural categorizations and stereotypes depending on race work to marginalize and de-legitimize people of color because of constant comparison to the white norm (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

In media representations of black males, some modeled representations painfully follow the stereotypes of black masculinity. Illegally garnering money, violent, criminal, unintelligent, and performing the role of a gangster are portrayed by black men in movies like *Belly*, *Juice*, and *Get Rich or Die Trying*. The wave of New Black Realism cinema, which became popularized in the 1990’s and is still relevant today, centers on young black male protagonists with a nihilistic tendency toward violence (Boylorn, 2017). Many of these films were concerned with what it meant to prove masculinity or be a man in the black community (Boylorn, 2017). Youth generally have an easier time relating with on screen performances if the actress/actor

looks like them (Moss, 2011). The proliferation of this form of masculinity doesn't allow youth to model themselves after safe forms of masculinity. As is shown in the 2016 Best Picture winner *Moonlight*, if youth do not see safe representations of masculinity, they will model themselves after the community members they see as providers despite the illegalities of their operations, effectively recycling problematic forms of masculinity for future generations.

Chapter 3: Social Context and Film

On Historical Context

One cannot begin an analysis of *The Royal Tenenbaums* without first detailing the forces and conditions of the historical context in which the cultural text was produced. *The Royal Tenenbaums* premiered October 5th, 2001, less than a month after September 11th, 2001. 9/11, of course, heavily impacted the ideas that circulated and were accepted as common sense within American culture and society. So, even though technically *The Royal Tenenbaums* premiered in the post-9/11 context, the film was conceived prior to 9/11 and should be read as a product of the cultural and political conditions of the 1990's America and namely the anxieties/fears that constituted the so called 'crisis of (white) masculinity.' The characters under analysis from *The Royal Tenenbaums*, Royal, Richie, Chas, Etheline, and Margot, both conform and diverge from hegemonic masculine/feminine representations. Richie generally matches elements of the 'new man' and 'man-boy', Royal the 'hard body', Chas the 'hard body' and 'man-boy', and how both Margot and Etheline resist stereotypical ideas about femininity superficially, but reproduce some common ideas about femininity through their portrayals. All men are meant to be shown to transition to a 'new man', or at least a version of masculinity that is more progressive than their current performances by film's end.

The 1990's 'crisis of masculinity' discourse gets produced in the aftermath of 1980's, a time when the 'hard body,' a cultural figure associated with the era of Reaganism, was hegemonic (Jeffords, 1994). This version of masculinity was an

imagined solution to a perceived crisis initiated by the progressive movements during the 1960's and 1970's in which white men believed they lost much of their perceived power for the empowerment of traditionally marginalized communities (Beynon, 2002). The hard body was a performance of masculinity that favored extreme muscularity, risk-taking behaviors, and the return of stoicism in men, representing a retrogressive call for more traditional forms of masculinity in the media (Malin, 2005). Jeffords (1994) states that the rise in the 1980's performance of masculinity came as a response to changes in gender norms where there was a growing pressure for men to display and adhere to feminine characteristics such as assisting in the domestic sphere, encouraging subordinated communities to receive more power in the political realm, and expressing emotions.

Presidential performances of masculinity generally play a key role in legitimating a particular way of embodying and performing masculinity in the American public. In Reagan's era, male characters embodying individualism, liberty, militarism, and mythic heroism were favored and these figures personified many ideas central to his political stances (Jeffords, 1994). Reagan and his administration attempted to constitute the actions of individual persons and make them symbols of the nation. Thus, the triumphs and failures of individuals were represented as cause for national glory or downfall (Jeffords, 1994). One such example is the way the US' controversial decision to invade Grenada was framed. Rather than question the US' involvement, mainstream media outlets used the occasion to celebrate US intervention and framed Reagan as a hero, as if he himself saved the students at St. George's School of Medicine from a brutal government regime in 1983. US intervention

certainly assisted in saving the students, but the media framed the story to focus on Reagan's 'individualistic actions' to save the group (Jeffords, 1994).

Given the importance of the hard body figure to Reaganism, films of 1980's featured actors like Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger, who were known more for their muscles and physique than their acting abilities. These two white men starred in movies such as *The Terminator*, *Conan the Barbarian*, and *First Blood* in this era. These white male bodies were created as spectacles to be consumed, and their popularity positioned the hard body as the visual representation of Reaganism's ideologies (Savran, 1998). Reaganism employed these images of white men to represent what he saw as the heroes of American culture through their individualistic actions serving the ideologies the administration wanted to disseminate into society. As a form of hegemonic control, the retelling of national stories as individual feats of heroics constrained the discourse surrounding national crises during this era (Fiske, 1996). This hardened white male body, which is synonymous with the American nation in this era, also lionized ideas that manly endeavors should always be pursued despite the repercussions that may occur, and that white males were the key figures in American society and public policies should be built around *their* initiatives first and foremost.

Another cultural event that both constituted the idea of a 'crisis in masculinity' in the early 1990's and offered another imagined solution is Robert Bly's novel *Iron John: A Book about Men* and the mythopoetic men's movement that grew out of it. A number of theorists discuss and critique the cultural and political importance of Bly's work (Beynon, 2002; Buchbinder, 2013; Connell, 1995; Jeffords, 1994; Kimmel,

1996; Malin, 2005; Savran, 1998). Bly's movement called for men to make weekend retreats into the woods to escape what they saw as an increasingly feminized household (and more broadly, a feminized American society). Bly forwarded a collection of myths about male bonding, and used 'primitive' Native American like rituals as a means for promoting male escape to their 'natural,' inner masculine self.

Followers and leaders of the Bly's movement believe that the combination of the women's, civil rights, and gay liberation of past recent years and the continuing feminization of the post-industrial workplace was subjugating men and distancing them away from their masculine 'inner warrior.' To indicate the popularity of Bly's ideas about restoring male rituals and male bonding, his book, and a number of others in the same vein, stayed on the New York Times Bestseller list for months. Men's movement critiques are largely characterized by men blaming women for the emotional distress and discontent that anxious white males were feeling (Beynon, 2002), turning men to individualistic (rather than remaining in a feminized home) pursuits to find their inner self (Kimmel, 1996), and negotiating male anxieties as men attempted to address and change conceptions of masculinity to hold onto a 'more masculine' past (Malin, 2005). As a perceived solution to the 'crisis,' men like Bly blamed feminism for men having to critically reflect on and negotiate their masculine identities.

As the popularity of Bly's movement waned, a new male figure gained prominence: the new man (Malin, 2005). The 'new man' was, again, influenced by the civil rights, women's and gay liberation movements during the 1960's-1970's. Most notably, the 'new man' was portrayed as not being afraid to talk about his emotions.

This male way of being was yet another imagined solution to the perceived crisis in masculinity previously mentioned, albeit a much different response than the hard body of the 1980's and Bly's mythopoetic men's movement. The new man embraced many of the ideas and values of progressive movements and performed a new way of being man that resisted traditional male stereotypes. At the same time, if need be, the new man could reproduce the hardened man of the past when it serves his interests.

As the 1990's wore on, new variants on the new man figure appeared in popular American culture. One variant of the new man was the 'little man,' as dubbed by Malin (2005). The little man is a man who is soft, affectionate, and questions traditional masculinity. The 'little man' diverged from traditional masculine expectations to a larger degree and displays some insecurity due to this. Because of this anxiety about how he performs masculinity, he often attempts to prove his masculinity in an over-the-top manner. An example of the 'new man' includes Ross Geller from *Friends*. Geller is in touch with his emotions, doesn't conform his life around traditional masculinist pursuits, but displays fits of anger that arise in certain situations and invokes stereotypical masculine ideals. An example of a 'little man' in contemporary media is Robert Daly in the Netflix's episode 'USS Callister' in their hit anthology *Black Mirror*. Robert Daly fits this mold because he creates a fantasy, virtual world where he is an all-powerful male and able to control the actions of all his co-workers in response to the resentment he feels because he doesn't control the company he helped create. Little men figures often display an insatiable need for masculine authority and control in response to gender-based anxiety, insecurity, and resentment. A key aspect of the little man is he imagines himself as a victim of the

social changes wrought by modern society and is blind to the social privileges he enjoys due to him being white, male, and straight (Malin, 2005).

Just as Jeffords (1994) highlighted the similarities between the hard body figures prominent in American media culture in the 1980's and the ideas that informed the policies of Reaganism, Malin (2005) argues that, the 'new man' of the 1990's was often constructed and imagined through US President Bill Clinton's performance of white masculinity. Ryan and Kellner (1988) argue that presidential performance of masculinity often play a key role in shaping the forms of masculinity that are made popular during their time in office. Since Clinton was in office for most of the 1990's, his performance of white masculinity impacted the forms of white masculinity that were popularized in US culture. In particular, it bears noting that Clinton was a man who represented conflicting ideas about masculinity that served a 'crisis' quite well. His election came off three terms where Republicans occupied the White House. President Carter was the last Democrat elected before Clinton in 1977, and his presidency is popularly imagined as him being an indecisive leader. His lack of success in governing and the fear created from Reagan's policies is the alleged catalyst for leading many Democrats to flee the party and vote for Reagan and Republican policies in 1980 concluding in Republican control of the White House (Jeffords, 1994; Ryan & Kellner, 1988). Reaganism was marked by staunch conservative shifts represented by Hollywood's extreme depictions of masculinity, previously discussed (Jeffords, 1994).

Taking cues from critiques of Carter's administration, Clinton ran on a platform that advocated for tough street crimes and continued the war on drugs while

still outwardly championing progressive policies that the modern Democratic Party is known for (Hinton, 2016). Although Clinton advocated for progressive policies, his actions suggested that his campaign stances may have just been for winning the election. He promoted progressive policies such as universal health care that would have disproportionately helped the lower classes (Clinton, 1992), (which would have disproportionately helped people of color due to the racial gap wealth disparity placing many people of color within the lower class (McKernan, et al., 2017)), yet signed the 1994 bill ‘Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act’, which systematically oppressed people of color by increasing surveillance in marginalized communities and furthering privatization of the prison industrial complex, making it even more profitable for companies to imprison individuals, which has been known to jail people of color at a higher rate than their white counterparts (Alexander, 2010; Hinton, 2016). He advocated for gender equality through the image of Hilary and him being a power couple, yet he participated in marital transgressions in his White House office with Monica Lewinsky and other extramarital affairs that eventually led to his impeachment. Clinton’s performance of white masculinity seemed progressive superficially, but his implemented, conservative leaning initiatives evidently hurt the communities he promised to help. Clinton’s performance of white masculinity led the public to perceive him as race, gender, and class fluid, but his political decisions suggested otherwise. African-American writer Toni Morrison even goes as far to say that Clinton was the first ‘black president’ (1998).

Aside from his politics, Clinton represented the ability to bounce between classes and races with ease. He was born to a working class family in Arkansas, but

was a graduate of Yale. He could comfortably walk into a working class barbecue joint back home, or host a correspondent dinner at the White House. Clinton held the top position in America while his wife, Hilary, worked in top US security positions, eventually working her way to Secretary of State. Even his public perception of his personal life was progressive compared to most president/first lady gender roles. These conflicted representations of Clinton serve as a model for the friction in hegemonic masculinity that proliferates in the 1990's (Malin, 2005). While maintaining a progressive position to the general public, his political initiatives harkened for conservative ideals. Clinton's mediated representation and politics were extremely conflicted and serve as a figurehead for a 'crisis in masculinity.'

During the mid to late 1990's within American media culture, there emerged some representations of adolescent performances of masculinity (Moss, 2011). Moss argues this turn to adolescent behavior is men's acknowledgement of never being able to meet the standards of masculinity they remember their fathers possessing (Moss, 2011). Youth didn't have a roadmap to masculinity like previous generations have had due to the influx of varied media representations, shifting social and labor relations redefining masculinity, and the rise of women's, civil rights, and gay liberation calling into question forms of traditional masculinity, so most men allowed child-like humor to suffice for their lack of ability to perform masculinity like their fathers (Moss, 2011). The material conditions of the social world changed, leading new forms of masculinity to not presume the same form as traditional versions. While noting a rise in adolescent masculinity before the 1990's, the proliferation of this form of masculinity didn't surface in popularity until said decade because white male as victim

of society portrayals began to multiply due to increasing pressure to conform to resistant ideologies about masculinity the progressive initiatives called for (Beynon, 2002). White males who perceive victimization have a tendency to revert to adolescent ways of behavior as a means to counter societal expectations of their masculinity (Moss, 2011). Shows like *Beavis and Butt-head* and *The Simpsons* portrayed men and boys as not growing up and being unattached to stereotypical masculine representations. The proliferation of adolescent masculine portrayals allows men to model themselves after the mediated representations. The desire not to be like the fathers who raised them and also not possessing the ability to perform masculinity the same way their fathers have are important for understanding men during this era. Even Ross Geller from *Friends*, my previous example of the ‘new man,’ is often times correlated with adolescent behavior as he continuously competes with his sibling, Monica (even as an accomplished adult) and has child-like bursts of rage and an adolescent necessity to always be right.

In the post-9/11 era, there are a number of exceedingly eccentric man-boy films that critique traditional masculinity for the sake of laughter and wit. Many of Will Ferrell’s films (*Blades of Glory*, *Anchorman*, *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*, etc.) speak volumes to this rise in adolescent comedy that began to emerge in popular culture in the 1990’s (Kusz, 2018). While Wes Anderson films do not match Will Ferrell’s formula for adolescent masculinity, they do share the desire to retain parts of their childhood in adult life. Likewise, some of Wes Anderson’s white male characters match the ‘new man’ characteristics and Anderson positions the transition of a traditional man to a new man at the center of his cinematic world.

Anderson's films also offer another commentary, namely how contemporary men imagine their masculinity in relation to their father.

On a final note about the male figures that have emerged, been prominent, and resided in visibility over the past few decades, I want to discuss changes in the way that father figures been represented historically, especially during the aforementioned time period. It is important to note that portrayals of father figures have always been a key site for the production of ideas about masculinity in American society (Malin, 2005). Beginning in the 1950's there were many father figures that were tough, hard, and seemed to know the correct answer to any situation. Up to the 1980's, media representations of father figures generally portrayed them as providers, protectors of the family, and as the 'rock' the family could rely on for consistent, unwavering characteristics. Following the trend producing the 'new man,' 1990's father figures were represented not only in traditional ways as a guide, protector, and provider for their family, but also as being more in touch with emotions and softening the lessons they teach their children about relationships, school, and society in general (exemplified by Alan Matthews in *Boy Meets World*). As time progressed, media representations of fathers began to show cracks in their armor (Malin, 2005). Modern day media representations of fathers in familial roles vary from non-existent (i.e. Showtime's *Shameless*) to combatting being over-involved in their family's life (i.e. *Modern Family*).

