This thesis for the Master of Arts degree by

Nicole Martinez

has been approved for the

Department of Communication

by

Christopher Bell, Chair

K. Maja Krakowiak

Katie Sullivan

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ABSTRACT

*Star Wars* has influenced generations of American viewers for decades but has gone largely unanalyzed when it comes to a critique of the discourses about masculinity presented in the films. This is problematic as media serves as an agent of socialization, and the representations of masculinity in the *Star Wars* franchise may influence viewers’ idealization of masculinity leading to real world consequences. The research questions being analyzed in this study are: Is hegemonic masculinity performed by central characters in *Star Wars*? If so, how is it reinforced, how is it challenged, and how do these change over time? This study uses a critical discourse analysis to analyze the character development of twenty central characters of the *Star Wars* franchise, how these characters are both challenged and aspire to fall into ideals of hegemonic masculinity, and how these ideals may shift over time.

**Keywords:** Star Wars, Critical Discourse Analysis, Hegemonic Masculinity, Toxic Masculinity
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CHAPTER I.
INTRODUCTION

*Star Wars* has become embedded in American popular culture since its premiere in 1977 when the first film, *Star Wars*, later renamed, *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (1977), appeared on the big screen. It captivated audiences with its futuristic storyline and relatable characters. The *Star Wars* franchise, which now spans over four decades, not only reflects the culture of its time, but also helped define it. While the franchise has been deeply rooted in American culture and consumed by a wide audience, it is clear that the franchise’s target audience has historically been boys and men (Johnson, 2014). Due to its long history, intense character development, and deep connection to American culture, *Star Wars* makes for an interesting cultural artifact in which to analyze the performance and construction of masculinity. This project conducts a critical discourse analysis of the ten *Star Wars* films in order to analyze the character development of twenty central characters of the *Star Wars* franchise, how these characters are both challenged and aspire to fall into ideals of hegemonic masculinity, and how these ideals may shift over time.

**Statement of Problem**

*Star Wars* has been embedded into American popular culture for decades and has been consumed by multiple generations since its release. Over time, the messages that *Star Wars* has conveyed about hegemonic masculinity, as defined by Connell (1987) the idealized way of performing masculinity in society, have shifted as represented through the construction of different characters within the *Star Wars* franchise. These representations of masculinity are important to study as they demonstrate shifts in public
pedagogy surrounding gender ideologies and may serve as a site in which viewers learn how to perform gender.

A primary reason to examine hegemonic masculinity, is that its effects can be directly observed in the actions of some members of its fanbase. After the release of the most recent film in the franchise, *Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi* (2017), groups of fans including an alt-right group, “Down With Disney’s Treatment of Franchises and Their Fanboys,” took to social media to harass Kelly Marie Tran, *Star Wars’* first woman of color with a leading role (Cavna, 2018; McCluskey, 2018). Tran experienced personal backlash that manifested in the form of hateful comments regarding her racial identity, her femininity, and her physical appearance. After months of online harassment, Tran deleted all of her Instagram posts leaving her followers with only the words of her bio, “Afraid, but doing it anyway” (Tran, 2018). After Tran deleted her posts, “Down with Disney’s Treatment of Franchises and Their Fanboys” posted on their webpage celebrating their success in removing Tran from the platform. The post has since been removed, but not before their post was published in an article by *The Guardian*. The post by Shoard (2018) states,

> In the 6 months since *The Last Jedi*, hell even the last 4-6 years of this perversion of a canon, it warmed my heart to see the true fans rise up against Kathleen Kennedy and her feminazi agenda in the form of her soldiers like Pablo Hidalgo (you’re welcome), Daisy Ridley and now Kelly Marie Tran. Each and every one of you are the true Rebel Alliance… Now go out there and fight for Legends restoration, go out there and reverse this forced diversity, go out there and show them what real *Star Wars* fans look like. Bring back the Straight White Male Hero that isn’t manufactured by a corrupt corporation like Disney.

Efforts to include diverse characters in the *Star Wars* franchise have been met with immediate backlash by some fans who feel personally attacked by the inclusion of others. Tran’s representation in the *Star Wars* franchise was enough to cause this outrage,
leaving Tran emotionally affected and even fearful for her own safety. These representations of characters in the *Star Wars* franchise have real world implications that reach further than the film. These representations reinforce social power relations and need to be analyzed.

**Specific Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to conduct a critical discourse analysis of the ten *Star Wars* films in order to understand how hegemonic masculinity is embodied by central characters found throughout the franchise. This project provides additional insight into the changes in the cultural expectations surrounding the ideal representations of masculinity over time. By examining *Star Wars*, it is possible to see changes demonstrated through the shifts in character development found in central characters unique to the franchise. These changing representations should be analyzed and discussed as they can represent and reinforce ideals about masculinity in our society. The research questions being analyzed in this study are:

RQ1: Is hegemonic masculinity performed by central characters in Star Wars?

RQ2: If so, a. how is it reinforced b. how is it challenged c. how do these change over time?

**Significance of the Study**

*Star Wars* is a major cultural phenomenon that has remained largely underexplored from a critical perspective, specifically in regard to masculinity. This study seeks to address this issue through analyzing the construction of central characters within the ten current *Star Wars* films. It will add to the current literature through its aims to use *Star Wars* films and their discourses as a way to learn about changes in
representations of masculinity over time. In addition, this study analyzes masculine characters, feminine characters, and non-human characters in order to understand if and how masculinity is being constructed. In bringing to light these representations in this popular franchise, it could lead to more diverse and complex representations of characters in media.
CHAPTER II.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Media as an Agent of Socialization

Children learn how to be members of a culture through their interactions with others, through institutions, and through media. While children do not have the life experiences necessary to learn how to conduct themselves in complex situations, media offers a learning opportunity that they then internalize in order to learn cultural expectations and norms. For children, Disney is a primary creator and enforcer of culture which they then learn from. According to Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth Lugo (2009),

In a basic sense, the narratives embedded within these recent stories provide children (their primary target audience), and even adults with audio-visual reinforcements of ideologies concerning gender roles, the importance of conquering one’s fears, the rewards of hard work, or the benefits of team effort, making these stories powerful agents of socialization (Lugo p. 166-167).

Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo (2009) stress the importance that children’s media teaches children about society and how to conduct themselves within it. It serves as a reflection of society as well as a tool that children use to learn societal values and conduct. Bourdieu’s theory of cultural production claims that popular and alternative media both produce and influence the culture of society (Bourdieu, 1974, Littlejohn, Foss, and Oetzel 2017). In this regard, social identities and culture can be shaped by the media. According to Cappice, Chadha, Bi Lin, & Snyder (2012), it is important to pay attention to the messages that Disney is presenting in their films because “it becomes apparent that Disney holds an enormous stake in the cultural capital of the nation—our children” (p. 49). Disney is one of the six largest media conglomerates in the United States (Lutz, 2012). This makes evaluation of the messages within their films important
because they are consumed by such a massive audience. According to Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo (2009), children are especially susceptible to these messages because the content is made for them and thus becomes a mode of socialization and education. As of 2012, Disney includes Lucasfilm and the Star Wars franchise acquiring seven of the top 100 grossing films of all time in the worldwide box office (Clark 2018).

**Public Pedagogy**

The research in this study is informed by what Giroux (2004) refers to as public pedagogy, or the idea that people learn ideologies through culture including institutions, media, and social interactions. According to Giroux (2004), “culture functions as a contested sphere over the production, distribution, and regulation of power, and how and where it operates both symbolically and institutionally as an educational, political, and economic force” (p. 62). In this way, power structures are learned through these interactions with cultural artifacts and constructions. Films are no exception, according to Giroux, (2008), “as forms of public pedagogy, films must be understood in terms of their political and educational character and how they align with broader social, racial, economic, class, and institutional configurations” (p. 7). Zorando (2008) discusses how children learn culture, ideology, and social power structure through children’s film as a form of public pedagogy

Culture, in other words, transmits its imperatives: it is a story of itself as a practice and a strategy of pedagogy adults subject children to. Imbedded in the practice are ideas -- often unconsciously held by the individual -- that manifest as relational practices in which the individual learns the "right" way to relate to self, to other and the wide world all around. Pedagogy here, then, signifies more than its humble denotative definitions. Understanding pedagogy more broadly -- as a notion that signifies the power dynamic at work between and among power positions (p. 2).
Giroux (2008) also stresses the importance of historical context with regard to film. Because films were created at a certain point in history, they are reflecting the culture at a given time. This is important because films act as pedagogical devices and sites for learning about cultural ideologies at the time in which they were created.

This being said, people watching these films may gain an understanding of what it means to be a man through the coming of age storyline within the *Star Wars* franchise. Through looking at how the characters reinforce and challenge gender expectations, viewers gain an understanding of these social forces through what they see on screen and may choose to imitate some of the characteristics they see performed.

**Critical Theory**

According to Littlejohn, Foss, and Oetzel (2017) critical theory developed from Marxist thought and is concerned with social injustice caused by the way in which social and cultural institutions privilege dominant groups while oppressing others. Critical theory is activist in its nature and argues for critique of power structures. In focusing on the injustices caused by dominant groups and ideologies, critical theory can be used to create social change. Critical theory encompasses feminist, queer, and critical race theory, all with focuses to call attention to injustices to marginalized groups and bring about change. The concepts of privilege and oppression exist within society as a way of reinforcing power narratives based on systematic benefits and denials to certain groups. Samuels (2008) defines privilege as, “gaining resources that are denied to others based on one’s social group memberships” (p. 139). Oppression, on the other hand, is defined as “being denied access to resources based on one’s social group memberships” (Samuels 2008, p. 139). Through being part of a privileged social group, an individual will receive
unearned benefits through the injustice of taking these opportunities from others. Some of these social groups include gender, race, ability, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation to name a few. It is important to recognize that everyone has varying levels of privilege and oppression, while a person may benefit from privilege in some areas of their life, they may suffer from oppression in other areas. Patricia Hill Collins states that, “each one of us derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression that frame our lives” (Collins, 1993, p. 98).

**Foucault, Domination, and Power**

While power is evident in patriarchy and in representations of masculinity, Foucault (1977) argues that power does not stem from individuals alone, but rather power, and its effects on social structures, originate from institutions and structures of discourse, including language and cultural productions, leading to control and domination. In Foucault (1977)’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault discusses the shift from control over the physical body through physical punishment, to control of the body through discourse in order to maintain social control. Summarizing Foucault, according to Littlejohn, Foss, and Oetzel (2017), “discourse determines the place of the person in the scheme of the world” (p. 443). To clarify, those in power control the discourse and therefore reinforce social power structures and hierarchies. This contributes to social inequalities and differences in power relations. It is important to note that power relations are fluid and changing (Littlejohn, Foss, and Oetzel, 2017).
**Hegemonic Masculinity**

A concept that is central to this study is the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Drawing upon concepts from Antonio Gramsci, Connell (1987) defines hegemony as, “a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural practices” (p. 184). In other words, these hierarchies are not determined by physical power alone, but are embedded within our culture through institutions such as the family structure, government, and mass media. These ideologies seek to reinforce power structures that benefit the dominant group and keep them in control. In regard to gender, the dominant group is men. Kimmell, (1994) expands on Connell’s definition of masculinity by stating, “The hegemonic definition of manhood is a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power” (p. 125). Using Kimmell (1994)’s definition, it is possible to see how power constructs and defines ascendant forms of masculinity. According to Connell (1987), hegemonic masculinity serves as a cultural ideal for what masculinity should look like. It acts on a hierarchy that values some ways of being a man over other subordinated masculinities and over femininity as a whole. Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) discuss that although hegemonic masculinity might not be the most common form of masculinity it is normative in society and, “it embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men” (p. 832). This hierarchy creates a power structure that values certain qualities or ideals that become embedded into our everyday life, including mass media.
Birthisel (2014) expands this concept further by establishing idealized masculinity through three structures: bodily masculinity, sexual masculinity, and social masculinity. Bodily masculinity constructs masculinity through a physical male body defined by physical size and strength. If the individual does not measure up to these constructs, he has to compensate through personality traits such as “grit, determination, or unique skills” (p. 342). Sexual masculinity constructs masculinity through the normalization of heterosexuality. Social masculinity constructs masculinity through the integration of the subject into male patriarchal environments and relationships through homosocial interactions. Through analyzing and defining masculinity in these ways, it is possible to gain a more thorough understanding of how hegemonic masculinity is constructed through these three structures.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is not limited to biologic males alone. Many studies have addressed the concept of female characters embracing characteristics of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, Seibert 2018, Oppenheimer, Adams-Price, Goodman, Codling, & Coker 2003, Hentges & Case 2013, Rohner 2018). In some of these studies, “strong female characters” are considered strong characters through embodying male characteristics (Hentges & Case 2013, Oppenheimer, Adams-Price, Goodman, Codling, & Coker 2003). Hentges & Case (2013) found that in children’s media, male and female characters are being constructed similarly. However, they found that female characters are behaving in more masculine ways while male characters are not displaying female behaviors. In response to this they state,

This likely reflects the privileged status of males, and denigrates the feminine. Given that feminine behaviors were virtually nonexistent in programs targeting boys, even amongst female characters, children's television is presenting few images of feminine roles to boys. Given the privileged status of males,
programming sends the message that girls should aspire to stereotypically masculine behaviors and roles. However, the reverse does not hold true; boys are not encouraged to aspire to stereotypically feminine behaviors. Thus, girls are exposed to images of both masculine and feminine behaviors on television, but boys see mainly masculine roles (p. 330).

This implication demonstrates reproductions of the social power structures that are in place that allow for the domination of men over women in society through the lens of media. Women are encouraged to gain their power and agency through embracing and aspiring to embody hegemonic masculinity and its idealization.

**Toxic Hegemonic Masculinity and What it Means to Be a “Real Man”**

Although masculinity is diverse and complex, images of masculinity in media are oversimplified and focus on aspects of toxic masculinity (Elliott, 2018). Representations of masculinity in media are not inherently problematic. However, Birthisel (2014) states,

> These texts' grammar of masculinity becomes more problematic, however, when these physical signs of maleness become inextricably linked to patriarchal signifiers of masculinity and authority: to be a large man is to be a powerful and respected man; to be a small man is to be constantly compensating for one's lack; to be a man is to be endlessly caught up in heterosexual pursuits; to be a man is to find oneself constantly embroiled in patriarchal battles over authority, freedom, and power with male relatives, friends, and colleagues.

These negative characteristics and patriarchal acts define toxic masculinity. While hegemonic masculinity fundamentally reinforces male domination in society, toxic masculinity is defined by acts of gendered violence and sexual aggression. The concept of toxic masculinity emerged out of the men’s movements in the 1980s and 1990s that sought to explain a narrowly defined social construction of manhood that focused on competition between men (Douglas 2019). O’Malley (2016) defines toxic masculinity as, “a narrow and repressive description of manhood, designating manhood as defined by
violence, sex, status, and aggression” (para. 5). Clemens (2017) clarifies that the importance in the definition of toxic masculinity is that it focuses on the men’s violent behavior, not masculinity itself, but the gendered behavior that occurs when “what it means to be a man goes wrong” (para. 3). To clarify, toxic masculinity is defined by the acts attributed to negative characteristics of masculinity such as violence, sexual aggression, and dominance over women or what it means to be a real man.

Kimmel and Wade (2018) equate a healthy versus toxic masculinity to what it means to be a good man versus what it means to be a real man and the conflict between the two. Through Kimmel’s discussions with cadets, they found that many equated healthy characteristics of manhood with what it means to be a good man and toxic characteristics of manhood with what it means to be a real man. Kimmel and Wade (2018) state, “First of all they were telling me that the real man is the performative part. The real man is the part that has to perform for others, to validate their masculinities. The real man is homosocial. The good man is abstract. It’s not necessarily interactive” (p. 238). Through this it can be understood that toxic masculinity and what it means to be a real man are performative and clearly defined ways of enacting masculinity.