On Film Representation

Hollywood has a tendency to make films viewed from, and created for, white eyes. Whiteness and maleness are usually unmarked in media and many times they are the assumed norm in filmic landscapes. Many children aspire to be the white role models they see on film because they assume that they can actually fulfill the requirements to be these role models (Moss, 2011). This is also true of for children of color and working class youth, but at some point they learn about the obstacles opposing their dreams. Dyer (1988) states “the invisibility of whiteness colonizes the definitions of other norms- class, gender, heterosexuality, nationality, and so on- it also masks whiteness as itself a category.” Here, Dyer means that whiteness works to normalize itself in society and not categorize itself, the norms of American society are actually white norms in place through reproduction of (white) ideologies. White skin presumes the absence of ethnicity, leaving white individuals racially unmarked. Dyer’s discussion analyzes lighting in Hollywood in which he theorizes that whites look ideal, bright, and even whiter than usual. Bright colors are used depicting orientation to the upper classes and darker colors are used to depict lower class workers, functioning to make white the pinnacle in visual representation (Kuchta, 1998). Whiteness as the norm can create identification issues for non-whites attempting to model themselves after a cinematic portrayal. Frantz Fanon (1967) elaborates on the point of whiteness as the filmic norm remarkably in *Black Skin, White Masks*. As a boy, he would watch movies in his all black community in French colonized Martinique, specifically mentioning *Tarzan*. The boys in his community wanted to be Tarzan, but when Fanon arrived to France to continue his education, the

white French citizens correlated Fanon more with the monkeys than his childhood hero. His shock also relates to a personal experience- my girlfriend Alishia is from mixed race origins- German and African-American. Throughout her childhood, she spent hours upon hours straightening her hair because, I argue, she never saw a representation of a role model donning natural African-American hair. She wanted to be more like the white Disney princesses her childhood revolved around and assumed society would ostracize her if she didn't match those aesthetics. The invisibility of whiteness in media can cause a multitude of issues that are superficially unsighted because of whiteness being the standard.

Historically, maleness is also very often unmarked in media and frequently represented as the norm. In modern times, especially in man-boy films, this pattern is changing as many films are now created to critique white masculinity. Laura Mulvey in her pivotal piece *Visual Pleasure and Cinema* (1975), explains how typical film directors generally mark the audience's view from a male perspective. Through psychoanalytic work, she reveals how women are more so depicted as objects for male viewing and pleasure. Traditionally, women are either used for eroticization for characters onscreen or for viewers at home. This eroticization depends heavily on the writer and director of the film, which more times than not it is a male behind the scenes (Ryan & Kellner, 1988). While not all films are oriented by what Mulvey called 'the male gaze,' (a 'female gaze' can be seen in movies like *Girlfight*, *The Wedding Planner* and *The Devil Wears Prada*) this model stills hold truth in majority of contemporary movies such as *Transformers*, *Resident Evil: The Final Chapter*, and

Underworld: Blood Wars, just to name a few. Women now claim more roles in film and are allowed bigger, more productive actions both on screen and off.

One of the promising things media offers is marginalized masculinities to be popularized or, at the very least, to be acknowledged in society. Promising, yet also problematic in the sense that alarming and questionable masculinities can appear and become popularized. Through a number of media circulations that took place in the 1980's and 1990's and a few initiatives to make the marginalized communities closer to equality, white males felt that their place in society is questioned and they didn't have the opportunities that were once only available to them (Beynon, 2002; Malin, 2005). An example of one of the initiatives working to make life more equitable for subordinated communities, but allowed white conservatives to perceive they lost power, was affirmative action. Affirmative action called for the supposed betterment of people of color and woman alike. Recently in a Cultural Studies class I assist with grading, a white male wrote anecdotes on his final exam about how his white friend wasn't allowed admission into UCONN because a less qualified black student was accepted to meet the affirmative action recommendation. Despite the history of subordination people of color experience that he was learning in that class and the years of privilege he doesn't want to admit he's enjoyed, the idea of whites as victims was engrained into his thoughts, so he only needed one example to reject the ideologies that were taught in that class. White male as victim, one of the leading factors in the 'crisis in masculinity' (Malin, 2005), is portrayed in a number of popular films at this time and in current films such as *Fight Club* (Kusz, 2002), *The Wrestler*, *The Green Mile*, and, most importantly for this analysis, *The Royal Tenenbaums*.

Generally speaking, political conservatives and the white middle/upper classes believe that America operates as a totally egalitarian and meritocratic society, except when they can find a way to position themselves as victims. Most believe that an individual's race, gender, or class doesn't constrain one's ability to achieve. With hard work and determination, anyone can rise above and live the American dream- a dream where one is wealthy and successful by way of sheer toughness, fighting spirit, and a never going to quit attitude (this ideology dates back to the Protestant Work Ethic of colonial American times). Those who accept these hegemonic ideologies believe their values to be absolutely true, even with the plethora of research showing the systems of oppression in governmental decrees heavily favor white, cis-gender, upper class males (Alexander, 2010; Anderson, 2017; Hinton, 2016). Recently, I visited my grandmother's neighborhood in Worcester, Massachusetts. A for sale sign was placed in front of a house, next to it a sign reading "White, quiet neighborhood." The need for the owner to emphasize that the neighborhood is white and quiet speaks to the discrimination and stereotypes that still holds precedence in our society, whether conservative middle class whites reject it or not.

The ideology of a society based around meritocracy and egalitarianism gets reproduced in media because they serve the ruling class' cultural, political, and economic interests. The media has the power to effectively (re)produce ideologies because it pervades most people's daily lives. One cannot walk down a city street, or watch a video on a free streaming video site without advertisements hounding their every move. Companies fight for the best advertising spots, usually the one with the most money wins, and these ads aim to garner higher revenues for the companies'

investment. Americans use media to learn about all forms of news, and are usually at the vagary of whichever media outlet they chose to learn about the world from. One's world view can be shaped by the ideologies outlets offer, most important in this analysis is filmmaker Wes Anderson's portrayal of white masculinity in turn of the century America and the ideologies (re)produced from his characters.

A discussion will also be had of the ethnic Other Anderson uses across many of his films that serves his white characters. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) will be used to discuss how Anderson's characters are representations of a white male's ideological and colonialization power over the Orient construct. The Orient is a white colonial imagination of Asian countries, a place of supposed "romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (Said, 1978). The Orient helps define the West as its contrasting image, idea, personality, and experience (Said, 1978). Orientalism is the Western style for domination over the Orient by "teaching it, settling it, ruling over it, describing it, and authorizing views of it" (Said, 1978).

Anderson uses characters that serves the white males of the family while simultaneously subjugating the character through traditional tropes of white imagination of the Orient. White males in power positions project values they believe to be associated with the East onto characters, situations, and events even if these characteristics are not sufficiently true. This is problematic as white filmic representations of the Orient add further deception to the actual characteristics of Eastern peoples. It also doesn't allow Asians agency in identification in societies outside their countries. Their identities are constructed for them based on (white) mediated cultural representations of their people and society.

***The Royal Tenenbaums* Literature Review**

As discussed in Chapter 2, British Cultural Studies is interested in examining not only how meaning is constructed in cultural texts from specific historical forces and conditions in a particular moment in society, but also the politics of the meanings of those texts. In this analysis, I aim to highlight the ways Wes Anderson reproduces traditional ideas about white masculinity despite employing an alternative, quirky representational style in his films that urges many to read his films as hip, edgy, and different. Anderson represents what some have called an “Indiewood” director meaning styles generally associated with independent filmmaking received Hollywood type money for grander productions (King, 2009; Tzioumakis, 2013). I want to argue that Anderson’s films became popular in the masses because the ideas about gender and race portrayed in his films aligned well with those that were made popular at the turn of the 21st century. Stated a bit differently, Anderson’s art-house films gained a broader following and were embraced by Hollywood distributors, at least in part, because their representations of white masculinity served the interests of those in power. More specifically, like many other popular cultural texts of the time, Anderson’s films offered images and narratives that position white males as victims in society and are marked by a nostalgia for previous historical moments when white men could be unapologetic about their entitlement. One thing that is unique about Anderson’s film, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, is that he created a novel world on the screen that is almost wholly centered on the exploits of a wealthy, yet dysfunctional white family—the Tenenbaums. The story is driven by the negative impacts of the

pain that the insecure white patriarch, Royal Tenenbaum, has caused for almost all those with whom he crosses paths, but especially his wife, biological sons, and adopted daughter. What I aim to show is how this film that is centered on the seemingly bizarre habits and world of a wealthy white family becomes yet another cultural text of this era that constructs a story of white men in crisis. At first glance, audiences are urged to sympathize with the pain that all of the upper class, white Tenenbaum family members experience from their father's sense of 'entitled masculinity' (Robe, 2013). But when one examines the film more closely using the BCS method of conjunctural analysis, we see how Anderson's film produces a largely masculinized social world where emotion can not be directly conveyed, where the narrative is centered chiefly on the stories of the pain of the white male members of the family, and where the only masculine ways of being offered in the film are symbolically organized by the figures of the hard body, new man, and man-boy.

Before I dive into my analysis of the politics of the white masculinities portrayed in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, I first wish to review the academic literature surrounding Wes Anderson's filmmaking. This literature will be used as a foundation for analytical points throughout my discussion.

Masculinity is explicitly breached by Robe (2013) stating that traditional forms of white masculinity like stoicism and entitlement stemming from the social privilege of being a white upper class heterosexual male frequently appears in Anderson's films. Idealized and often unattainable masculine archetypes like the self-made millionaire (*Rushmore*), Victorian Patriarch (*The Royal Tenenbaums*), and explorer (*The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*) are constructed as appropriate and ideal in Anderson's

films. Robe argues that white privileged men have three strategies to cope with their perception of a crisis—1) attempt to escape from feminine realm, 2) emotional self-control/repression, and 3) the project their anxieties onto others, often times marginalized groups. As I will explain below, these three ideas can be seen in Royal's character. The other line of argument I want to point out is that Anderson's characters seek revenge on those who abandoned them, while unconsciously incorporating aspects of their character into their white masculine self. For example, many masculine performances by the Tenenbaum children could be seen as taken from their abandoner, Royal, such as the typical traditional masculine characteristic of not expressing emotions in a healthy manner. McLennan (2018) offers another interesting insight about the construction of white masculinity in Anderson's worlds by claiming that "all of Anderson's male characters could be understood as undergoing adolescence" and argues that one's chronological age doesn't define maturity for the socially constructed worlds of Anderson.

Another previous analysis of Anderson's films I find useful for my analysis is Dean-Ruzicka's (2013) piece where she highlights how whiteness and male privilege are normalized in the worlds Anderson creates. Dean-Ruzicka argues that the whiteness of Anderson's actors are stressed by placing them in settings with deep, rich colors. She also examines how the most unproblematic character in the film-Etheline's African-American suitor Henry- is set up as an antagonist to Royal, the protagonist. The positioning of Royal as the protagonist and the one the audience is made to root for disallows a progressive representation of race to occur, which will be discussed in detail in the pages below. Gooch (2014) argues how Anderson's limited narrative

structure focusing on paternal and castration objects block themes of race, class, and gender from persisting in his films. Using a psychoanalytic approach, he argues that Anderson's obsession with castration objects (like Margot's symbolic missing finger) doesn't permit a progressive representation along the themes of race, class, and gender.

Many analysts highlighted how Anderson attempts to display characteristics of his characters covertly. Objects (like Margot's cigarettes, Richie's headband, and Royal's Javelina head) having a strong metaphorical power in Anderson's films. Baschiera (2012) discusses how he uses objects to convey ideas about characters implicitly. Relatedly, Peberdy (2012) details how the embodied performances of the actors signify characteristics that aren't explicitly stated. Henderson (2018) highlights how composure is valued act in the Tenenbaum household within the males of the family, and many analysts highlight how the typical deadpan delivery style of Andersonian characters generate emotional distancing between the characters in conversation (Henderson, 2018; MacDowell, 2013; Peberdy, 2012; Wilkins, 2014).

Much research from film studies focuses on the idea of Anderson as an "auteur" and his films are discussed as solely his imaginative creations (Browning, 2011; Dean-Ruzicka, 2013; Gooch, 2014; Joseph, 2014; Hrycaj, 2014; Kennedy-Karpat, 2014; MacDowell, 2014; O'Meara, 2014; Rybin, 2014; Seitz, 2013; Wilkins, 2014). Orgeron (2007) argues that the DVD commentary on Anderson's films construct him as a genius storyteller and filmmaker that many critics of his films seem to uncritically reproduce. Anderson's reiteration of the idea of his own genius allows labeling of the 'auteur' to become commonplace. This imagining of Anderson through

the category of a genius ‘auteur’ seems to make it difficult for critics and analysts to critically examine the racial, gender, and class politics of the characters and stories he creates.

The theme of childhood and innocence is another heavily analyzed theme in Anderson’s films. This isn’t surprising as some of his films are animated (*Fantastic Mr. Fox* and *Isle of Dogs*) and one centers especially on childhood experiences (*Moonrise Kingdom*). Kunze (2014) explores the role of children’s literature as intertexts in Anderson’s films. MacDowell (2013) looks at how quirky styles and sensibilities harkens for an interest in examining the relations of childhood/innocence. Kertzer (2011) describes the lengths Anderson went to capture the sense of wonderment Anderson felt as a child while reading Roald Dahl’s *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. All of this work will be useful in helping me explain how Anderson constructs man-boy performances of masculinity and to think through the racial and gender politics of these representations.

The next topic that is heavily broached and has relevance for my analysis is the theme of family and community in Anderson’s films. The familial and communal unit in his films are atypical to normalized Hollywood representations and add to the complexity of understanding the discourse surrounding the gendered performances of his characters. Many analysts I discovered discuss familial or communal relations within Anderson’s film to some extent (Baschiera, 2012; Browning, 2011; Henderson, 2018; Joseph, 2018; Kertzer, 2011; Knight, 2014; Phillis, 2014; Orgeron, 2007; Robe, 2013; Wilkins, 2014). Rybin (2013) relates the Tenenbaum family to a system in which obedience to stereotypical upper class sensibilities creates a cultural hierarchy.