The obsession with violence in defining toxic masculinity is something that sets this form of masculinity apart from hegemonic masculinity, as defined by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) who clarify, “hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion” (p. 832). In this regard, hegemonic masculinity, or idealized masculinity, is not a concept that is innately steeped in violence, but rather has formed through socialization allowing both positive and negative characteristics. In contrast, toxic
masculinity is defined by the negative traits that are associated with masculinity. Rohner (2018) states, “The term toxic masculinity is useful in discussions about gender and masculinity because it distinguishes those aspects of hegemonic masculinity that are socially destructive from those that are culturally accepted and valued” (p. 9). In this regard, toxic masculinity is upheld and defined through violence and other problematic characteristics of masculinity. Haider (2016) states, “If violence is constitutive of masculinity, then violence becomes the mode by which one asserts one’s masculinity. This assertion can take the form of symbolic violence and extend to physical violence too” (p. 558). Violence is used in toxic masculinity to uphold male guardianship over women and family and to enforce patriarchal order (Haider 2016). Upholding idealizations surrounding toxic masculinity and violence lead to damaging consequences for women, gay men, and the men who embody toxic masculinity themselves (Douglas, 2019).

**Building Off of Hegemonic Masculinity**

While it is important to define hegemonic masculinity, there are other theories about how masculinity is constructed that also need to be addressed when analyzing the character composition within the *Star Wars* franchise. As mentioned previously, Kimmel (1994) builds upon Connell (1987)’s theory of hegemonic masculinity adding in that men construct their identities in relation to other men and construct masculinity as homophobia, or a fear of other men. According to Kimmel (1994) “Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men” (p. 131). This fear, leads to a society in which men are made to feel both powerful and powerless. In constantly fearing the unmasking
of masculinity, judgement, and being perceived as homosexual (and thus not a “real man”), men perform masculinity in order to appease standards set by other men.

According to West and Zimmerman (1987), people put on gendered performances that represent and display their proclaimed gender. This performance is reinforced through boundary work that strives to maintain a specific representation of gender. It shows gender as a situational accomplishment in which people can choose to reinforce or challenge their gender category. In this way gender is viewed as an identity that is formed through group membership with others.

**Masculinity in Star Wars**

There are several previous studies that demonstrate the importance of looking at *Star Wars* and other science fiction films analytically (Atkinson & Calafell, 2009; Bar & Hou, 2016; Ellis, 2002; and Johnson, 2014). Their pieces argue that these media constructions have influence within and are influenced by the culture in which they are created. The most influential study to the current research study was done by Atkinson & Calafell (2009). Their research draws on Trujillo (1991) who identifies five features of hegemonic masculinity. These include: 1. Physical force and control, 2. Occupational achievement, 3. Familial patriarchy, 4. Frontiermanship, and 5. Heterosexuality. Atkinson & Calafell (2009) show how Anakin Skywalker demonstrates a sixth feature of hegemonic masculinity, the avoidance of responsibility. This study tracks the progression of Anakin Skywalker into Darth Vader through his performances of hegemonic masculinity. In outlining these features of hegemonic masculinity as embodied through Darth Vader, the piece acts as a starting point for the research that is currently being addressed in this study.
Bar and Hou (2016) discuss the importance of looking at science fiction films in relation to constructions of masculinity through the Back to the Future franchise. The researchers use an intersectional approach in order to analyze different forms of masculinity that are present within the films and offer an analysis of how these different forms of masculinity are socially constructed and reproduced. The piece analyzes factors such as social class, age, and differences in aggression. It also looks at how the male characters interact with each other within the films in order to look at how masculinity is constructed through men’s regulation of other men.

Other work that has been done previously on Star Wars has shown gender construction through the lens of femininity. Ellis (2002) analyzes Princess Leia’s role in Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope (1977) as compared to masculine characters in the film. Princess Leia is constructed as having less agency throughout the film, and as a less important character than male characters such as, Luke Skywalker and Han Solo. Leia relies on the male characters in the film in order to be saved, and only gains power through her position as a leader of the Rebellion. This article emphasizes the subordination of women in response to representations of hegemonic masculinity. It directly relates to arguments made by Connell (1987) in which femininity is constructed as subordinate to masculinity. Johnson (2014) demonstrates the importance of gender in the Star Wars franchise as well, but uses a different approach and analyzes gender through merchandising. Johnson (2014) states that merchandise created for women still enforces ideologies about hegemonic masculinity and the subordination and objectification of women. This furthers the claim that Star Wars and its messaging, still rely heavily on the assumption that the artifact was created for men.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In order to obtain an understanding of how hegemonic masculinity is represented in *Star Wars*, a qualitative research method, critical discourse analysis (CDA), was used. This method was appropriate for this analysis as it involved examining the power structures that are operating within the artifact itself as well as how those systems are interconnected to the society in which the artifact was created. Through analyzing the systems of power that are in use within *Star Wars*, we can gain a better understanding of how those systems can translate into American society. According to Bell (2016), CDA can be defined as “a method of research that studies how social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in social political contexts” (lecture, April 20, 2016). According to Van Dijk (1993), Critical Discourse Analysis is characterized by its focus on systems of power and dominance as they relate to inequalities within societies (p. 252). CDA requires that its users take a sociopolitical stance in bringing about change for those who suffer from inequality and injustice (Van Dijk 1993, p. 252). CDA is activist in nature and thus focus on calling attention to and bringing about change.

Sample

media including television shows, books, comic books, blogs, merchandise, or fan-created media which acknowledge the films’ positioning within the larger Star Wars universe. In addition, the analysis used an illustrative sample that focused primarily on the character development of 20 central characters that demonstrate masculinity in the Star Wars films including Luke Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Darth Vader, Han Solo, Chewbacca, Yoda, Emperor Palpatine, Lando Calrissian, Anakin Skywalker, Qui-Gon Jinn, Jyn Erso, Kylo Ren, Finn, Po Dameron, Rey, Princess Leia, Jabba the Hut, Qi’ra, Padme Amidala and Jar Jar Binks and how they embodies or challenge hegemonic masculinity over the course of the films. While their relationships with other characters may be mentioned briefly, this analysis will focus solely on central characters to the storyline. These characters were selected due to their central presence within all of the films, or within film series either as main characters in the original trilogy, the prequel films, or the sequel trilogy. This same construct also applies to characters who are central within their anthology films such as Jyn Erso in Rogue One: A Star Wars Story (2016) and Qi’ra in Solo: A Star Wars Story (2018) even though they are not present within the canon films. In looking at only primary characters, it narrows the focus away from secondary characters that may not add as much depth to the study. In addition, the study excludes droids, although R2-D2 and C3PO are central to the narrative storyline.
Table A: Sample Characters and Film Presence

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<th>The Empire Strikes Back</th>
<th>Return of the Jedi</th>
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Procedure

For this study each film was viewed in its entirety three times. There was a careful consideration of the text which aimed for an exactness in the codebook which included direct transcripts of the films. The researcher transcribed the dialogue for each of the twenty characters in the study verbatim throughout each of the films pausing and rewinding as necessary for accuracy. If necessary, clips from the films were re-watched. These transcriptions were recorded in a Word document that consisted of three sections: Imagery, Dialogue, and Narrative. Imagery included transcribing what was happening on-screen in films in regard to the image presented, dialogue included words that were used by characters, and narrative included what was occurring in the storyline involving the characters. From the three-tiered analysis, the films were coded in a codebook constructed in Numbers. The codebook was broken down into 18 sections that included: physical force and control, occupational achievement, frontiermanship, familial patriarchy, heterosexuality, avoidance of responsibility, homophobia, power, bodily masculinity, sexual masculinity, social masculinity, violence, sex, status, aggression, challenging of masculinity/ feminine traits, and acts of being a savior. When characters exhibited any of these traits, they were recorded into the codebook into the corresponding
section. The codebook was then analyzed by the researcher. This produced a codebook of 149 pages in length. Due to the size of the codebook, it is not included as an appendix for this thesis.

**Coding**

The films were coded qualitatively in regard to imagery, auditory, and narrative structure and were evaluated interpretively using a three-tiered analysis. The films were coded for how the characters in the study followed ideologies of hegemonic masculinity as outlined by Atkinson & Calafel (2009), Trujillo (1991), Connell (1987), and Kimmel (1994). The study was coded closely for the concepts of hegemonic masculinity outlined by Trujillo (1991). These included demonstrations of: 1. Physical force and control, 2. Occupational achievement, 3. Familial patriarchy, 4. Frontiermanship, and 5. Heterosexuality (Trujillo, 1991). Characters were also coded when they demonstrated acts of constructing their masculinity through interactions with other characters, acted in an aggressive manner, or placed blame of their actions on others. These codes contributed to an analysis of when characters embraced ideologies and characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, as well as when they challenged these ideologies. The characters were coded for instances in which they adhere to hegemonic or toxic masculinity characteristics.

Coding occurred when characters performed actions, used language, or constructed the narrative through masculine representations that reinforce hegemonic masculinity, toxic masculinity, and social power structures. The semi-structured format used for the coding focused on these basic themes but allowed for the analysis of other codes as they appeared and related to this study. The study then compared these results generationally (original trilogy, sequels, and prequels) over time as the films progress and analyzed how
these representations changed over the course of the films’ history. It looked for patterns that were present within the generations of films in comparison to one another to see which patterns emerged. The codes were used to construct a codebook used in this study in which the codes specifically were: physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiermanship, heterosexuality, avoidance of responsibility, homophobia, power, bodily masculinity, sexual masculinity/sex, violence, status, aggression, challenging of masculinity/feminine traits, and a code that emerged out of the patterns of this study: acts of being a savior. It is important to note that both male and female characters, as well as inhuman characters were coded in regard to their performances of masculinity.

Analysis

This project used Van Dijk’s critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA examines the metanarratives present within the artifact and analyzes them for their real world implications and what it means for our larger society. This method was appropriate for this analysis as it examines the power structures operating within the films themselves, as well as how those structures are interconnected to the society in which they were created. Power structures, such as race, gender, (dis)ability, and other social identities contribute to privilege and oppression of groups leading to inequalities within a society. CDA also involves taking into account the historical context of the artifact and analyzing it for the time in which it was created, as well as by whom it was created.

In CDA, Van Dijk uses the term “power elites” to represent those who have the most power in society and therefore control the discourses that are created and reinforced. These discourses are reinforced on both macro and micro levels. Macro discourses
consist of institutionalized social power, while micro discourses focus on individuals through verbal and non-verbal language. CDA requires that researchers use their analysis for social change. In drawing attention to the power structures that are occurring within the artifact, the method should be activist in its nature and requires users of this methodology to take a stand based on the argument that is presented. It is important to note that this is not the only way that the film can be analyzed. This is due to the fact that the analysis is constructed by one researcher, whose own identities influence the way that the films and characters are viewed.

Within this study, there was a focus on gendered representation of the characters with regard to race, class, (dis)ability and other social identities as represented by characters in the film. The study also examined how these social identities related to larger power structures. This was operationalized through the analysis of the characters found within the films, with regard to their differences in their social identities over time. Character’s social identities throughout the film were not always static. Over the course of the films, characters may have experienced changes in their construction of masculinity based on changes of ability, age, and class. These differences were analyzed in order to view how masculinity is being constructed within the films. Through looking at characters from an intersectional lens, we may be able to deconstruct differences between the characters as their identity does not consist of gender representation alone.

**Rejecting Empiricism**

As this paper is based in CDA, it is important that the researcher recognizes the bias that may be experienced based on the researcher’s own identification. The researcher is a twenty-four-year-old Latina female pursuing a Master of Arts degree in
Communication. The researcher has an undergraduate degree in Communication with an emphasis in Media Studies and Women and Ethnic Studies from the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. The researcher is from a upper-middle class family and identifies as cisgender and able-bodied. These identities inform the researcher’s life experience and thus the way that this researcher has analyzed the text. The writer may not see the implications of other interpretations that a man may see, a white person may see, or a disabled person may see within this text. Thus, only the researcher’s own identities will inform this analysis. This is not the only way that this text may be interpreted.
CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Overall Findings:

Throughout this study, there were patterns that emerged regarding how masculinity was constructed in the *Star Wars* universe. For most characters, masculinity was achieved primarily through occupational achievement, as well as through physical force and control. That is, characters who were viewed as being masculine often excelled at their careers and exerted their physical force onto others at some point in their characterization. These two traits primarily made up the majority of masculine character composition in the films. However, violence, heterosexuality, and bodily masculinity were also of importance in constructing masculinity in the *Star Wars* films. Interestingly, there was another pattern that emerged with masculinized characters acting as saviors of either themselves, others, or their way of life. This pattern was something that occurred in both heroes and villains of the franchise and contributed to their success as masculinized characters. This was especially important in some of the younger characters as they come of age and are viewed as establishing their own versions of masculinity and learning how to be a man.

Generational Differences

In response to research question two which addressed the differences in generations of films, there were overarching themes regarding masculinity that came from each generation. In the original trilogy, masculinity can be viewed as the choice that characters make between hegemonic masculinity, or traditional masculinity, and toxic masculinity. This is evident in the juxtaposition of the Light Side and the Dark Side of
the Force. The Light Side of the Force, which is primarily embodied by the Jedi and other heroes in the original trilogy, such as Han Solo and Luke Skywalker, acts as a stand in for hegemonic masculinity and what society expects of men. The Dark Side of the Force, is representative of toxic masculinity and is embodied by the villains of the original trilogy, including Darth Vader and Darth Sidious (Emperor Palpatine). While there are problematic instances such as the objectification and sexualization of Princess Leia, and the policing of Luke’s emerging masculinity by Obi-Wan, Yoda, and Han Solo, the overall message to viewers of the original trilogy is that one should strive to adhere to a specific form of hegemonic masculinity over toxic masculinity. As stated earlier in this paper, hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily toxic. Hegemonic masculinity is the idealized way of being a man that is embedded and reinforced in culture and society. It is not inherently violent, but rather is defined by social ascendency through cultural institutions. Toxic masculinity on the other hand, is defined by its violence, aggression, and sexuality.

In contrast, the prequel films are riddled with examples of violence, rape culture, and aggression. These films focus on Anakin’s ascent into the Dark Side of the Force and as such show viewers what toxic masculinity looks like and how to emulate its power. Viewers are meant to identify with Anakin and understand how he morphed into Darth Vader. Even though Anakin is supposed to be viewed as a villain, in many ways he is expressed as a hero throughout the prequel films. This could be especially problematic for younger viewers who are learning how to express their gender identity through the consumption of these films.
The newer sequel and stand-alone films challenge these constraints of masculinity by showing different forms of masculinity expressed by new characters such as Rey, Finn, and Poe Dameron. They also address the consequences of narrow expressions of masculinity for older characters, such as Luke Skywalker. Seemingly, some of the newer films attempt to right some of the wrongs that previous films in the franchise made in regard to gender identity. This is especially evident in the ways that Poe is questioned for his use of violence, and Finn demonstrates intense emotions. It can also be seen through analyzing Princess Leia’s construction in the newer films in which she is referred to as General Leia. While these films provide different versions of masculinity and alternatives for masculine expression, these films do not challenge the masculine social structure in our society and still contribute to gendered oppression through its downplaying of femininity for Rey who is a female character but who embodies many of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity and behaves very much like a masculine character.

The rest of this discussion will examine the concepts discussed within this section in much greater detail. Specifically, it will explore in detail how masculinity is constructed by several of the main characters within the films and what these characterizations may mean for our larger society. Even with the additions of different forms of masculinity, more female characters, and shifts in gender representations in society, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done in regard to Star Wars’ expressions of masculinity.
Luke Skywalker: Masculinity and the Light and Dark Side of the Force

In the Star Wars universe there is a constant battle between the Light Side of The Force and the Dark Side of the Force. For Luke Skywalker, this directly contributes to his construction of masculinity. Throughout much of the original trilogy, viewers watch Luke Skywalker navigate his entrance into manhood. He encounters mentors such as Obi-Wan Kenobi, Yoda, Han Solo, and Darth Vader which shape his own versions of masculinity. He is faced with a problematic and narrow version of hegemonic masculinity that the Jedi adhere to, or the outward and extreme toxic masculinity that the Sith promote.