Joseph (2014) states that characters in *Rushmore* specifically never undergo a true mourning process, they attach themselves to objects or ideas about the deceased and don't heal in healthy ways (I would argue you can make this case for all of Anderson's films and not just for the dead, but also for those characters missing in the others' lives). Knight (2014) showcases how the death or reunion of an animal in Anderson's plots typically allows the character to have an epiphany moment in which they change actions and perspectives to reenter their community. Other themes breached in analysis of Wes Anderson's work includes how he references pop culture in his films (Scott, 2014), uses Bill Murray as a muse (Kennedy-Karpat, 2013), Anjelica Huston's 'progressive' roles (Felando, 2012), and the gentrification of city space (Kredell, 2012). Finally, scholarly work has also focused on Anderson's homage to past directors, use of frames, and how music emphasizes emotions that aren't explicitly expressed (Browning, 2011), the importance of colors in his films (Vreeland, 2015), how Royal is coded as conservative (Phillis, 2014), how he uses music to provoke emotion (Hrycaj, 2014), how trauma effects his characters (Ryall, 2015) and how he uses mise-en-scene to elicit emotions (Lee, 2016).

While many of the analysts discuss the ways Anderson is marking himself and his films as different, an original, and even progressive, my analysis focuses on how Wes Anderson's quirky and unique visual representations of white masculinity too often reproduce socially conservative ideas about gender and race that circulated in the late 1990's and early 2000's. Most analysts discussed above lack a critical lens to see past their adoration for the director. While I acknowledge that at times in this analysis my affections for Anderson's films will surely emerge, I do try my best to maintain a

critical perspective on these films and the white masculinities that Anderson constructs within them. Maintenance of such a critical perspective requires that I not only remain vigilantly attuned to the ways that my social experiences and position as a white male of relative privilege who came of age in the 2000s enabled me to be interpellated to his films. The last (and probably most important for my analysis) study constructed the idea that Anderson's worlds are so hand crafted, one cannot see the characters in the real world (Wilkins, 2014). Anderson also has the tendency to reduce the world to the family or community, leaving outside, social conditions that are cast in his films as irrelevant for his characters' lives and developments (Wilkins, 2014). In doing so, Anderson allows the normalcy of whiteness and upper class privilege to go unmarked as normal, but he constructs a social world where his white male characters are largely abstracted from broader social, historical, and political forces and conditions.

Chapter 4: Patriarchal Masculinity

Story Background

The following chapter will be a critical analysis of the patriarch of the film: Royal Tenenbaum. Here, the main points I look to elaborate upon are Royal's conservative performance of masculinity, his proliferation of racialized ideas, and the meaning of the tombstone epitaph as symbols of Royal's white masculinity. But first, I want to elaborate on key elements and dynamics within the story to give background information for the film.

Royal Tenenbaum (Gene Hackman) is the father and former patriarch of the Tenenbaum household. Royal was an absent, derelict father who left the family when the children were young. Chas (Ben Stiller), Margot (Gwyneth Paltrow), and Richie (Luke Wilson) grew up in a separated household with Etheline (Anjelica Huston), their mother, heading the house. Royal's estrangement from the family is represented as causing his children to be stuck emotionally. In the beginning of the film, we see Royal going through a moment of crisis. He hits bankruptcy and is kicked out of the hotel he lives in. At the same time, Pagoda (Kumar Pallana), his Indian servant, tells him that Etheline has taken a new lover in Henry Sherman (Danny Glover). The combination of financial bankruptcy along with a potential patriarchal adversary led Royal to fake stomach cancer in a desperate attempt to maintain his status. After six days of sustaining this ruse, Henry finds out Royal is faking his illness, forcing Royal out of the house once the news is revealed. Without a place to stay and without any money, Royal becomes a hotel elevator attendant, accepting his new social position as

a bankrupt ex-lawyer. Only after losing everything economically did Royal decide to try to better connect with his kids and estranged wife to right the ways of his absent fatherhood. Following Royal's death in the epilogue his tombstone interestingly reads "Died tragically rescuing his family from the wreckage of a destroyed sinking battleship."

Royal Tenenbaum: Conservative Masculinity

Using Royal's fall from wealth as a symbolic device, his story represents a conservative shift in politics that occurred in the 1970's and 1980's following the perceived weak leadership of Jimmy Carter (Phillis, 2014). The film is set somewhere in the late 1990's or early 2000's but Anderson tends to be anachronistic about historical time. As a result, the time period in which *The Royal Tenenbaums* is set is a bit ambiguous. For example, Anderson uses four types of cars throughout the film—a 1964 sports car owned by Eli Cash (Owen Wilson), a 1987 Chevy Caprice and a 1986 Buick LaSabre for the taxi cars, and a 2001 BMW when Chas decides to move his family back in his mom's house. In the 1970's, there was a shift in the economic interests in politics to a move toward morality (Phillis, 2014). A conservative shift occurred following the moral shift that was racially and heteronormatively charged as progressive movements across the country arose in an attempt to get marginalized communities more power in the political and social realms- movements like Civil Rights, Feminism, and LGBTQ+ liberation. The 1970's into the 1980's saw a disastrous economic turn symbolically represented by Royal (Phillis, 2014). Royal's characterization and decline in financial prosperity emphasizes the loss of status many

white males perceived in this era; he begins as a famous lawyer, falls from grace and asks his family to accept him into the home again, then is kicked out and operates an elevator at the end. Anderson uses Royal as a symbol to show his generation is responsible for voting in a president like Reagan who helped cause stagflation- persistent high inflation combined with high employment and a stagnant demand in the country's economy (Barsky & Killian, 2001)- in the 1970's and 1980's due to his political voting affiliation (Phillis, 2014) and now he must suffer the consequences of his actions.

The economic shift also promoted acknowledgement of a shift in the representations of masculinity. The successful, affluent man of the 1960's and 1970's had to find new ways to embody their masculinity once their finances were reduced and they couldn't afford the typical services and goods they once could. Royal's perception of masculinity was bound in the Reaganistic 'hard body' representational image that was becoming hegemonic in filmic representations of masculinity to accommodate for the perceived weakness happening due to economic strife accentuated by Carter's administration (Jeffords, 1994). Royal, being an older man, didn't have the cartoon-like muscularity that visually defined the era in Hollywood representation, but he is portrayed as taking risks (faking stomach cancer for his family's forgiveness), he wears power suits to show signs of masculinity (his ex-lawyer suits he dons before he victimizes himself attempts to connote power and respectability), and his individualism is centered in the film (he is always cast as the creator of his situations, good or bad), and he has no friends or associates other than Pagoda who is positioned as his personal servant.

Royal is also representative of conservative aspirations in this era. He seems to harken for times in which he could be unapologetic about his non-politically correct ideas, times that were easier for white males to get away doing whatever they wanted. Royal reproduces many characteristics of traditional masculinity such as the white male as narcissistic, privileged, and entitled that scholars associate as dominant forms of masculinity for white males since the Victorian era (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1996). Royal pursues what he wants without worry of his family or the repercussions of his actions on others. Royal's separation from the family left deep emotional traumas on his children. He is adventurous and continues his pursuits of risky activities to 'prove he is a man' despite his age- emphasized in the way he is energized by bringing Chas' sons to participate in dicey activities such as street gambling and jaywalking.

Royal is especially conservative when it comes to his fear of losing his status as a father after losing his occupational status. Royal feels threatened when Henry asks Etheline to be his wife. He responds by spouting racially charged language to him. A black man marrying a white woman that was once a white man's wife reproduces a history of whites using racist stereotypes about black men 'stealing' (as Royal would put it) white women in order to protect and reproduce white privilege. His perception of losing his masculine status is continued when he realizes none of his personal accoutrements have a place within the home anymore (Royal's in disbelief despite being gone for so long). One item Anderson uses to show Royal's lack of status within the house is the removal of a Javelina head that once belonged to Royal. A Javelina is a wild boar, and one of the first things Royal notices upon returning to the house is the head isn't hanging where he had left it. The head of a wild boar also signifies the

manly endeavor of hunting. One can assume Royal was proud enough of his hunt that he visited a taxidermist and got his carcass' head stuffed for further display, a sign of vanity for men longing for the past when their supposed 'primal' masculine pursuits could be fulfilled. The removal of the symbol also shows Royal's perceived loss of being the patriarch (Robe, 2013). This is resolved by the end when, after all the good deeds over the span of a few days that very slightly make up for the torment he put his family through for years, Richie hangs the head up in its respective position in the house, marking that Royal is welcome and his patriarchal status is now restored (Robe, 2013).

Almost the entirety of the first hour of the film is set up to be multiple scenes for Royal's loss of patriarchal status which allows him to create a perception of emasculation for his character. He is 'emasculated' through Henry's marriage proposal, 'emasculated' through the boar head missing on the wall in his former house, 'emasculated' through hitting bankruptcy and needing his family to bail him out, 'emasculated' through the deplorable act of faking an illness to get his family to pay attention to him (the act of transitioning from a Reaganism 'hard body' to a soft body), and 'emasculated' through his servant inflicting pain once his lies are broadcasted to the family. These work as emasculation devices because Royal is evinced to traditional ideas about white masculinity that he can no longer perform. All of this work is done to get Royal to see his adherence to practices associated with traditional masculinity and develop values and practices aligned with the 'new man' (Malin, 2005), or at least a more progressive performance of white masculinity. His family and those around him, even his servant, Kumar, express to him that the way he

conducts himself is problematic, and he should ascribe to being more caring, affectionate, and open minded to progress, yet Royal is reluctant to change until after he is kicked out of the house following news that he was faking his cancer diagnosis. Anderson uses Royal's character to critique traditional ways of performing masculinity. Anderson calls for adult white men to develop more depth emotionally and having the capacity to love as a domesticized family father. Although presented in an alternative, non-normative style, much of what Anderson critiques in Royal's character are the changes that have been noted as occurring in American discourse in mediated representations of masculinity in the 1990's.

Royal's status loss effectively sets the stage for his redemption. He can't walk into his family's lives and expect the same gratitude and respect from his children he once received. The beginning of the film works to show Royal's status loss, to show him how problematic his performance of masculinity actually is. It is only through reconstructing his masculine identity and working toward making things slightly better for the members of the family can he regain his status as father. He has always felt out of place in the Tenenbaum home. Royal could never portray his version of masculinity with complete acceptance from the family and doesn't ascribe to higher class sensibilities, making him an outcast and not immediately relatable to family members (Rybin, 2014). One piece of dialogue stresses this feeling of being out of place. Richie, Royal, and Pagoda go to Eli's house to have an intervention following receiving news of Eli's reckless drug habits. Richie tells him he needs help and he will be there for him to which Eli replies, "You know I always wanted to be a Tenenbaum." Before Richie can reply to his friend Royal mumbles, "Me too. Me too."

The Tenenbaum name symbolizes an idealized white masculinity as in control, dominant, provider, protector, and respected. Royal's not only 'emasculated' through not feeling like the man of the house, he never even thought he had a place in the house to begin with because of his 'imposter syndrome'. This term relates to someone who believes they aren't bright or smart, and that they've fooled everyone into believing they are intellectual (Clancy & Imes, 1978). Royal sees himself not being a part of the Tenenbaum family because he doesn't value the intellectual pursuits that became correlated with the Tenenbaum name.

But, he also has issues recognizing his faults and working to fix what his family needs him to, which is seen throughout the course of the film. Being a Tenenbaum used to have meaning, it used to connote genius standards and people were envious of the family's position. It becomes more and more apparent that this standard is not true and people conceived idealized notions for the family because of the success of the children in adolescence. Eli Cash is a poignant example as his entire life he wanted nothing more than to be a Tenenbaum. Throughout the years, he sent report cards and newspaper clippings to Etheline in search of a matriarchal recognition for his work. Later on in the film, he realizes the Tenenbaum name doesn't actually match the idealized standard the family portrayed and part of his redemption story is overcoming his desire to be something he can never be, whether that be a Tenenbaum, or an archetypical Cowboy, or Native American. The children's successful adolescence and the creation of a book about raising child geniuses by Etheline created representations about the family that weren't always recognized and fulfilled.

This next section aims to follow the symbolism of Royal's clothing throughout the film because it is an important symbol for signifying Royal's white masculinity. Wilkins (2014) argues that Anderson's characters' clothes reveal the traits of his characters. While I do not go as far to say that clothes act as innate traits, clothes in Anderson's films do have symbolic meaning for Anderson's characters. In the introduction of the film, Royal is always shown wearing a power suit. This device of clothing for Royal displays his investment in being regarded with authority and respect. The suits work to situate Royal as wealthy, but also to show that business usually takes precedence over his children's lives because he is never seen outside of a suit in the story except when he dons a hospital gown to represent vulnerability and also the scene in which he and Etheline are walking in the park. But, even then, Royal wears a sport coat with his hospital gown on underneath. After the beginning montage, Royal is seen wearing suits whenever he and family members leave the house despite his supposed illness. Wearing a suit in public displays his class position and visually implies a class based performance of masculinity. The business suit is a less muscularly defined version of a hard body that elicits stereotypically masculine ideas like dominance and emotional composure in the professional world. Royal doesn't have the body to display the hegemonic mediated characteristics during Reagan's era (Jeffords, 1994), but he reinforces the ideas about masculinity that Jeffords (1994) explained through his class specific suits of armor that connote power, respect, individualism, and control.

In an effort to display vulnerability to his family, the next outfit Royal persistently wears is a hospital gown. The hospital gown represents a 'soft body,' or

one that is physically weak. Royal's use of a hospital gown when he fakes his illness signifies status that effectively casts him in a perceived victimized role. In private, he wants his family to empathize his pain, but in public, he wants strangers to perceive him as in power and control. He only wants his family to see the soft body representation to view him as a victim, strangers aren't allowed a glimpse of vulnerability—that would correlate Royal with effeminacy, something he can't allow because of the public's perception of a gendered performances through clothing choice. The victim status he portrays coerces his family to allow him into the home again and forces conversations to be had about each family members' tribulations that more than likely wouldn't have occurred otherwise.