When viewers first meet Luke Skywalker, he is a boy on the verge of manhood. He plays with toys in his room and daydreams about being a pilot. Skywalker argues with his uncle Owen about being able to go to the academy reaching for some form of independence, which is something many adolescents can identify with. It is not until Skywalker sees the charred skeletons of his aunt and uncle after meeting Obi-Wan Kenobi that he chooses to embark on his journey across the galaxy and into manhood. Throughout the film, Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope (1977), Skywalker is constantly referred to as a boy and a kid by both his guardians and Han Solo. In the first half of the film, it is primarily Obi-Wan Kenobi acting as a father figure that shapes Luke’s view on manhood and masculinity. Kenobi shows Luke the Force and teaches him the ways of the Jedi, and as such, how to be a man. He shows Luke to act in a manner that is controlled and calculated in order to defeat his enemies as well as how to assert his power over others through the use of the Force. Obi-Wan Kenobi also shapes how Luke constructs his masculinity through his construction as a savior. He encourages Luke to
help him save Princess Leia. Skywalker is also introduced to Han Solo who acts more as an older brother or more experienced peer. Solo functions in opposition to Kenobi and makes statements to undermining Kenobi’s guidance. Solo teaches Skywalker about women, how to fight, and how to act tough as he demonstrates these behaviors and polices Luke’s masculinity.

Most of the lessons that Luke Skywalker learns about masculinity early on are from the Jedi through Obi-Wan Kenobi and later Yoda’s teachings which fall in line with what could be considered hegemonic masculinity as outlined by Trujillo (1991). Jedis assert physical force and control. Viewers see characters who are Jedis fighting with lightsabers and defending themselves and others. They are considered to have occupational achievement as they move through their ranks as a Padawan Learner, to Jedi Knight, and ultimately achieve the rank of Jedi Master. Their masculinity is inherently tied to this occupational status. They act as patriarchs to the younger padawans through their mentorship relationships. They are viewed as frontiersmen through their willingness to travel throughout the galaxy in order to restore peace. Even though Jedi are not supposed to pursue romantic relationships, heterosexuality is still assumed for the Jedi.

The Jedi Order works as a social and cultural institution within the Star Wars universe, and as such, serves as a cultural device for the construction of masculinity. The Jedi Order is a structured institution with its own governing body that works closely with other governing bodies in the galaxy including the Galactic Senate. The Jedi are well respected within this government structure and are well known throughout the galaxy. In this way, being a Jedi means something of importance and as such, they are powerful agents of maintaining social structures within the galaxy. It is not just a career choice
however, but rather a lifestyle based in religious values. The Jedi Code states, “There is no emotion, there is peace. There is no ignorance, there is knowledge. There is no passion, there is serenity. There is no chaos, there is harmony. There is no death, there is the Force.” (Lucas 1977-2018). This religious code shapes the Jedi Order and their beliefs. In its existence, toxic masculinity is inherently built in as the code states that in order to be a Jedi, you must abstain from all emotion. The Jedi learn to suppress their feelings and emotion in exchange for power that is meant to bring peace to the galaxy. While the Jedi Order is inherently problematic, in the Star Wars universe, it functions as the most honored way of being a man. Being a Jedi is a highly desirable way of presenting masculinity as the Jedi are powerful, well respected, and valuable within the society. Both Yoda and Obi-Wan Kenobi are highly revered by others and many other characters are held up against them as a standard for achievement.

For Luke Skywalker, learning how to be a Jedi, is synonymous with how he learns to be a man. Luke learns how to fight as a Jedi, and how to use the Force in self-defense to protect and defend himself and others. He becomes a pilot for the Rebellion and destroys the Death Star. He becomes a skilled warrior and achieves the rank of Jedi Master. Luke goes on adventures all over the galaxy as he embarks on missions to help the Rebellion. He learns to act as a savior, restoring peace to the galaxy, through rescuing Princess Leia, Han Solo and ultimately what is left of the Resistance. Even though the Jedi are not supposed to have romantic relationships, Skywalker is still marked as heterosexual. Before viewers learn Leia is his sister, they watch Skywalker pursue a romantic relationship with her in his rivalry with Han Solo. Luke also asserts his dominance over his sister Leia acting as her protector, in this way, he is marked as a
patriarch as well. It is through the embodiment of these traits that Luke Skywalker uses the hegemonic masculinity of the Jedi to gain his power and become a masculine being.

Luke’s masculinity is not just shaped by the ways of the Jedi. In learning about the Force, Luke Skywalker is also influenced by the ways of the Sith, especially after he learns that his father is none other than Darth Vader, a name synonymous with the Dark Side of the Force. When Yoda, acting as a guide and mentor to Luke, tells him about the Dark Side in the *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back (1980)* he states, “Yes a Jedi’s power flows from the Force. But beware of the Dark Side. Anger, fear, aggression, the Dark Side of the Force are they. Easily they flow quick to join you in a fight. If once you start down the dark path forever it will dominate your destiny” (Kurtz & Kershner). When Luke asks if the Dark Side is stronger and how he can know the difference, Yoda replies, “No, no, no. Quicker, easier, more seductive…You will know when you’re calm, at peace, passive. A Jedi uses the Force for knowledge and defense. Never to attack” (Kurtz & Kershner, 1980). In this regard, the Dark Side is viewed as toxic masculinity. It is based on violence and aggression. In Yoda stating that the path to the Dark Side is easier, it can be learned that the traits associated with toxic masculinity are considered easy ways to prove masculinity, but they do not necessarily constitute what it means to be a good man. Darth Vader constantly uses the Force and his power to harm others. Darth Vader and Darth Sidious encourage Luke to give in to his anger and aggression arguing that it will make him more powerful. Darth Sidious, or Emperor Palpatine, tries to influence Luke to join the Dark Side and embody toxic masculinity encouraging Luke through saying, “Good, use your aggressive feelings boy, let the hate flow through you” and “Good, your hate has made you more powerful. Now fulfill your destiny and take
your father’s place at my side” (Kazanjian & Marquand, 1983). Luke identifies with the Light Side of the Force and claims that he will never join the Dark Side opting for hegemonic masculinity versus the abundance of toxic masculinity viewers see from the Dark Side.

However, although the Jedi are held up as an ideal version of masculinity and favorable over the Sith, this version of masculinity is still problematic and something that Luke addresses as the franchise goes on. The Jedi training that Luke receives teaches him to act in a way that asserts physical force and control over others. Even through the Jedi’s use of the Force is supposed to restore peace to the galaxy, viewers gain the understanding that the only way to bring peace is through violence. This is evident when Luke is told by Yoda that the only way to restore peace and complete his training is to face (read kill) his father, Darth Vader. While Luke hesitates to fight his father, he still enacts violence against him. The lessons that Luke learns about hegemonic masculinity from the Jedi are damaging as he is taught to suppress his feelings. Luke is told to sacrifice his friends in order to finish his training. He is told to hide his feelings as they could be used against him by the Dark Side. However, viewers see this substantially in *Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi* (2017) as demonstrated by Luke’s creation of Kylo Ren. Skywalker threatens Kylo Ren with physical force at the hands of his lightsaber in an effort to act as a savior and save the galaxy from the darkness he sensed in Kylo. Instead, it left Kylo Ren with fear of Luke Skywalker and his threat of physical violence. Importantly, this act is what created Kylo Ren as Skywalker chose to assert his dominance over Ren instead of handling the conflict in other more appropriate ways without the threat of violence and the guise of homophobia. This scene in particular
addresses the problems with hegemonic masculinity and the damaging effects that it has to both older and younger men in attempting to adhere to these social and institutionalized expectations.

Luke Skywalker addresses discontent with the Jedi and as such, with hegemonic masculinity in *Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi* (2017) as he tells Rey that the Jedi need to die. Skywalker shares that the feels the Jedi are vain and romanticized. He claims that the Force does not belong to the Jedi alone, that their arrogance allowed Darth Vader to rise, and that his own hubris led to the construction of Kylo Ren. This can be read in our society as the issues that we are faced with in regard to hegemonic masculinity.

Classic versions of masculinity are still held up as standards and ideologies, however, these are problematic and damaging as these romanticized versions of masculinity show only a narrow version of masculinity steeped in violence and institutionalized domination. This version of hegemonic masculinity can lead to toxic masculinity if problematic traits are not addressed.