Following his fall from grace and accepted humility in his new status, Royal dons an elevator operator suit. This looks similar to the business suits he typically wore to symbolize power and respect. But here the uniform signifies Royal positioned as a lower-class worker while still preserving the idea that masculine status is achieved via wearing a suit. This change in appearance occurs after Royal is kicked out of the house following Henry's announcement that Royal's faking his illness. Royal sees the problems he has caused the family and finally can see what he did was wrong. He accepts his humility as a washed up, bankrupt lawyer and terrible family man and finds a way to make money so he can support himself rather than mooching off of his family. The acceptance of a new social position is a staunch turning point for Royal as he finally acknowledges that previous performances of masculinity won't suffice if he wants to find a place in the family. Royal's white masculine redemption story is reproduced in a number of mediums like the film *The Green Mile* and the story of

Lance Armstrong (Kusz, 2019). Generally, the story reads like the white male falls from grace, then they learn something from showing some form of vulnerability, then they find a way to redeem their self. The shift in his representation could also be seen as a shift in the hegemonic representation of masculinity in the late 1980's to early 1990's from the 'hard body' (Jeffords, 1994) to the 'new man' (Malin, 2005). Older individuals need to adapt their ideals of masculine performances to be more in touch with the shifting social world. Royal works toward becoming a 'new man' (Malin, 2005) at the end of the film by being more in touch with the family's emotions and helping them develop to move past their developmental stagnation. Royal's redemption arc can be seen through Royal's clothing.

Often times, Royal is cast as playing the role of a white male victim of society (Beynon, 2002; Malin, 2005). But that can easily be overlooked—especially since the film is centered on Royal's redemption. His fall from grace is mostly of his own doing. As a recently bankrupt man, Royal's fall in is line with the 1970's and 1980's economic downfall (Phillis, 2014), although it is people like him who elected the political representation that led to stagflation in America. Royal fakes an illness to come back into the family, acting like a victim of circumstantial life issues instead of a victim of his own poor decisions. He is victimized by the apparent estrangement of his own father (which trickles down into his parenting style and even Chas' parenting style (Robe, 2013)). Faking an illness is the ultimate form of white male victimization and Royal's consistency in eating hamburgers although 'diagnosed' with stomach cancer is Anderson's way of showing the inauthenticity of Royal's victimhood claim.

Royal creates (most) conditions of his victimization, but doesn't see how he plays a hand in forming the conditions.

Royal's lack of awareness is symbolic of white Americans perceived victimization. His story parallels some whites' perception of being a victim of affirmative action, diversity initiatives, women's liberation movement, and political correctness. Historically, white Americans had a hand in victimizing lower class individuals, people of color, and LGBTQ+ communities to the point of ostracization, rape, or even death (Anderson, 2017; Hinton, 2016; LeFlouria, 2015; McGuire, 2010; Mumford, 2016). The political action from the progressive movements of the 1960's and 1970's ascended marginalized communities to a perception of more power, but was perceived by many whites as their communities losing power in society. Royal's loss of power was on his own hands, just like the perceived white loss of power wouldn't have occurred without first placing institutions and policies that favored white maleness. These formations allow contemporary white America to take power for granted and naturalize privilege to the point where most whites do not recognize how they enjoy it. White America (Royal) doesn't see how their perceived victimization (and apparent emasculation) is of their own doing (or at bare minimum their ancestors doing).

Continued Conservatism: Racialized Tendencies

The conservative shift also came with social baggage of racism. Again, Anderson uses Royal to critique how white male performances like his rely on using racist tropes to make them feel superior. Royal perceives Henry as his

patriarchal/sexual adversary. Henry proposes to Etheline and Royal has trouble letting go of status as husband. In one scene after Royal has come back to reside in the Tenenbaum home, Royal plainly asks Sherman “Are you trying to steal my woman?” highlighting the anxiety and fear haunting Royal’s psyche. Later in the same scene, Royal spouts racial comments directed toward Henry to rile him up- calling him “Coltrane” and saying “You wanna talk some jive? I can talk some jive.” These obvious attempts at race baiting were used to try to get Henry to ‘prove his masculinity’ by fighting Royal. Anderson’s use of racialized verbal warfare is used to showcase Royal’s despicability, but this is also used for comedic effect to white people who can overlook the racialized language for a laugh. To Royal, Henry undermines his ability to claim his patriarchal status (Dean-Ruzicka, 2013). If Henry were to claim Royal’s alleged place as familial patriarch, Royal’s sense of identity as patriarch would be completely lost. After all, it’s Henry who investigates Royal’s claims at a terminal illness and finds out he’s been faking the sickness all along. The scene of Royal getting kicked out of the house allows the audience to be disappointed in Royal’s departure since the audience is compelled to root for Royal through Anderson’s framing of the plot (Dean-Ruzicka, 2013). Anderson constantly employs techniques and dialogue that urges the audience to feel Royal’s pain. Whiteness in film is usually unmarked and Royal’s position as protagonist despite his actions speaks to the unspoken logic of whiteness. Film representational patterns typically allow white males to be in the forefront of film while not challenging their adherence to problematic forms of racialized masculinity. This allows the audience to root for Royal despite his ill-advised performances and hope for a relatable figure in their life

(if they know one) to overcome their wrongdoings and begin to perform their masculinity in a more progressive manner.

Anderson does display a scene in which nearly all audience members can feel that Royal did the right thing. Near the end of the film, Royal signs the divorce papers to allow Etheline and Henry to marry. Some critics argue that *The Royal Tenenbaums* creates an all-too familiar Hollywood ending in which the racist white man overcomes his racist beliefs by befriending an Other (Robe, 2013). Royal easily turned to racially charged pop culture references when arguing with Henry like calling him ‘Coltrane’ or trying to ‘talk some jive’ (Scott, 2014), and Anderson doesn’t offer much to show he wouldn’t resort to these tactics again if another man was in a position to challenge his status outside his family. After all, the racially charged discussion wasn’t exactly about race, it was more so an attempt to prove masculinity over another man by belittling him via his race (Browning, 2011). His racial animosity is never shown to lessen, it’s just overlooked or forgotten by the film’s end. Pagoda (Royal’s Indian servant) is still by his side until his death, seemingly showing that Royal’s transitional racist beliefs don’t apply to all people of color.

The most poignant discussion at the end of the film we have between Henry and Royal comes after Royal signs the divorce papers. “I’ve always been considered an asshole for as long as I can remember. That’s just my style. But I’d feel really blue if I didn’t think you’d forgive me,” says Royal. Henry replies with, “I don’t think you’re an asshole, Royal. I just think you’re kind of a son of a bitch.” Royal responds with “Well, I really appreciate that.” Obviously this scene was supposed to be comedic, but it never seems Henry fully accepts Royal’s apology. The difference

between ‘asshole’ and ‘son of a bitch’ lies in the blame. By being an asshole, the reason for his issues lies directly on Royal while being a son of a bitch places the blame on his mother. In Royal’s mind, blaming his mother for his transgressions would absolve him of guilt. The bigger issue lies in Royal’s willingness to resort to racial warfare. Anderson’s representation of Royal reproduces black male stereotypes. Even if one is to conform to white ideologies about appearance, manner, and conduct (like Henry), racist tropes will still be used against them and are impossible to avoid because of white men like Royal who see no issue in using them to deal with their own feelings of vulnerability, insecurity, and inferiority.

Regardless whether you believe that Royal overcame his racial bigotry, the most important aspect to critique is how Anderson uses people of color almost solely for developmental purposes of his white male protagonist. Henry is used to show Royal ‘gets over’ his racially charged stance by the end of the film, that the conservative man who probably voted for Nixon can overcome his faults and see Henry for a person worthy of his ex-wife. Though the idea of a conservative leaning white man overcoming his racial animosities may seem positive, using an African-American male as a conduit for white male progression offers conservatives the idea that African-Americans should be placed on the periphery in society, only included in the picture to challenge extreme forms of problematic whiteness. Dean-Ruzicka (2013) says that all people of color are subservient to white leaders in Anderson’s films besides Henry. Even though he may not be subservient, Henry’s role of the film is to develop the white male protagonist. This is problematic in the sense that Anderson uses Sherman as a prop for whiteness rather than afford space to develop an

actual story about Henry or show Royal the errors in his ways. Casting Henry's role as investigator to Royal's illness places Henry as the antagonist, traditionally someone who works against the main character of the story and a character the audience is supposed to not like or identify with. Using an African-American in his film in this manner reveals how, despite the auteur status given to Anderson by some critics and analysts and his quirky, indie façade and aesthetic, through the characters of Henry and Pagoda, he offers representations of men of color that are stereotypical and not much different from those seen in Hollywood films.

Anderson also chooses to have Henry propose to a white woman (Etheline) purely to have a black male be Royal's patriarchal adversary. The marriage proposal also evokes traditionally racist, conservative ideas of black males stealing white women from white families. Royal represents the aggrieved, conservative white male, who not only lost economic and patriarchal statuses, but to a black man who appears more competent and composed than him. Anderson's choice of having a black male marry a white woman that used to be with a white male cannot avoid the history of white anxiety surrounding perceived black male virility. The alternative presentation is superficial to the underlying traditional tropes about black masculinity that Anderson uses Henry's character for.

Anderson uses white, high culture as the pinnacle of culture and the audience is left to desire wanting to be placed in that class. The Tenenbaum family is symbolic of feudalistic era dynasties that were the idealized standard every serf and underling aspired to be. There are obvious signs of privilege the Tenenbaums enjoy that are never broached in the film such as the years of falcon upkeep a servant must do for

Richie's pet Mordecai while he is away, having hired help, and the ability to move back into your childhood home whenever issues arise that you want to escape from. It seems in Anderson's head he presumes "If I want this lifestyle, doesn't everyone?" regardless of a person's background depending on their class, race, and gender. His viewpoint isn't completely incorrect as his films' popularity continues to increase as his style becomes normalized in contemporary film culture (Wise, 2018). Making films that normalize upper class standards evokes the ideology of pre-British Cultural Studies analyses that imagines upper class culture as the only culture worthy of analysis.

Another cause for concern is Anderson's use of Pagoda in the film. Pagoda is Royal's right hand man and seems to work in the Tenenbaum house for Etheline as a servant. He spies for Royal and is actually the one who first tells Royal of Henry's proposal to Etheline with the phrase "The black man asks her to be his wife. She think about it." We later learn how Royal and Pagoda came to be associates; Royal was in Calcutta in his former years and was stabbed with a knife. Pagoda carried him on his back to the hospital. "Who stabbed you," Chas' son Ari asks. "He did." Royal replies referring to Pagoda, "There was a price on my head and he was an assassin. Stuck me in the gut with a shiv." Later in the film after the family kicks Royal out of the house following discovery of his faked illness, Pagoda stabs Royal in the stomach again. This metaphor for figurative/literal pain seems to be the turning point for Royal each time. Now that his life is in shambles, Pagoda stabs him and he recognizes his flaws and works to justify them. Pagoda's actions serves as a change in demeanor for Royal through violent acts whenever Royal has been in the wrong. Robe (2013) calls Royal a

‘Victorian Patriarch.’ That is someone with enough money, class, and privilege to have an Indian servant by their side, much like the Victorian era colonial explorer of yesteryear. Furthermore, the representational power of Pagoda emphasizes how Royal’s white masculinity is constructed through Victorian era ideas of masculinity.

Even though he is Royal’s servant, Anderson uses his imagination of the old world’s way of doing things in the Orient to develop Royal’s character. The Orient is Western culture’s ideology about the East, typically imagined through mediated cultural representations (Said, 1978). Said (1978) states that we use the Orient as a comparison means to construct the West’s ideas, norms, values, and relations as ‘normal’ and what can be considered the ‘other.’ Anderson repeatedly uses imagined cultural norms of the East in his films (see *Darjeeling Limited* and *Isle of Dogs* for more reference). Pagoda is also completely subservient to Royal’s wishes and whims, he seemingly doesn’t have any ambitions or goals that mark him as a character worthy of actual development (similar to Henry’s position). Pagoda speaks broken English in the film, especially problematic for Indian and Indian-Americans searching for a Hollywood representational model to mold oneself after, which many youth tend to do (Moss, 2011). Although almost all of Pagoda’s twenty-five seconds of dialogue is used for comedic purposes, the usage of broken English and not contributing to meaningful (white) conversations effectively casts Indians as less than their white counterparts and reinforces the traditional subordination of the ethnic Other in contemporary American society. Other shows, like *The Simpsons*, have been working to fix the proliferation of racially insensitive Indian stereotypes in their character, Apu, since the release of Hari Kondabolu’s *The Problem with Apu* which emphasizes how

insensitive and insulting the portrayal of Indian immigrants are in the show (Ghandi, 2018). Yet, in Anderson's 2018 film *Isle of Dogs*, he still uses stereotypical representations of Eastern Asians to serve the purpose of his film (at least all of those representations don't wholly serve a white protagonist in his most recent feature). His use of stereotypes of the East reproduces those problematic ideas into mainstream discourse in 2000's America and complicates how those of Asian heritage are perceived and treated in the Western world.

Another poignant example of Anderson's reproduction of stereotypical ideas about white masculinity as unapologetic about their non-politically correct ways is when sly racist, gendered, or classed remarks by Royal go unchecked. This picking and choosing of when to correct Royal or not draws on the idea that not all battles are worth fighting when helping a man ascribe to more progressive values. Men in similar positions to Royal still need room to express some of their racist, classes, or gendered thoughts. For example, Richie never corrects Royal's racialized discussions of Henry, he simply distances him by not accepting his viewpoint. When the family first visits the cemetery, Royal asks for Chas' forgiveness after forgetting that Chas' dead wife, Rachel, is buried in that same cemetery as Helen, Royal's mother. Without Royal attempting any act for redemption, Chas sighs and walks off without answering Royal. An example of when Royal is corrected is when he is kicked out of the house. As he is entering a cab he yells to Margot "He'll never be your father!" referring to Henry to which she replies "Neither will you." Margot, and the rest of the family, are disappointed in the announcement of Royal's faked illness, so she isn't complacent with letting that remark go acknowledged in its non-politically correct ways. The

inability of the family to consistently correct Royal and his unprogressive statements proliferates some forms of problematic white masculinity to become naturalized that shouldn't be allowed space to bloom.

Tombstone Epitaph: Truth or a Lie?