**Darth Vader: The Mask of Masculinity**

While Luke Skywalker demonstrates emerging masculinity and the choice to adhere to hegemonic masculinity, Anakin Skywalker’s development into Darth Vader demonstrates the path to toxic masculinity. As stated earlier in this analysis, toxic masculinity can be thought of as when being a man goes wrong. Through looking further into Anakin Skywalker and Darth Vader’s construction of masculinity, there is a sharp contrast in how the character’s construct masculinity as Anakin Skywalker is shown in opposition to Darth Vader. This occurrence is referred to in this study as, “The Mask of Masculinity.” The Mask of Masculinity is the explanation for the differences in
representations of masculinity and development of increasing toxic masculinity performed by the character of Anakin Skywalker/ Darth Vader.

Viewers see Anakin Skywalker as a child in Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace (1999). He is strong willed, creative, resourceful, and innocent. He wants to help others, not hurt them. His mother says that he knows nothing of greed and he is fearful in the way that children are. Anakin loves to create things and builds droids and podracers. Anakin grows up as a seemingly normal child until it is pointed out to him that he is anything but normal, that he is extraordinary. Anakin is trained in the ways of the Jedi by Qui Gon Jinn, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and other members of the Jedi Council. Viewers watch as the problematic traits of the Jedi’s hegemonic masculinity manifests in Anakin through his desire to adhere to the strict version of masculinity that the Jedi promote leading to his embrace of toxic masculinity. We see an arrogance grow within Anakin over the next two films, he begins to question the authority of Obi-Wan Kenobi and the Jedi Council. As he grows stronger, the Jedi Council becomes more concerned with his instability and begins to show their distrust for Anakin Skywalker. However, even with this distrust, viewers see Anakin Skywalker pushing boundaries, driving aggressively, and reinforcing his heterosexuality through his relationship with Padme. As Anakin is about to become a father and is excelling in his career, viewers see these cultural ideals enforced again to symbolize and construct Anakin as a man. When others discuss Anakin from this time, it is done so with respect to him as a good friend, a powerful Jedi, and a good man. Even in the Jedi Masters’ interactions with Luke later in the franchise, they refer to Anakin Skywalker as someone who was viewed in a positive manner. He was “a Jedi Knight, the best star pilot in the galaxy, and a stunning warrior” according to Obi-Wan Kenobi.
(Kurtz & Lucas, 1977). He was killed as a victim of Darth Vader directly referring to the split between the two versions of this character.

It is not until after Anakin Skywalker starts to fail as a man in the film that viewers see his shift to Darth Vader. The things that solidified him as a man such as his occupational achievements and his heterosexual relationship start deteriorating. Anakin Skywalker loses the trust of the Jedi Council, starts to crave power, and even commits acts of violence against his love interest, Padme. His actions of killing the Padawans, children aspiring to become Jedi, solidifies his fate as Obi-Wan and the Jedi Council are forced to act against Anakin. Obi-Wan removes Anakin’s limbs and leaves him on the shore of the volcano planet to die. He is badly burned and is left with severe physical disabilities. Anakin’s bodily masculinity and physical ability are taken away as a result of gendered and institutionalized violence. Yoda ordered Obi-Wan to kill Anakin as he has become a threat. Obi-Wan spares Anakin’s life but maims and disfigures him. Obi-Wan is not viewed in the same negative light as Anakin for this action because he still has power through his status as a Jedi Master. As a Jedi Master, his actions are viewed as positive as he is enacting violence in order to restore peace. In this way, his violence is viewed as positive in a way that Anakin’s is not. Through this enactment of violence, Obi-Wan acts as a savior seemingly protecting the galaxy from Darth Vader. His actions are not sanctioned in the same way because he is acting in upholding the institutionalized ideals of masculinity as defined by the Jedi Council that was threatened by Anakin’s behavior. In addition, Obi-Wan’s masculinity is not in question and he maintains his power as a man, therefore allowing Obi-Wan to act in a toxic manner without it ever being questioned or considered toxic in the same way that Anakin is constructed. This
solidifies Anakin’s separation from the Light Side of the Force and hegemonic masculinity, as his mentor and friend uses violence to sever Anakin’s own bodily masculinity and physical ability. In this moment, Anakin is taught that the only way to be a man is to embody his own violence to assert his masculinity as he can no longer demonstrate masculinity in another way. His actions result in Padme’s death as she could not bear to live with the atrocities that he enacted. Both his physical body and his heterosexuality that marked Anakin Skywalker as a man, are gone. Through his inability to perform gender in a way that was previously constructed as idealized in society, Anakin Skywalker no longer measures up as a man, and is forced to perform his gender through the guise of the mask of Darth Vader.

Anakin Skywalker, is now transformed into Darth Vader, his new body is mechanized. His limbs are now prosthetic and an emotionless black mask is placed over his head. The mask affixed with a breathing device does not allow for emotions other than anger to be demonstrated through his voice. He is dehumanized and as such becomes the ultimate version of toxic masculinity. His dominance, aggression, and concealed humanity allow him to perform masculinity in a way that is not able to be questioned. His attire and inhuman abilities with his new body allow Darth Vader to become the villain that we associate with the Star Wars franchise, someone who is so composed and threatening through their presence. Darth Vader relies on his helmet and his suit for power. He is no longer able to assert his masculinity through his body and sexuality, so he needs a mechanized body, stoic personality, and ability to enact violence in order for his masculinity to be realized. Without his mask and his suit, he would not be considered masculine or powerful.
This is shown in some of the rare scenes in the franchise where Darth Vader is out of his suit. In one instance, he is floating in a tank with his disfigured head exposed. The messenger sent to summon Darth Vader is even shown to look away in shame for what he has seen. His age and disability prove that Darth Vader’s masculinity is only vulnerable through the exposure of his weaknesses of his deformed and aging body. Vader hides behind a mask that serves as a metaphor for Kimmel’s discussion of homophobia and the fear of being unmasked by other men as proof of not being a real man. He is literally unmasked by Luke Skywalker, his son, after telling Luke that he wants to look at him with his real eyes. Vader is shown on the ground looking up at look with his disfigured and aging body. Vader looks vulnerable and weak while Luke is meant to be juxtaposed as the man with power over his father’s weakness. His mask was the only thing hiding his mortality. Underneath the mask, is love for his son, compassion, fear, uncertainty, and conflict. These are emotions that Darth Vader would not show to the world. They are hidden underneath the violence, hidden expressions, and power of the mask. When the mask is removed, Darth Vader dies. This could be viewed within our society as the fear of unmasking masculinity. Although many men would not physically perish if their masculinity is called into question it may lead to anxieties and feelings of inadequacies that may make men feel they are powerless.

Even after Darth Vader’s death he is still admired by his successor and grandson, Kylo Ren. Kylo Ren constructs his own mask similar to Darth Vader in hopes to emanate his power. However, Kylo Ren is young, able-bodied, white, male, and born into a powerful family. He should not have to prove his masculinity through the use of the Mask of Masculinity that Darth Vader created to make up for his shortcomings through
other paths of performing masculinity. Darth Vader was trying to gain back his masculinity and power through the use of his mask, Kylo Ren should already have it at his fingertips in the *Star Wars* universe as it privileges these social identities. Yet he is not considered powerful and does not measure up as a man. Because of this, he is made fun of by others including Supreme Leader Snoke for his reliance on the Mask of Masculinity. Snoke tells him to take the mask off. Kylo Ren is able to show his face without sacrificing his masculinity, but Darth Vader could not due to his constraint on his lack of social privilege communicated by his body due to his disability and age. In this way, Kylo Ren is trying to emanate power and masculinity that he will never have because he is already supposed to be powerful in other ways. However, Kylo Ren fears that he will never live up to Darth Vader and will never live up to being a real man. This secret is exposed to the viewers through Rey, a “girl who has never held a lightsaber” that threatens Kylo Ren’s fragile masculinity (Burk, Kennedy, & Abrams, 2015). This can be viewed as the threat of the feminine to hegemonic masculinity and the domination of women through these institutionalized systems as a way to maintain power and control. Although Darth Vader and Kylo Ren share many similar life experiences, it’s the differences between the two that cost Kylo Ren his respect and his masculinity.