The film concludes with Royal's tombstone reading "Died tragically rescuing his family from the wreckage of a sinking battleship." While the events leading up to Royal's reconciliation can be heartfelt and lead the viewer to believe his acts were worthy of the Tenenbaums' forgiveness, I argue that Royal's redemption arc is weak compared to the years of torment he put his family through. My argument is also argued similarly in Robe's (2013) discussion where he says the epitaph on the tombstone is hollow because of the traumas he caused the family during his life. Baschiera (2012) makes a parallel point by saying the writing on the tombstone is fake, it's simply a lie for future generations of cemetery visitors that stumble upon his gravestone. Joseph (2018) argues differently saying that the writing implicitly forgives Royal. The epitaph interpretation is determined from the audience's perceptions on forgiveness and if one believes Royal's actions redeemed him by the end of the film. All the devious actions he performed such as leaving the family for at least 18 years, like shooting his son, Chas, with a BB gun as a child, using Pagoda to spy on the family, etc., were all somewhat forgiven once he acknowledged his wrongdoings and performed little deeds to slightly redeem himself. At the end of the film, Royal's actions become good for the family and help them overcome issues they all were facing such as helping Chas admit he needs help since his wife has passed, talking

Richie through his love for his adopted sister, Margot, and replacing Chas' dog, Buckley, with a new dog to symbolize the emotional readiness to move on for Chas and his sons, among other little deeds. These small acts are supposed to make up for years of missing his children's lives, and the epitaph is a lie that embellishes the small, decent acts he performed. After all, no one wants to be remembered negatively post-mortem. As Orgeron (2007) says, Anderson's films often times fall into the hands of an adolescent creator who needs to let go of his auteur-like behaviors to fit into a larger community (in this case the family). The epitaph is an example of the family's forgiveness toward traditional white ways of being masculine once he somewhat relinquishes those dubious behaviors.

Anderson's writing of the family lying on Royal's gravestone means a number of things— 1. The family was always ready to forgive Royal and wanted his presence in their life despite his years of absence. Joseph (2018) writes that each child creates something to present evidence of existence to Royal. Their need to feel loved and acknowledged could take precedence over years of separation. 2. Even though he is an asshole in every sense of the word (or sort of a son of a bitch according to Henry), there are lingering effects of Royal that still cause people to root for the character—namely his charisma and bulldog-like approach to facing issues head on. Anderson also positions the plot to revolve around him, persuading the audience to support and root for Royal's redemption. This plot device also helps establish the unspoken norm of the filmic world being that male whiteness is dominant and ever present. 3. Anderson wrote Royal and the children in this fashion to show traditional white masculinity performances are forgivable no matter the past issues surrounding the

situation. With the façade of being alternative, hipster, and cool, *The Royal Tenenbaums* maintains the white male patriarch as forgivable if the white male is in the hunt of traditional masculinist pursuits, and every familial member should be ready to forgive the white male if they make any sort of effort of reconnecting in the family's lives despite whatever trauma the man put their family through in the past. In a broader sense, the film could be a device to disseminate ideologies that white male patriarchs should be forgiven in spite of a history of transgressions toward the family. The film situates white males as deserving forgiveness despite performing risky masculine acts that could potentially harm their family or close ones. This ideology serves the white ruling elites by positioning their family and public to forgive and forget past grievances and work toward allowing white males freedom to pursue their desires. With the knowledge that forgiveness will occur, white males can follow whatever activities they want without thinking of the repercussions of their decisions.

The epitaph lie removes past transgressions the white male performed. It rewrites Royal's history as a caring family man that died in a heroic way. Even though Royal did do very small things to help the family along, the epitaph lie makes it seem as if his individualistic actions saved an entire family, akin to Jeffords (1994) discussion of how Reaganism employed the individual actions of white male heroes to be the cause of national pride or embarrassment. The family is left in a position to lie for the white male for better remembrance of the person. The situation is reminiscent to white history (specifically American K-12) rewriting history to shine white males in a more positive light. Thanksgiving in educational capacities are a time for celebration of two different ethnicities coming together in America and I wasn't told of the

incomprehensible amount of death Native Americans endured didn't until I was in middle school (around age 12). Without the film as proof, knowledge of Royal's wrongdoings wouldn't have been known to passersby in the cemetery, only the lie that he heroically died saving his family from a metaphorical masculinized war vessel. In a sense, Anderson is disseminating the idea that rewriting history is okay if it serves the purpose of bettering the ideals behind a white male.

Chapter 5: The Brothers Tenenbaum

In this chapter, I look to analyze the ways in which Wes Anderson constructs white masculinity in the characters of Chas and Richie Tenenbaum. Like so many white masculinities produced in American media in the late 1990's, the Tenenbaum men all first appear in various kinds of crisis (Beynon, 2002; Bly, 1991; Buchbinder, 2013; Kimmel, 1996; Malin, 2005). Chas is portrayed as being in crisis from never healing or successfully mourning the passing of his wife, Rachel and from his sense of alienation he experienced throughout his life from his father, Royal. As a result, he acts overprotective toward his sons, Ari (Grant Rosenmeyer) and Uzi (Jonah Meyerson), by giving them rigid schedules that require them to work hard in both the gym and business. Chas' brother, Richie, is also portrayed as being in a crisis; this time of unrequited love with his adopted sister, Margot. Richie's peculiar crisis is portrayed as a product of both his family's difficulty in expressing their emotions and the taboo idea of loving a relative, whether by blood or not. Rather than face the emotions that trouble both of them, Anderson portrays the Tenenbaums as dealing with them through taking up rather conventional and stereotypical masculine performances. But their adherence to these masculine performances causes pain and suffering until the very end of the film when Anderson makes it seem as if both may be transitioning to a new, less stereotypical performance of white masculinity but this transformation of self is never ultimately shown. This chapter will focus on four main characteristics of Chas' and Richie's white masculine performances: 1) the way Anderson both privileges and others his white masculinities in the film, 2) the way

Chas is constructed through codes associated with the hard body/man-boy figure narratives, 3) the way Richie is constructed through codes associated with new man/man-boy figure narratives, and finally, 4) I will highlight how Royal's redemption arc with his sons is a metaphor for the reproduction of white male authority in an era where the idea of white masculinity being in crisis is popularized by conservatives.

'Others as it Privileges'

Anderson's filmic universes have a tendency to reduce the social world down to the family (Wilkins, 2014). In doing so, he creates conditions that 'other' his white male characters while never disrupting their abundant class privilege. The 'othering as it privileges' technique Anderson uses for Richie is casting him as an elite sports star. While Richie's portrayal of an elite sports star may elicit ideas about idealized masculinity, this profession is considered non-normative for the brainy, old money upper class Tenenbaum family. The choice of tennis as Richie's profession creates a conflicting dichotomy that privileges the character, but also casts him as an 'other' compared to his intellectually based family. Portraying Richie as a tennis star speaks just as much to his class position as it does to his masculinity. Historically, sports were largely exclusive to economic elites who participated in them in their idle time and used them as a marker of social status (Moss, 2011). Using tennis as Richie's profession allows Anderson to construct a difference between Richie's white masculinity and that of his brother, while his sport of choice, tennis, still has a history rooted in upper class distinction and exclusivity. Tennis was traditionally played by

monks, then kings and queens during the sport's rise in popularity at the end of the monastic period (Gillmeister, 1998). Richie's tennis career also led him to escape the Tenenbaum home which may partly explain the differences that exists between him and his brother, Chas' masculinities, especially as Richie's masculinity is more emotionally composed than Chas'. Also, Richie is modeled after ex-tennis star Bjorn Borg. Richie and Bjorn both don headbands and sweatbands, both had a mental breakdown in the mid-20's and retired due to a rise of internal/external pressure along with both having long, flowing hair. Anderson's choice of modeling Richie after Bjorn Borg, a European tennis champion who resisted the norms of sport superstardom, is another way of othering him as he privileges him, especially to American audiences.

Anderson uses a different representational strategy to other Chas from the family, but this also masks how privileged he is. Chas' 'genius' moniker that is attached to the Tenenbaum children comes via his money-making ability. In his teens, he created a species of Dalmatian mice to sell in Little Tokyo. He then went on to become a financial guru buying and selling real estate. As it is not normal for young children to invent mice species and teens to become a real estate entrepreneur, these are Anderson's ways of othering Chas' white masculinity. At this point it is also important to note that as a boy, Royal tended to reserve time and space for Richie, but not his other children, Chas and Margot. Audiences are shown how Royal's preference for Richie creates jealousy and resentment in Chas. And in a typically quirky Anderson manner, he stages a scene where in a jealous attempt to prove his existence and his masculinity to his father (Joseph, 2018), Royal, Chas buys Royal's summerhouse, as a teen. Chas is envious of the relationship Richie and Royal share

and wants the love his father showers on Richie. In turn, Chas performs his masculinity in atypical ways, often lashing out emotionally at various times in the film, compared to the normative composed masculinity that is a defining marker for the Tenenbaum men (Henderson, 2018). His inability to perform masculinity in familial appropriate ways further ostracizes him from Royal (Beynon, 2002). He is the ‘other’ son, the one son who doesn’t value the same things as Royal, internalizes the pain caused by being alienated from his dad. But, interestingly for my analysis, Anderson constructs an imagined solution for Chas that echoes back to Jeffords’ (1994) hard body masculinity of the 1980s and the Reagan era. The visual representation of the hard body was imagined to be a solution to the perceived ‘crisis in masculinity’ that conservatives believed to be occurring during that era (Bly, 1991). The hard body signifies cartoon-like muscularity, risk taking behaviors, and a retrogressive call for stoicism in men (Malin, 2005). Anderson transforms Chas into a high achieving, hard bodied teen-businessman who is defined by the power suits he wears and the financial power he wields over Royal. Even further, in one quick scene we see Chas pumping iron and working out to create a muscularized body of armor (like the business ‘power suit’) to hide his emotionally distraught state of being. But, this performance of masculinity others as it privileges because Chas chooses to prove his masculinity in a business setting, effectively securing his finances and reserving a space for himself (and his boys) in the upper class. Chas’ masculinity is cast as dominant in the professional sphere through his intellectual ingenuity.

Referencing the idea that began this section, Anderson’s tendency to reduce the social world down to the family (Wilkins, 2014) allows Chas’ privilege to be

easily forgotten throughout the film as we see Tenenbaum after Tenenbaum mired in various states of crisis. His perceived crisis through both familial jealousy and the loss of his wife represents affluent white males who receive hardships in their lives (that anyone regardless of social class, race, gender, or sexual orientation may face), but don't recognize how truly lucky and privileged they are to be in their classed, raced, and gendered social positions. Their tumult with their father Royal helps create a perception that life has treated them unfairly and allows the white male Tenenbaum boys to be cast as suffering. These ways of othering the Tenenbaum boys may cause some viewers to feel empathy for white men.

Associations with Masculine Cultural Figures

Richie's and Chas' masculinities are defined by a mixture of cultural figures of white masculinity popularized from the 1980's until the present. Richie's performance matches some elements of the 'new man' in Malin's (2005) discussion and some elements of the man-boy figure that has become popularized in more recent times (Kusz, 2013; 2018). Chas' performances evince certain elements of Jeffords' (1994) 'hard body', and of the man-boy figure as well. In the following section, I outline the ways both white masculinities are complexly constructed.

Malin (2005) discusses the 'new man' of the 1990's as a man wishing to resist the performance of stereotypical male tropes and whose thinking and actions are influenced by the progressive ideas of the social movements of 'the 1960s,' but who still enacts traditional masculine ways of being if it served his interests. The element

that refers to Richie is his uncertainty about performing traditional scripts of masculinity. His uncertainty is rooted in Royal's desire to vicariously live through Richie's performance of these tropes such as being athletic, successful, and emotionally composed. Richie was always Royal's favorite son, and this is likely due to Richie's portrayal of performing masculinity in ways Royal values that can be accessed through being an elite sports star. An example of Richie's inner turmoil about his performance of masculinity is evident in a turning point scene in the film where he endures a mid-match breakdown. The breakdown occurs following the news of his love and sister, Margot, marrying Raleigh St. Clair (Bill Murray). Richie could not muster performing an emotionally composed masculinity anymore and collapses as a result. Richie is never cast as angered or dominant following this scene, but is anxious in matching masculine expectations his father values. Richie's 'new man' white masculine performance contains anxiety that is never fully resolved by film's end.

Richie's white masculine performance also has elements of what Kusz (2013; 2018) calls the 'man-boy.' The man-boy is a figure who refuses to grow up, retreats to masculinized spaces, revives racist and sexist humor with irony, and seeks liberation from the feminine sphere (Kusz, 2013). While Richie doesn't retreat with other men to masculine spaces or participate in racist and sexist humor ironically, often times he is portrayed as refusing to grow up and seeking liberation from the feminized sphere of the Tenenbaum home. Once Royal returns home, Richie allows Royal to sleep in his room while he erects a childhood tent as a place for him to rest and retreat. Of course, camping can be read as a masculine activity where one escapes the domestic sphere.

Yet, in this case, Richie's masculinizing retreat or escape doesn't take him outside the Tenenbaum home but simply provides him a private man-boy space within it.

Richie's desire to escape domesticity is also highlighted through his release of his pet falcon, Mordecai into the wild in the beginning of the film and his decision to travel on-board an ocean cruiser instead of dealing with his emotions following his on court breakdown. These various forms of symbolic escape portray Richie's white masculinity as searching for spaces that are his own within the traditional feminized sphere of the home. His search for liberation correlates with the rise of 'man caves' and other masculinized spaces in the home for contemporary men (Moss, 2011).

The other aspect relating Richie to the man-boy figure is his refusal to grow up. His refusal is emphasized by his repetitive clothing choice in which he dons the same clothes from his childhood to adulthood. Clothes are an important marker for Anderson's characters as they can act as characteristics that aren't explicitly stated (Wilkins, 2014). The wearing of the same clothes always suggests Richie's refusal to grow up and he is continuously idealizing a time when he thought he was at his best (Kunze, 2014). As a 'child genius', Richie's sporting masculine performance was venerated by the public and Royal, but this continual performance wasn't what Richie himself valued. The film questions conventional ways of being masculine that are commonly associated with sports stardom like dominance and discipline on the field/court. By film's end, we are offered a transitional representation of masculinity when Richie dons a new suit and hairstyle during Royal's funeral. His clothing choice is coded to establish his performance of masculinity is beginning to change.

While different from Richie's, his brother Chas is also portrayed as refusing to grow up and seeking liberation from the feminized, domesticized space of the Tenenbaum home. His refusal to grow up is depicted when he lashes out whenever things don't go his way (similar to my 'little man' example of Ross Geller from *Friends* in chapter 2). This frustration is emphasized by not being able to control his emotions whenever a familial problem arises. This inability to compose oneself is cast as one of the subtle factors as to why Royal might not have given Chas the same amount of attention as Richie. Yet, as Chas lashes out in anger, he cannot deal with the 'crisis' of emotions that are plaguing him. One scene emphasizes this contrast. After Royal takes Chas' sons, Ari and Uzi, out to 'have fun' by participating in stereotypically working class activities like street gambling and garbage truck riding, Chas notices blood on his one of his son's face. When questioned what it is by Chas, Royal reductively says "Oh no... That's dog blood," stating it as if it wouldn't be problematic. Infuriated, Chas brings Royal into a closet where he confronts him, "I need you to stay away from my children," to which Royal plays it off by saying "Oh I haven't been in this closet in years..." Chas interrupts Royal's thoughts by yelling "HEY! Are you listening to me?" Royal replies, shouting "YES! I think you're having a nervous breakdown. I don't think you've recovered from Rachel's death..." Chas sighs, shuts the light off, then leaves the closet. In this scene, we see the combination of Chas' hard body and man-boy performances of white masculinity. On one hand, we see how Chas creates a façade for his inner securities and anxieties through being a protective father, but in a boy-like fashion he is unable to show the composure expected of being an adult.

As a youth, Chas recognized the consequences of his performance of white masculinity not matching the normalized performance in the Tenenbaum family (Moss, 2011). The normalized masculine performance within the family refers to possessing elite professional status and maintaining emotional composure (Henderson, 2018). In turn, his attempt to create a performance of masculinity that proves to Royal he exists emulates elements of the 'hard body' (Jeffords, 1994).

Like father, like son, Chas dons a suit to portray a hard bodied armor that protects him from his inner anxiety, albeit his suit is in a much different fashion than Royal's. As a child, Chas dons the exact same conservative, business suit in an effort to perform the classed masculine status expected of a Tenenbaum man. In adulthood, he changes his 'suit' by transitioning to wearing a red Adidas tracksuit every single day. On one hand, we can read this change in outfit as a reversion back to adolescence. But we should not miss how Chas still uses a suit as a mask to hide his emotional expressions. In other words, while signifying some evolution in his performance of masculinity, the change from one suit to another suggests Chas is still invested in a hard body model of masculinity. On yet another level, Vreeland (2015) argues red is often times used by Anderson to signify deep rooted issues for sons stemming from fatherhood. So, Chas' choice of red tracksuit color may show that he wishes to control his life. He wants to visually represent that he is now the owner of his destiny. Again, Anderson positions composure to be a designated marker of masculinity in the film and finds value in creating symbolic representations of that composure or the want for that composure. Even by film's end, we see that Chas is still evolving in his masculinity when we see him wear a black Adidas tracksuit for

Royal's funeral. Nonetheless, as indicated by the continuity of the tracksuit, it seems Anderson's depiction of Chas suggests that white masculinity can't exist without at least some part of a hard bodied performance.

Anderson also includes scenes that suggest that a hard bodied performance of white masculinity is something that must be passed on from one generation of white men to the next in a family/society. For example, Chas chooses to create a hard, disciplined body for himself in an effort to garner his father's attention. In another scene, Chas' sons Ari and Uzi are shown at the 375th Street YMCA with Royal, their grandfather. They tell him that their father has them working out 16 times a week. Chas' personal adherence to muscularity and his transmission of this value to his boys reveals his belief that proving his existence to Royal requires fulfilling stereotypical hard bodied white masculinity marked by strength, success, high status, and dominance. Chas' hardened performance is similar to Wacquant's (1995) account of Sam Fussell's bodybuilding habits as a means to create a body suit to protect himself from his insecurities stemming from his family's social status. Longing for the patriarch's approval is a theme repeated throughout the film and emphasized by all the Tenenbaum children. Stereotypically speaking, mothers are ready to love their children, but the father's love has to be earned by adjusting oneself to fit ideas the father values. This longing is problematic in the sense that it proliferates the idea of 'earning' your father's love when both parental units equally displaying bouts of love/discipline calls for more equitable gender relations.

The idea of individualism, or pulling oneself up by the bootstraps and getting to work (Leonard, 2017), is another key component of the 'hard body' (Jeffords, 1994;

Malin, 2005) and emphasized by the white masculine performance of Chas. As an adolescent, his entrepreneurial spirit and ingenuity allowed Chas the financial means to purchase Royal's summerhouse and be financially secure throughout his life. But in reality, Chas' success is as much a product of familial wealth as his hard work as an individual in allowing his childhood 'genius' to blossom. Without the financial privilege his family possessed, his attempt to masculinize himself would have needed to take form in a different profession. His story rings similarly to many contemporary articles elaborating upon the 'self-made' billionaire status of celebrities like Donald Trump and Kylie Jenner. The media constantly refers to them as 'self-made' while ignoring their familial wealth that allowed them to establish themselves in their respective business(es) (Mejia, 2019; Scott, 2019; Tamny, 2018). Anderson creates a story similar to the production of contemporary news stories that naturalize the privilege and the abundant opportunities upper class white people enjoy en route to their success.

While Richie and Chas aren't totally similar, they aren't dissimilar either and share many characteristics through their upbringing. Both men create solutions to their perceived crisis. The hard body and new man have pertinent characteristics depending on the character, and both men ascribe to man-boy type tendencies. Despite all work that's done to show how they perform their white masculinity, Anderson's tendency to reduce the world down to the family positions the men as victims of their familial situation. This reduction ignores the financial security and privilege experienced by Richie and Chas. The characters also proliferate some problematic masculine representations like adjusting your masculine performance to fit your father's values

such as Chas' 'hard body' white masculine performance, maintaining emotional composure displayed in both characters, and seeking a masculinized space in a feminine sphere, emphasized by Richie's tent construction.

Royal's Effect on his Sons

In the following section, I delve deeper into how *The Royal Tenenbaums* also offers commentary on the reproduction of particular ways of being white men from one generation to another through the depiction of Royal's relationships with his sons, particularly as these relations are made central to the film's narrative (Robe, 2013). Masculine trends are cyclical, men remember their father's performance, then tweak and alter it slightly (Moss, 2011). Anderson's abandoned characters often times incorporate aspects of the abandoner into their very being (Robe, 2013). Richie and Chas both attach to and disassociate from white masculine performances because of their perceptions of their father, Royal.

Anderson constantly employs plot devices and scenes that shows Royal's appreciation for Richie and not the other children such as Richie being the only Tenenbaum child he would take out around town to participate in stereotypically working class activities like underground gambling on dog fights, riding on the back of garbage trucks, and jaywalking into oncoming traffic. Richie's connection with Royal is emphasized when Richie is the only child who embraces Royal when he returns home to discuss his (fake) cancer diagnosis and when he gives up his room in the home for Royal to occupy without approval from the other family members,

including his mother and rightful owner of the house, Etheline. In many ways, Anderson represents Richie's white masculinity in an idealized sort of way—he is cast as an elite sports star with the fame, achievements, and money to back it up. Elite athleticism is valorized because of the perception of being exceptional compared to the norm (Moss, 2011). It seems as if Richie gets more of Royal's attention because Royal values traditional ideas of masculinity that are generally attached to sports stardom such as the status and adulation that goes along with being a successful sport performer. Royal can vicariously live through Richie's performance of white masculinity, which is often times exactly what fathers do. Similarly to the Tenenbaum's idealized white, upper class status, Anderson casts Richie as the idealized white masculinity that men should aspire to be.

In childhood, Richie was shown with masculine objects like a drum set and collection of toy cars. Despite most objects correlating with stereotypical ideas about masculinity, Anderson also shows Richie being obsessed about painting. Along with it being an outlet through which he could express his love for Margot, Richie's painting gets represented as a feminized way of being that Etheline supports but not necessarily Royal. It seems Richie always found value in resisting stereotypical masculine performances, but the love from Royal was enough for him to continue his aggrieved masculine performance until his implosion evidenced by his on court breakdown. In this scene, Anderson creates a questionable father-son dynamic that poses that sons' worth act as a function of their successful performance of stereotypical white masculine values. Following the on court breakdown in which he cries, removes a sock and shoe, and sits on the court during a match, Royal's ability to

see himself in 'The Baumer' were dismissed as his white masculine performance didn't represent that values Royal is espoused to. As Henderson (2018) says, composure is an all-important marker for masculinity in the Tenenbaum family. The lack of composure causes Royal to disapprove of his son's white masculine performance.

The traditional idea of emotional composure for both Richie's white masculine performance is trickled down from Royal as well. Anderson displays plenty of scenes in which Royal can chat about the family's emotions, but generally finds a way to avoid discussing the trauma he left each child with. For example, when the family first visits the cemetery, Royal expects forgiveness to be impeding instead of attempting to help Chas overcome his wife's recent passing. Henderson (2018) argues that Anderson creates subcultures in his filmic worlds that constrain the characters' abilities to express themselves. The familial discourse surrounding the discussion of emotions is almost non-existent and the white males of the story are portrayed as conventionally masculine in this sense. The deadpan delivery the actors perform also signify staunch emotional detachment (Peberdy, 2012). Royal's performance of masculinity as unaffectionate, detached, and emotionally rational are initially modeled by Richie, but end up causing him a significant amount of pain.

Chas' performance of white masculinity is tied closely to his money-making intellect. With his finances secure, he bought Royal's summerhouse on Eagle Island, a bold move meant to usurp Royal's power as the patriarch of the family due to his exclusion from activities that were reserved only for Richie. He also finds out Royal is stealing bonds from his safe deposit box. Later on, Chas sues Royal because he took

money from his companies when he was a minor and gets him disbarred from practicing law. Chas' performance of white masculinity has foundations in usurping Royal's patriarchal status as provider of the family. One of two childhood scenes in the film featuring young Chas and Royal shows the pair playing a game where Royal shoots Chas with a BB gun despite their 'being on the same team.' In this scene, Royal performs his masculinity as distant, unaffectionate, and problematic. The BB lodged in Chas' hand is a literal symbol for the pain Royal caused him as a child. Royal's outings never included Chas, showing that he didn't represent the values and idealized masculinity that Royal holds in high esteem. Through Royal's estrangement and favoring Richie, Chas incorporating aspects of domination into his presentation (Beynon, 2002) represented by the red Adidas tracksuit, the overprotection of his sons, and success in the business world in the hopes of obtaining Royal's love.

Anderson represents fatherly estrangement to be cyclical through his representations of Royal and Chas (Robe, 2013). Royal's father is never directly mentioned throughout the film, but when he first returns to discuss the fake cancer diagnoses with the family, he is shown underneath a masculinized picture of his mother, Helen, a World War II nurse. The portrait of Royal's mother can be read as masculine because it matches many aristocratic style paintings of the Victorian era that typically feature upper class patriarchs (Robe, 2013). Her singularity in the painting displays her independence and World War II is generally thought of as a time in which Americans were at the peak of idealized traditional masculinity (Robe, 2013). With Royal not having a father figure in his past, he recycles the absentee fatherhood he was given as a child. This trickles down into Chas' parenting style as

the death of his wife, Rachel, causes him to overprotect his two sons, Ari and Uzi. His overprotection is similar to estrangement in the sense that he doesn't allow his boys to have a childhood because their lives are extremely scheduled and Chas doesn't tolerate room for activities for the sake of fun. Chas' white masculinity performance represents anxiety for losing loved ones and causes estrangement through his anxiety. He allows his anxiety about his performance of white masculinity as a father figure stemming from Royal's characteristics to supersede normalized expressions of fatherhood that could be healthy for his boys.

Chas and Richie perform their white masculinity in synonymous and antagonist ways, but both performances stem from the values they learned from Royal. The reproduction of many traditional masculine characteristics like dominance, athleticism, and emotional composure trickle into the Chas' and Richie's being, but this attempt to prove existence to Royal (Joseph, 2018) doesn't allow the siblings to perform their masculinity in healthy ways. Reducing the social world to the family also doesn't allow the privilege both men presume to be marked. Royal's character has long lasting effects on all members of the family, especially the two female characters of the film, Etheline and Margot.

Chapter 6: The Ladies Tenenbaum

Etheline and Margot Tenenbaum are the two main female characters in *The Royal Tenenbaums*. Etheline is the matriarch of the house and raised her children with assistance from help. Margot is one of her children who professionalizes in writing plays. In this section, I look to analyze how the characters' gendered performance resonates with traditional ideas about femininity and also how they resist these ideas. Margot could generally be seen as performing gender in a complicated way, matching some stereotypical ideas about both masculinity and femininity. Etheline is portrayed as a both professional and motherly, but Anderson's 'progressive' façade disguises stereotypical ideas about femininity like passivity, submissiveness, and not possessing agency. The three main points I look to elaborate upon in this section are how Anderson uses the main female characters for the development of his white male protagonists (Royal and Richie), to critique some analysts interpretations of Anderson's feminine representations as progressive (Felando, 2012; Taylor, 2016; Wise, 2018), and to describe the lingering effects Royal has over both women.

Etheline Tenenbaum: Matriarchal Power

Etheline is an archaeologist and well accomplished in her own right. In the children's childhood, she wrote a book on how to mother child geniuses. She is content with her professional status, but has her own goals to proctor. She is independent, free, and proficient (Felando, 2012). Although this superficially empowering move for Etheline may garner signs of progressive respect for Anderson,

her lack of care forced the children to not have control of their significant emotional baggage. Obviously, Royal's estrangement from their childhood is most of the reason for the children's emotional stunting, but Etheline's apparent lack of mothering is cause for concern as well (Felando, 2012). She is more worried about their careers than developing them emotionally, she doesn't realize how much the children's past grievances affect their adult situations, and her work seems to take precedence over other aspects of her personal/family life. At the end of the film, Etheline marries Henry who works for her as an accountant, not stretching far from her workplace. Her inattention to the children's needs caused a lack of emotional growth. The children's lives are very organized and includes a plethora of privileged activities. The over involvement in activities doesn't allow the children to act as adolescents, effectively leading them to revert to adolescent performances in their adulthood. In one of the childhood scenes we even see Chas have an already-made check for \$187 that just needs Etheline's signature, evidence of extreme financial privilege and that typical activities associated with adolescence were not represented in their childhood. Anderson casts Etheline in an absent presence within the children's lives. She was always there for the children, but overscheduled their lives to the point that they couldn't enjoy their childhood. She allows her children independence, but to the point of emotional stagnation occurring. Her professional and motherhood status elicits a cause of concern for her children's emotional development.

Moving into Etheline's relationship with Royal, the lingering effects the white patriarch has over the white matriarch is problematic. Etheline admits to not consummating a relationship in 18 years. Browning (2011) says that Royal's power

over her is so great, she can't let go of the past and move on with her life.