The concept of masculinity as a performance was discussed by West and Zimmerman (1987). The mask becomes a way to perform masculinity through this gendered display. However as was the case with Kylo Ren, viewers see that this performance is not always considered authentic. This inauthentic performance threatens exposure of being seen as not masculine. Masculinity can viewed as wearing a mask. Boys and men are taught to hide their emotions in favor of acting violently, asserting
their power over women, and not showing vulnerability. This could have lasting effects in our society as boys and men enact certain desired forms of masculinity that are being emulated within this film. They are not allowed to show weakness or vulnerability, even some that are inevitable such as aging and disability. They are shown that even though they may try and embody the type of performance given by Darth Vader they may not live up. This could have to do with the historical context of the film. Expectations of hegemonic masculinity have changed and shifted over time. This could mean that the same exceptions that were allowed for Darth Vader during his creation in the 1970’s may not be the same today given the construction of the failed masculinity of Kylo Ren. It could be that society expects more from boys and men in order to prove themselves as men, including substantial power over women and ability to show composure instead of violent outbursts. While Darth Vader’s enactment of violence was seen as necessary for his construction of masculinity in the early *Star Wars* films, it is viewed differently within our society today.

**Han Solo: Space Cowboy**

Han Solo asserts his masculinity in a way that equates him with the cowboys of Western films, almost as if he were John Wayne, a widely recognized character fitting the cowboy archetype, in space. He is a frontiersman who pulled himself up by his bootstraps to become a rebellion general, smuggler, war hero, and the pilot that made the Kessel run in 12 parsecs. Han Solo’s masculinity shapes the emerging masculinities of both Luke and Rey who he mentors and shapes. There are problematic pieces of Han Solo’s specific form of masculinity, but also ways in which he acts in very nonproblematic nontoxic ways that should be considered.
Han Solo is characterized throughout the films as a cowboy type figure. In the opening crawl of Han Solo’s stand-alone film *Solo: A Star Wars Story (2018)*, the timeline of Han Solo’s origin is referred to as “a lawless time” words often used to describe Westerns (Kennedy & Howard, 2018). This is even alluded to in the framing of Han Solo in the film, *Solo: A Star Wars Story (2018)*. Here he is shown from behind as a shadow with his hands on his hips and his blaster visible at his side as he walks into the bar, an allusion to the saloons commonly featured in western films, and takes a seat at the card table. Han refers to himself to Qi’ra as an outlaw. This characterization is furthered by his embracing of a frontiersman lifestyle throughout the franchise as he travels throughout the galaxy as a pilot on the Millennium Falcon. Han Solo is uniquely independent, evident even in his name. When the recruiter asks Han who his people are, Han responds, “I don’t have people. I’m alone.” The recruiter responds, “Solo. Approved,” giving Han Solo his iconic name (Kennedy & Howard, 2018).

Han Solo’s masculinity stems primarily from his extensive occupational achievement. He is a great pilot something that is expressed and admired by many characters throughout the films. A large part of how he views himself is constructed by his identity as the pilot of the Millenium Falcon and as a smuggler. Throughout the films, he also becomes a war hero and Rebellion general leading attacks against the Empire. When he meets Rey and Finn, they immediately know who he is and list off many of his occupational achievements. The first things Rey says to Solo are: “This is the Millennium Falcon. You’re Han Solo.” Finn says, “Han Solo the rebellion general?” Rey says, “No the smuggler.” Finn says, “Wasn’t he a war hero?” Rey states, “This is the ship that made
the Kassel run in 14 parsecs.” Han Solo acknowledges his achievements as he replies, “Twelve” (Burk, Kennedy, & Abrams, 2015).

Solo is characterized in his origin film as coming from nothing and escaping by entering into the imperial academy as a pilot. However, Han Solo was never good at following orders and quickly found his way into life as a smuggler. Regardless of his failed attempt as a solider, weapons are a big part of Han Solo’s identity as a man. While Luke constructs his masculinity through the hegemonic masculinity of the Jedi, Han states, “Old religions and ancient weapons are nothing compared to a blaster at your side kid” (Kurtz & Lucas, 1977). This ties Solo’s masculinity to his weapon and his physical ability to enact violence. He is constantly seen with a blaster. Even when Han is temporarily blinded, he still asks Chewbacca for his blaster and shoots to save Lando. He asserts his masculinity over others through his use of the blaster as evidenced when Han Solo kills Guido in the cantina, brushing off the incident as if it were nothing and tipping the bartender saying, “Sorry about the mess” (Kurtz & Lucas, 1977). When they are on the Death Star attempting to rescue Princess Leia, Han Solo tries to prevent an attack by the Storm Troopers through his conversation on the phone, however, it is quickly discovered that he is not as great at talking himself out of the situation and instead takes his blaster to the phone and tries to hold the Storm Troopers off with his weapon instead solidifying his reliance on his physical ability and violence.

Han Solo is very independent distancing himself from familial relationships and is viewed as a man’s man through his friendships with Lando Calrissian, Luke Skywalker, and most importantly Chewbacca. Solo solidifies these relationships by
entering into battles with these characters and celebrating their victories over others, as they become his war buddies.

Han Solo’s relationship with Lando can be viewed as a stereotypical male friendship. The men joke around and harass each other. For the most part, their friendship is surface level and based on history. The two are not affectionate and are seen at times in rivalry with each other. However, they have a closeness that is based on mutual harassment and history. Han admits to Leia that he does not necessarily trust Lando although they are friends which proves to be justified after Lando turns in Han, Chewbacca, and Princess Leia over to the Empire in return for protection over his mining colony. This demonstrates that the relationship while established does not have much depth and was easily traded for occupational and financial gain by Lando. Although Lando tries to rescue Han and plays a role in helping Leia and Chewbacca escape, this friendship is not necessarily valuable and serves primarily as a marker for social masculinity by Han Solo and Lando Clarissian. The second half of Han Solo’s friendship with Lando relies on their bond as war heroes. Lando and Han both enter into leadership positions within the Rebellion. They rely on each other for help meeting their goals. Han Solo loans Lando the Millennium Falcon and Lando relies on Han to have the shields down for their attack. Regardless of their dependence on one another, they are still do not have a relationship that could be considered close.

Han Solo’s relationship with Luke Skywalker is that of an older brother and mentor. Han Solo plays a large role in shaping Luke’s masculinity and is often shown in opposition to him when interacting with Princess Leia and Obi-Wan Kenobi. He teaches Luke how to shoot and the importance of weapons. He polices Luke’s masculinity
through these concepts throughout Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope (1977). However, Han Solo loves Luke and goes out of his way to act as his protector. In Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope (1977), Han Solo backs Luke up during his attack on the Death Star clearing the way for Luke to take out the thermal exhaust port and blow up the Death Star. He protects Luke again in Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back (1980) going out into a snowstorm to look for Luke after he is reported missing by Leia. Han Solo goes up to the deck officer and asks him to locate Luke. The deck officer responds that the temperature is dropping rapidly to which Han says, “That’s right and my friends out in it.” The deck officer says, “Your tauntaun will freeze before you reach the first marker.” Han Solo responds, “Then I’ll see you in hell,” angered by the deck officer that does not care as much for his friend, Han Solo risks his life to go out in the snow and rescue Luke (Kurtz & Kershner, 1980). When he finds him, Luke is almost dead in the snow. Han slices open the frozen tauntaun and stuffs Luke inside its body protecting them until the next day when they can be rescued.

Han Solo’s most important relationship throughout the films is his relationship with Chewbacca. Chewbacca is Han Solo’s first mate and closest friend. The importance of this relationship is voiced by Qi’ra in Solo: A Star Wars Story (2018). Qi’ra encourages Han Solo to go to Chewbacca stating, “Go and save Chewbacca. He needs you and you’re going to need him too” (Kennedy & Howard, 2018). The two are inseparable throughout the franchise. Their bond serves as a bromance as defined by DeAngelis (2014) as,

“An emotionally intense bond between presumably straight males who demonstrate an openness to intimacy that they neither regard, acknowledge, avow, or express sexually, and this definition already begins to point at some paradoxes and contradictions inherent in this phenomenon: bromance involves
that something will happen (the demonstration of intimacy itself) on the condition that something else not happen (the avowal or expression of sexual desire between straight males” (para. 2).

Chewbacca and Han Solo’s friendship is intimate as the two embark on adventures throughout the galaxy on the Millennium Falcon as hetero-life partners. They live and work within close proximity of each other and share the responsibility of taking care of the Millennium Falcon. Their friendship spans the entirety of the franchise up until Han Solo’s death. Chewbacca and Han Solo are each other’s constant companions. However, this relationship is never understood as sexual as Han Solo is constructed as heterosexual through his relationships with Princess Leia and Qi’ra and Chewbacca is constructed as heterosexual through his characterization in the Star Wars Christmas Special where he is shown with his wife and kids.