Alternatively, Felando (2012) states Anjelica Huston's (the actress that plays Etheline) characters in Anderson's films are heterosexual, but never in pursuit of men, they're content with their positions in society. Etheline matches traditional ideas about femininity such as being passive, not having complete agency in decision making, and being submissive to Royal's decision to move back into her home. Royal's power is questionable and varies depending on the audience's interpretations of power in separated households, but I highlighted how the lingering effects of Royal persist within the children in the previous chapters and the following pages, so it seems obvious Royal has long lasting effects on Etheline as well. This is also evidenced when the pair are walking in a park together and it seems that Royal's clever wit is slowly winning Etheline back. While Royal does have some power over her, Etheline is still relatively autonomous in her decision over love interests. It's important to note that Royal does have the power to stall her marriage by not signing the divorce papers. He withholds his signature for a time, but after he's kicked out of the house and does small acts to redeem himself, he finally signs the papers to allow Etheline and Henry to wed. In the end Royal says "I never understood what you saw in that guy [referring to Henry], but now I get it, he's everything I'm not." Anderson portrays Etheline to be the doting, forgivable female. Despite the years of transgressions, Etheline opens her home for Royal, almost falls into his manipulative trap, and seemingly forgives him once the divorce papers are signed. Positioning a white male to have this much control over his separated wife's life while not speaking for 7 years prior to his faked illness and that the white matriarch can easily forgive doesn't allow women full agency in

decision making and societal issues can arise from this display of patriarchal power. Additionally, Anderson's film is centered on the impact of Royal's, not Etheline's neglect on the children.

Another key aspect of how Anderson portrays women in his films is that they are represented in a static manner that doesn't see the character develop much throughout (Joseph, 2018). For example, the most development we see for Etheline's character is becoming married at the end. We are told Etheline is a successful scientist and the owner and matriarch of her home, but Anderson doesn't offer many other scenes that allow Etheline to grow as a character. The biggest point of Etheline's character is one of the last scenes—in a series of slightly redeemable acts, Royal finally signs the divorce papers to allow Etheline to marry. And I use the word "allow" knowingly because the divorce signature is, at minimum, a decade coming. Again, a character is used for development of the white male, in this case Royal. Positioning Royal as the giver of new life to Etheline and the gatekeeper for her development is problematic in the sense that Anderson has the white male patriarch still enabling and limiting the choices of his estranged wife, even when long separated. The remnants of Royal's character linger in the psyche of the people in his past. This lingering influence Anderson gives Royal over others is one of the unspoken norms of the filmic world—that male whiteness is dominant (Fanon, 1967; Mulvey, 1975). Anderson's writing of allowing a male to have this much control over a successful, business oriented woman has cause for concern. Anderson creates an alternative presentation to elicit the same sensibilities for femininity that stereotypical Hollywood films invoke. Etheline easily forgives Royal for his mischievous acts, she is passive in his

reappearance of her life, and is shown without much agency throughout the film besides her decision to marry Henry. She is not totally complacent in the domestic sphere, a stereotypical realm usually controlled by feminine standards. Her inability to actually remove Royal correlates with passiveness and is problematic for the proliferation of this stereotypical, feminine performance that allows room for the white male to pursue their interests while the white female is left behind, ready to forgive and pick up the pieces of life the white patriarch left behind.

In analyzing Etheline's clothing choices, she is cast as a professional woman. Wilkins (2014) argues Anderson's characters' clothing signify aspects of their identity. Etheline typically presents herself in effeminate business attire. Her look is always well structured, maintained, and controlled. She wears makeup, skirts, and pantyhose to elicit her femininity, yet, her style is powerful in itself; she wears sporting coats and resists sexual objectification for the male gaze. Evidently, she seemingly wears the same outfit but different colors time and time again, signaling her contentedness. When Royal first visits her to lie about his cancer diagnosis, she is wearing pink professional attire, when the pair go for a walk in the park she is wearing grey professional attire, when Henry proposes to her she is wearing off-white professional attire, and when she is to be married she wears a one tone, long, grey dress. Historically, clothing on film characters give authority to some and subordinates others (Owyong, 2009). Etheline's professional attire is an attempt to normalize women in an often male dominated workplace, such as the scientific field of archaeology (Wright, 1996 cited in Owyong, 2009). 'Pants' are often used in phrases to connote who has authority in a relationship such as the question about power many

couples receive-- “Who wears the pants in the relationship?” Although the power suit shows authority for Etheline, in contrast to Royal’s power suits, her skirt and pantyhose positions her in a conventionally less powerful position. This changes when Royal dons the ‘soft body’ by wearing a hospital gown and faking his illness. Etheline is then in power and control as she has the ability to dictate if he should be allowed to live in her house or not (which Royal calls *his* house in different parts of the film). Even though she doesn’t have power over Royal first entering the house as Richie allows Royal to occupy his room, she also doesn’t fight the decision as the family believed him to be dying at the time (the only character that does fight Royal moving in is Chas). With Royal’s lingering effect still having power over her, her decision making is of her own will, but always has hints of Royal’s desires. Her power is relative to Royal’s clothing choice; Etheline’s can infer power or subordination depending on what the white male protagonist that the plot is centered on dons.

Herein the problem lies with Etheline’s power over her home and family relies on the imagery the white male ex-patriarch elicits. Etheline’s clothing choice remains stagnant and doesn’t change just like her character never really develops over the course of the film. Her place in the film is used to develop Royal and allow him to overcome his transgressions. This represents white femininity in a subordinate and supportive role in the film even as she’s resisting many stereotypical ideas about femininity. The power Royal has over Etheline problematizes the agency of white femininity in society and further positions the white female as subordinate to white masculine activities and pursuits.

Margot Tenenbaum: Masculinized Femininity

Margot's performance seems to resist stereotypical ideas about femininity, but in the end it is a disguise for typical feminine portrayals to occur. She is stoic in discussions, private, and dominant in her relationship with her husband, Raleigh. She is a risk taker and pursues her initiatives without worry of the repercussions to herself or others. Each of these ideas are generally associated with traditional performances of masculinity. A key way she's cast as masculine is the way she's portrayed as emotionally unavailable in her relationship with Richie and Raleigh. The knowledge of her love for Richie not being publicized until a later scene highlights how she values keeping relationships private. Near the end of the film when Margot and Richie finally embrace and their love for one another is known explicitly, Margot pulls back and states that they need to keep their relationship private. Historically, keeping relations private is a very masculine idea. Throughout my adolescence it was guys who wanted to keep a relationship private with a girl so they could attempt to get more girls or they were embarrassed about the girl in the first place and didn't want their relations broadcasted for others to know. Her stoicism in familial/private matters is important as well. She doesn't display her emotions, nor does she even begin to talk about the symptoms causing her to lock herself in her bathroom for 6 hours a day. Repressing emotions and maintaining an emotionless exterior is conventionally associated with masculinity that traces back to at least the Victorian era (Connel, 1995; Kimmel, 1996).

The best example to display how Margot acts masculine is the montage of her past life she kept private from everyone else. When Raleigh believes she may be

having an affair, he hires a private investigator to look into her past and current affairs. The investigator reveals a number of risky acts that resist stereotypical ideas about femininity; she begins smoking at 12, in her late teens she marries a Jamaican singer and they are now divorced, has a French lesbian relationship at 21, and she's been recently having an affair with Eli Cash, among seemingly spontaneous hook ups. Margot pursues who and what she wants, when she wants, without worry of the consequences of her actions. I now wish to explore each selected phase the investigator showed the men to describe how these actions match a representation of a masculinized version of femininity.

The cigarette has long been thought of as a symbol of the phallus in media representations. Margot's 'owning' of the phallus at the age of 12 could portray her as the owner of her own destiny, that she won't allow others to decide her fate. But, she is only seen with a cigarette in private and whenever a family member (besides Richie) sees her with a cigarette, they attempt to get her to quit or are upset at the discovery that she smokes. The family works to minimize her masculinity by expecting her to not take risks and match the expectation of stereotypical femininity as passive, an object, and submissive. The symbolic denial of the phallus could also be family members telling her to be more effeminate, to quit hiding things in private and display her emotions. When she shares cigarettes, it's with Raleigh and Richie, and she lights them for both males. The lighting (control) over the phallus represents an extremely masculine way of being. The cigarette correlates to her having control over her relationships and 'wearing the pants,' along with using the object as a symbolic, private vessel to highlight when Margot is ready (or when she is forced) to open up

about her private life, which she finally does at the end of the film with Richie. When Margot shares a cigarette with Raleigh, he forces her hand in front of her family by asking for one after he met with the private investigator and knew she has been smoking. Etheline replies with “Well, I think you should quit,” referencing both her smoking habit and keeping her life private from the rest of the family. The consistent denial of the phallus for a female matches historical denials of female pursuits for the sake of white masculine desires. The constant dismissal of feminine autonomy problematizes the ‘progressive’ representation of white femininity’s decision-making ability in Anderson’s film.

The next phase I wish to highlight is Margot leaving the house in her late teens and marrying a Jamaican singer. From the small scene we see with her, she made this decision at 19, more than likely without thinking of consequences. This risky adventure and lack of concern for the repercussions of this escapade elicit typical masculine ideas and expound on Margot’s identity. Interestingly, Margot is shown in a bathing suit when her first marriage is previously mentioned on the cover of the band’s album. Placing Margot in a bathing suit harkens to Mulvey’s (1975) idea of the male gaze leading directors’ productions. More than likely, in Anderson’s mind, he positions Margot in a bathing suit to contrast the darkness of the actors who play in the Jamaican band with Margot’s extreme whiteness. While visually this may seem appropriate, the representation of Margot being sexually promiscuous with a group of black males harkens for traditional stereotypes of black male virility. The exoticized black Other is one way Anderson chooses to display Margot’s sexual promiscuity and further plays on black masculinity stereotypes that date back in history to slave era

race relations. Only at two other points in the movie is the audience positioned to stare at Margot and objectify her, this being the scene where Raleigh enters their bathroom, we are shown Margot in a revealing underdress and the other is discussed in the next paragraph. Anderson's creation of Margot's sexual objectification occurring around black males displays Anderson's ideas about black masculinity and white femininity. To him, black masculinity represents a 'rock star life' in the sense that the men are a means of escape for Margot. Anderson highlights their views of sexuality and they are shown smoking marijuana- both criminal and adventurous. In turn, if white femininity looks to escape their white, upper class world, running to black males is the ultimate form of a punkish type rebellion against normalized white ideologies. The proliferation of race in this manner is problematic for black males attempting to escape stereotypical representations.

The other scene the audience is made to gaze at Margot occurs when she is 21 in Paris when she takes up a Lesbian lover. The scene is short, but it shows Margot staring out the window at the Eiffel Tower smoking her cigarette (read as phallus). She is dressed in only her underwear and positioned central of the frame. Her lover appears next to her and she doesn't have a top on, fully exposing her breasts. They then turn toward one another, Margot feeling her breast, while giving her a passionate kiss. The scene positions Margot in the masculine role as she is the one smoking, the one not fully exposed, and the one who feels on the breast of her lover. It also forces the audience to gaze upon her and her lover's semi and fully exposed bodies. LGBTQ+ films sometimes receive criticism for not portraying the events in a realistic manner and often times serving a straight male's fantasy gaze (see Autostraddle's review of

Blue is the Warmest Color for more reference). Positioning Margot's body and her lover's body as almost unclothed serves a white male's fantasy gaze, even if it only holds four seconds of screen time. Those who designate directors as auteurs state that often times these directors allow space for their straight white male fantasy to appear (Orgeron, 2007) and this scene is no different despite its attempt to masculinize Margot through explicit gestures and the portrayal of her owning the phallus.

The final phase I wish to discuss is Margot's affair with Eli Cash. The attraction seems to be a placeholder for Richie, highlighted in the tent scene where Margot says her and Eli were attracted to one another because of their mutual attraction to Richie. Eli represents extreme forms of white masculinity. There is a theme that female characters in the Tenenbaum family attach to extreme forms of masculinity they don't necessarily need in their lives. Etheline marries Royal and ends up with his opposite, Henry. Margot has an affair with extremely masculine Eli to fill the void 'new man/man-boy' Richie created. Eli is dangerous, addicted to drugs, and performs his masculinity in disturbingly erratic ways to make up for never being able to achieve what he also wanted: to be a Tenenbaum. Furthermore, the racialized Native American/Cowboy persona Eli dons is modeled after archetypical masculine representations of Wild West era America. This attempt to recreate an image based on extreme forms of masculinity speaks to the representational models Eli found value in as a youth due to his social position compared to the upper class family he aspired to be a part of. I also believe Eli begins an affair with Margot simply because she is a Tenenbaum. It's possible Eli is only attracted to her through her name, causing concern for the value of the affair. Alas, having an affair for only sexual purposes is a

very masculine thing to do, along with sleeping with someone to fill the void of a person (Richie) she perceives that she cannot be with for taboo reasons. The affair satisfies both parties' desires for a while, but a relationship based on filling a void and becoming something you can never truly be isn't a strong foundation for longevity and happiness.

Margot is shown to be sexually promiscuous time and time again, a marker for her resistance of traditional femininity. In her past montage, it shows Margot in a series of relationships or hook ups throughout her years, something that is typically akin to a contemporary masculine performance of becoming a man. Those males who conform to traditional ideas of masculinity often times attempt to prove their masculinity by 'conquering' different females sexually in an attempt to amass a high number count for bragging rights to their friends. This is typical in a frat-boy performance of masculinity and an athletic male population (from personal experiences). Positioning Margot to perform in a similar sexually promiscuous masculinity may be seen as some for progress. Owning your body and allowing the stereotypical idea of purity in femininity to be pushed to the wayside could cause some critics to see Anderson's female representation in a positive light. But, this call for women to act more like men in the sense of sexual promiscuity effectively works for ideologies the elites want elicited into society. A female putting their body on display sexually objectifies the individual, no matter what the purpose of the body flaunt may have been. This works for those in control of society because now females themselves choose to display their bodies, furthering sexual objectification to become naturalized and commonplace because it is not seen as objectifying female bodies

anymore. The argument typically goes ‘I should be able to do what I want with my body without a male policing it,’ but this argument ignores the history of sexual objectification that men have constantly interposed on women. Despite female’s best efforts to control the visual representation of their body, putting their body on display no matter the intention feeds into the patriarchal machine that values women’s bodies sexually. While *The Royal Tenenbaums* doesn’t display female bodies as much as some contemporary films (*Transformers*, *Resident Evil: Final Chapter*, *Underworld: Blood Wars*, and *Blue is the Warmest Color* for reference), the notion of female sexual objectification serving the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) is pertinent and represented well in his film in the character of Margot, just in more subtle, less nuanced ways than the films listed above.

Given how Margot’s years from childhood to adulthood are described in more detail than the other children, it’s surprising how stagnant her character development from the beginning of the film until the resolution. This is counter to Joseph’s (2018) decision to list Margot as the only female character who develops in all of Anderson’s films. She is very stoic and private throughout the film and this doesn’t really change by the film’s end. The one change is when she finally admits to Richie she is in love with him. This occurs following Richie’s suicide attempt. Margot assumes she was the main reason behind Richie’s attempt and Richie later confirms her suspicions. Following that scene, they embrace one another in a long kiss in Richie’s tent after he shows her his scars. She cries a little bit (the most emotion Margot performs throughout the film), but still wants to keep their relationship private. In a world where love supposedly knows no bounds (a cliché many Americans believe in), Margot’s

desire to keep the relationship private seems to want to avoid the societal consequences of pursuing a taboo, semi-incestuous love affair. Richie agrees to keep their relationship private, but doesn't seem as keen on the idea. We can assume Margot doesn't perform solicitous or promiscuous acts anymore because her and Richie's love is broadcasted to the family, but the idea to keep the relationship private after admitting that love seems cumbersome. If she cannot display her love and continue a public relationship with Richie, why wouldn't she revert back to her old tendencies to fill the void Richie left? It seems clear that the privatization of their relationship is because of the public's eye on Richie and her. Richie is still recognized in public and is just a year removed from his mental breakdown. The final scene in which Royal is being buried following his death shows Margot and Richie draped around one another under the same umbrella. This timeline between their admittance of love and Royal's death is ambiguous so it could be taken that the pair finally admitted their love publicly, or that around the family is the only space they feel comfortable expressing their love for one another. This is all speculation, but the privacy aspect doesn't sit well from a character development perspective, especially when she performed promiscuous acts for years in an attempt to fill the void Richie left.

Margot's classed and raced privilege (along with every other character) goes unmarked and becomes natural in Andersonian worlds. Anderson has a tendency to reduce the world down to the social world of the Tenenbaum family (Wilkins, 2014). Margot and the other children may have had difficult familial circumstances growing up, but Margot hasn't produced a play in seven years and isn't shown making money

in any other fashion. Her marriage to Raleigh seems dull and empty, but he is a successful neurologist so her finances are accounted for. Margot goes about her days not worrying about minute aspects of life that working class individuals toil until death to possess like housing, food, and clothing. In fact, Margot has two houses to bounce between living in, her childhood home which is still owned by the family, and Raleigh's house which is supposed to be her family home nowadays. Noting her clothing choice, she always appears in the same looking clothes from childhood to adulthood, showing that the ability to repurchase a rather expensive looking fur coat is easily attainable for her (all of Margot's clothes were custom made, so her clothes truly were very expensive and difficult to obtain (Erbland, 2012)). Other times she is shown in Lacoste branded clothes, a rather pricey symbolic class status symbol. The only class privilege that gets checked in the film is Roy's. Truly, his redemption only takes place because he loses his class privilege in the beginning of the film by being kicked out of the hotel and running out of money. The portrayal of privilege positions those whose values align with upper class ideologies as the ones who deserve forgiveness and should remain in their class position.

Despite the hipster, alternative presentation we are given of Margot and her child genius status that allows her to achieve adult, professional accolades while still a teen, she is still sexually objectified throughout the film in subtle ways in the film. Mulvey's (1975) discussion of the male gaze is pertinent here as three scenes highlight Margot's objectification. The first is the bathtub scenes where Raleigh enters her private space and she is clothed in a revealing under dress. The camera doesn't work to make her central of the shot, so Anderson's techniques differ from the observations

Mulvey made in classic cinema, but the point of showing Margot in skimpy clothing speaks volumes to the representation Anderson attempted to elicit. The second is described above, as she marries a Jamaican singer she is shown only in her bathing suit in the presence of black men. The third is discussed above as well; when she is in a lesbian relationship in Paris at 21. Whenever Margot isn't in her drab fur coat, she is usually in a Lacoste outfit. She is the only character who consistently shows skin whenever she doesn't have her coat on. As Dyer (1988) says, camera lighting works to accentuate the whiteness in actors, and the visual representation in Margot is no different. The dark pop of her eyeliner contrasts her skin tone and the deep colors in the Tenenbaum house work to stress her whiteness. Her stark whiteness compared to the other items in every scene position Margot as an object to view. Her whiteness allows the audience's eye to be drawn to her even without Margot being in the center of the shot. Her performance of stereotypical whiteness as the object to view, wealthy, and dominant in relations continues the propagation of whiteness-as-the-norm in classic and contemporary films.

As I go through this analysis, I can't help but call attention to how central the white male characters are to this examination. Royal and Richie both have strong impacts on Etheline and Margot and Anderson's positioning of these men being the protagonists of the film makes it difficult to discuss Etheline and Margot without mentioning how they largely exist in the film to reveal things about their male counterparts. This is an example of how white male privilege operates in the filmic world, even in Indiewood. Etheline and Margot are both used as props (Margot less so) for the development of a white male (i.e. Royal signing the divorce papers so

Etheline can marry, Margot allows Richie to face his emotions and develop).

Anderson has a history of writing from a limited viewpoint and positioning his films around the development of a white male protagonist (see *Bottle Rocket*, *Rushmore*, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, *Darjeeling Limited*, and *Moonrise Kingdom* for more reference). In the course of critically analyzing the film, I was disappointed to see how much this Indiewood film—which one would assume would offer character narratives that differ from those of Hollywood films—still centered on white men in the story of the Tenenbaums. The need to include discussion of many male actions in a female character analysis speaks to the unspoken norm of white male dominance in the filmic world and Anderson's preference toward male characters over female ones. In Anderson's films, white men are centered while most women and people of color exist only to develop the story of white male characters.

These patterns of representational issues of women and people of color are evident in Anderson's filmography. *Bottle Rocket's* sole female is an ethnic Other used for Anthony's (Luke Wilson) want to distance himself from upper class whiteness and privilege. *Rushmore* uses Rosemary Cross (Olivia Williams) as a means for a masculine proving ground and an ethnic Other, Margaret Yang (Sara Tanaka), becomes a consolation prize when Max (Jason Schwartzmann) can't find romance with his idealized white female (Robe, 2013). *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou's* Eleanor (Anjelica Huston) does not develop, she is merely a prize to be won between Zissou (Bill Murray) and his nemesis/friend, Alistair (Jeff Goldblum). *Darjeeling Limited* shows only one white female character who is portrayed as distanced and not wanting to assume familial responsibility. *Fantastic Mr. Fox* has Mrs. Fox (Meryl

Streep) forgiving Mr. Fox at almost every turn despite his lack of remorse or apologizing for his inconsiderate actions. *Moonrise Kingdom* breaches this pattern a bit as Suzy (Kara Hayward), the white female co-lead, gets more time and space in this narrative, but not nearly as much as her male counterpart, Sam (Jared Gilman), does. And her most problematic issue (her anger) is never unpacked nor solved by film's end. *The Grand Budapest Hotel* is a male dominant film with most females present only in subordinate roles not worthy of development or much screen time. Finally, *Isle of Dogs* follows a male dog pack with a male youth and the only female afforded action is the white female savior, Tracy (Greta Gerwig), who is the only person outside the protagonist, Atari (Koyu Rankin), who realizes the manipulative government regime wants to end life for all dogs in Japan and saves the day for the Orientalized Others (Said, 1978). Anderson has a history of putting females in subordinate roles within his films. His reliance on women to develop the white male characters indicates his subtle retrogressive view of femininity in American society. It further reproduces the idea of women as subservient and apologetic to men. Too often, women are merely props for Anderson's white males to resolve their perceived crisis of class and/or masculinity.

Etheline and Margot can be seen as progressive white feminine representations, but the progressiveness Anderson displays masks stereotypical, Hollywood ideas about femininity. Anderson employs many plot devices that could be seen as very progressive to an uncritical eye. Margot is stoic, private, and emotionally composed. Etheline is business oriented and emotionally composed as well. Yet, we are to sexually objectify Margot in some scenes and Etheline's power is almost always

subordinate in relation to Royal's. Anderson's portrayal of white femininity evokes stereotypical ideas about white femininity that is shrouded in an Indiewood style, making the typical ideas associated with Hollywood feminine representation difficult to analyze to a general audience.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Shift in Self

A BCS critical lens and learning critical discourse analysis has allowed a brand new perspective to be applied to almost all movies I have viewed since engraining my thoughts into this type of analysis. The call for skepticism and questioning everything that is considered ‘natural’ in the world now allows me to critically (re)view almost all media and attempt to determine why they chose this particular image in this particular time in history. Before this master’s program, I had difficulty seeing beyond the superficial meaning and reasoning to media’s placement of objects and the ideas they want to elicit. Now, my days seem to be filled with an attempt to figure out the certain reason why this company chose a particular image in our particular social climate within our particular geographic location. It has become increasingly harder to divvy enjoying media texts from analyzing them.

Before I began this project, I was a self-proclaimed movie buff. I devised a list of my top 80 movies, giving serious thought to the representations I found value in and how certain films impacted me in certain times in my life. The number one movie on my list was *Fight Club*. The main reason for my love of this movie is it was the first psychological thriller I ever watched (which quickly become my favorite movie genre). I had no clue Ed Norton and Tyler Durden were the same person throughout the film. What stood out most was David Fincher’s subtle hints that the two actors played the same character all along. After first viewing the film, I immediately wanted to watch it again to pick up on those hints and was blown away by the shocking detail.

From a more critical perspective, I also found value in breaking free of the monotony of life. Tyler Durden didn't care about the politics surrounding his performance of masculinity. At the time, I thought I valued his life perspective.

Upon first thinking of entering this master's program, I read Dr. Kusz's 'Fight Club and the Art/Politics of White Male Victimization and Reflexive Sadomasochism.' While not being indoctrinated into critical analytical thinking since my background is physical science based, my first time reading through this piece left me somewhat skeptical to entering the program. In it, he details the white male victim of society status portrayed by Ed Norton's narrator/Brad Pitt's Tyler Durden that left me to question what I'm getting into. By placing my all-time favorite movie into what I would learn to be called a 'crisis in masculinity' narrative didn't settle well with me.

The next pieces I began reading from Dr. Kusz were his articles about the connection between Tom Brady, Donald Trump, and white supremacy. I could relate more easily to these articles as the connections between Trump and white supremacy seemed to be evident from his political campaigning. The association with Tom Brady was an interesting step he took that I wouldn't have thought of and I believe it to be brilliant. While these articles still were more in tone with my life perceptions and beliefs, I was still skeptical about what exactly I was getting myself into. But, instead of completely rejecting this new way of thinking, I chose to come to Rhode Island and hear him and my other first semester professors out.

I'm certainly glad I did.

If one is to truly understand a text's meaning at a particular point in history, understanding the historical and social conditions surrounding that text are vital for

interpretation of social implications. This idea didn't cross my mind before entering this program, but it seems so obvious and beneficial in hindsight. *Fight Club* and other white masculinity in crisis texts proliferate the idea of ignoring social privilege that comes with being a middle to upper class white male to position said male in a state of perceived crisis because of not matching idealized standards that are normalized in society, mostly through media representations.

To my knowledge, there are no other analysts that have explicitly listed characters within Wes Anderson's films matching the label of 'crisis in masculinity'. Cleverly, in *Bottle Rocket*, *Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, *Darjeeling Limited*, and *Moonrise Kingdom* all have the social world essentially excluded from the plot for sole focus on the white male characters. I say this is clever because this plot device allows Anderson to solely focus on the white male protagonists who make up majority of his movies. While clever from a movie convention perspective, ignoring the social world allows accurate criticism to occur for his portrayal of race, class, and gender (Browning, 2011; Dean-Ruzicka, 2013; Phillis, 2014; Robe, 2013).

While Anderson's style, attention to detail, color schemes, deadpan performances, superficially atypical characters, and unique plots will continuously draw me in, especially since his more recent films don't necessarily center explicitly on a white male protagonist, I will now read his texts as a product of the historical moment and hope that his class, gender, and race representations progress. Unfortunately, his most recent film, *Isle of Dogs*, reductively represents some Japanese characters and can be read as extending ideas associated with Orientalism

(Said, 1978), or Anderson's imagined relations of Japanese culture from mediated texts. His next feature is titled *The French Dispatch* and it said to be a "love letter to journalists at an outpost of an American newspaper in 20th century Paris and centers on three storylines." (Thompson, 2018). Here's to hoping his 2020 release will have truly progressive features!

Recently, I have been wanting to recreate my favorite movie list. Taking the information I've learned from this program has sculpted my perceptions of movies and my values. I think the list would lean more toward my progressive principles instead centering on how the movie impacted me at a particular point in time. I would also believe the list to be more about movie conventions, the director's personal touch, and if women, people of color, and the working class are portrayed in progressive ways. Some recent movies that come to mind who offer an interesting social commentary are *Get Out*, *Moonlight*, and *Eighth Grade*. While Indiewood stylizations will always have a place in my heart for aesthetics, the ability to remove myself from being sucked into conventional movie plots that look to create a 'feel-good' story will more than likely cause my appreciation for those types of plot devices to decrease as the years go on.

Essentially, this project allowed an insight into my life I wouldn't have found otherwise. I now can recognize how my upbringing effects my perceptions on almost all daily interactions. I better understand how humans can create a more equitable society and understand the importance of people who critically analyze social texts. In turn, I hope directors who are given an 'auteur' designation like Anderson can find value in creating films outside of the comfort zone to not express problematic representations. *Moonrise Kingdom*, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, and *Isle of Dogs* are

all creations that are markedly more progressive than his previous films, but they still have potential to ostracize and marginalize individuals who have anxiety about matching the masculine/feminine representations they observe through films.

For future work, I would love to analyze more of Anderson's films, especially his more recent ones, to see if their representations are somewhat better than his previous films as I assume they are from a few viewings. As his filmography widens, the social context in which he creates his films widen as well. He has now moved away from his protagonists being specifically white and upper class, includes more women in his productions than before, and but still has issues representing race and femininity in a progressive manner. Applying a critical lens to a director like Anderson reveals how he projects his life circumstances onto the screen and how his reproduction of white control, authority, and rule through his white male characters is problematic for audiences consuming his media.

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