In the film, Solo: A Star Wars Story (2018), Han Solo and Chewbacca meet when Han is placed in Chewbacca’s cell to be killed by “The Beast.” Han convinces Chewbacca not to kill him and instead convinces him to help him escape. The two become instant friends as they embark on the first of their smuggling together. Han Solo and Chewbacca save each other multiple times over the course of the franchise and constantly have each other’s backs. Han Solo saves Chewbacca from falling off of a train saying, “You all right? A little close there buddy” (Kennedy & Howard, 2018). Chewbacca saves Han constantly through the use of his large stature and his identity as a Wookie. In Solo: A Star Wars Story, Chewbacca makes the conscious decision to choose Han Solo over his own tribe of Wookies that he is helping escape. They are both very protective over each other and use the threat of violence in order to protect and save one another. This is demonstrated with Han stating to Finn in Star Wars: Episode VII - The
Force Awakens (2015), “If you hurt Chewie, you’ll have to deal with me” (Burk, Kennedy, & Abrams, 2015). Chewbacca demonstrates this as well when he strangles Lando after he allowed Han Solo to be captured and frozen in carbonite.

The nature of Han Solo and Chewbacca’s relationship as a deep friendship is evidenced throughout the films. Although Han Solo has friendships with both Lando and Luke, none of his other male friendships compare to the one that he has with Chewbacca as his constant companion. Han Solo loves Chewbacca unconditionally and even entrusts him to take care of Princess Leia as he enters the chamber to be frozen in Carbonite. When Han Solo is rescued in Star Wars: Episode VI- Return of the Jedi (1983), he is thrown into a cell with Chewbacca. Although blinded and confused after just waking up, Han hears Chewbacca and says, “Chewie. Chewie is that you? Chew Chewie. I can’t see pal, what’s going on?” (Kazanjian & Marquand, 1983). Chewbacca then embraces and cuddles Han. This act of physical intimacy shows the viewers how close the friendship is between Han Solo and Chewbacca. While love between two males is not typically shown in media, there is never a question about Han Solo and Chewbacca’s love for each other as evidenced through their construction of friendship within the films.

Han’s masculinity is furthered by his heterosexual relationships with Qi’ra and with Princess Leia. In both of these relationships, Solo shows love and affection for the women, however, he also makes comments that are overtly sexual and problematic. Through these relationships, Solo asserts himself over the women in the relationships as dominant through their objectification and sexualization.
When Han Solo sees Qi’ra again in Solo: A Star Wars Story (2018), he is anxious to get back into a relationship with her. After being separated during their escape, Han Solo made it his goal to come back for her. However, when he sees her at Crimson Dawn she is not the same person that he knew. Regardless, Han Solo tries to rekindle their relationship by telling Qi’ra he was always going to come back for her and that he was going to use the money he earned to buy their ship. He starts his sexual advances saying to Qi’ra that they “should drink two and see where it goes” and “talk a little first and then…” (Kennedy & Howard, 2018). In both cases implying the rekindling of their sexual relationship. Viewers know that Han Solo is in love with Qi’ra even though it is never explicitly stated, regardless, through the making of these comments, Qi’ra is still equated as a sexual object for Han Solo’s conquests.

Han Solo’s relationship with Princess Leia is more complex. Han Solo’s relationship with Leia is something that evolves over the course of the films. In Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope (1977), Han Solo is aggressive toward Leia, in Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back (1980), he is sexually aggressive, by Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi (1983), their relationship evolves as Han learns to trust and love Leia.

In Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope (1977), Han Solo makes it abundantly clear that he is only helping Luke rescue Leia for the reward. He tells Leia, “Look I ain’t in this for your revolution and I’m not in this for you princess. I expect to be well paid, I’m in this for the money” (Kurtz & Lucas, 1977). When Leia first comes into his life, Han Solo is aggressive and condescending toward her. About Leia he says, “Wonderful girl, either I’m going to kill her or I’m beginning to like her” and “Now if we can avoid
any more female advice maybe we can get out of here” (Kurtz & Lucas, 1977). Both of these comments are very problematic. In the first comment, Han Solo positions romantic relationships and violence toward Leia. The second comment is very misogynistic.


Luke: So what do you think of her?
Han: I’m trying not to kid.
Han: Still, she’s got a lot of spirit. What do you think? Do you think a princess and a guy
Like me?...
Han smiles.

In this interaction, Han Solo establishes both his heterosexuality, and his dominance over Luke as a man. Luke wants Han Solo’s approval to pursue a romantic relationship with Princess Leia, but knows that Han Solo as the more dominant of the two, has the ability to take that relationship away if he were to pursue one with her as well. Han makes these comments in order to put Luke in his place, and tease him in a way that brothers do.

In Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back (1980), Han Solo actively pursues a relationship with Princess Leia. Early in the film viewers witness an exchange between Han Solo and Princess Leia. He is upset after Leia refuses to give him an affectionate goodbye when he is leaving. He wants her to tell him how she feels about him, but instead tells him that the Rebellion will miss him as he is a natural leader. He argues with her and tells her that is not the reason that she wants him to stay to which she
responds that he is “imagining things.” He says, “Uh huh. Then why are you following me? Afraid I was going to leave without giving you a goodbye kiss?” She says, “I would just as soon kiss a Wookie.” Solo responds, “I can arrange that. You could use a goodbye kiss” (Kurtz & Kershner, 1980). This is the first of several sexually aggressive exchanges throughout the film. Another exchange happens in the presence of Chewbacca and Luke (Kurtz & Kershner, 1980).

Han: That’s a good story. I think you just can’t bear to let a gorgeous guy like me out of your sight.
Leia: I don’t know where you get your delusions from.
Han (to Chewbacca): Laugh it up fuzzball but you didn’t see us in the South Passage. She expressed her true feelings for me.
Leia: Why you stuck up half-witted scruffy looking nurf herder!
Han: Who’s scruffy looking?
Leia exits.
Han to Luke: I must have hit pretty close to the mark to get her all riled up like that huh kid? Well I guess you don’t know everything about women yet.

This interaction serves multiple purposes, first it establishes Han Solo’s domination over Princess Leia as he embarrasses her by implying sexual activity to his friends. It also demonstrates and reinforces his masculinity amongst his male friends through his expression of heterosexuality. Later in the film, Leia falls into Han Solos’ lap on the Millennium Falcon. Han holds her. She says, “Let go please.” Han says, “Don’t get excited.” Leia counters stating, “Captain being held by you isn’t quite enough to get me excited.” Han states, “Sorry Princess I haven’t got time for anything else” (Kurtz & Kershner, 1980). This exchange is sexual in nature and is used again to assert Han Solo’s domination over Princess Leia.

Later in the film, viewers get a different look at Han Solo and Princess Leia as they have a conversation about their relationship (Kurtz & Kershner, 1980).
Leia: You make it so difficult sometimes.
Han: I do. I do. But you could be a little nicer though. C’mon admit it sometimes you think I’m alright.
Leia: Sometimes occasionally when you aren’t acting like a scoundrel.
Han: Scoundrel? Scoundrel? I like the sound of that.
Han takes Leia’s hands.
Leia: Stop that. Stop that my hands are dirty.
Han: My hands are dirty too what are you afraid of?
Leia: Afraid?
Han: You’re trembling.
Leia: I’m not trembling.
Han: You like me because I’m a scoundrel. There aren’t enough scoundrels in your life.
Leia: I happen to like nice men.
Han: I am a nice man.
Leia: No you’re not. You’re…

And just like that, Han Solo’s aggressive sexual masculinity is forgiven and accepted as desirable. He is forgiven for acting like a “scoundrel” and this solidifies his relationship with Princess Leia (Kurtz & Kershner, 1980). Interestingly, after this exchange, viewers watch the relationship between Han Solo and Princess Leia shift into something less toxic. Han Solo and Princess Leia enter into a relationship based on understanding and protection over each other. They face the mynocks and go to the Cloud City together. After Han is tortured by Darth Vader, Princess Leia holds and comforts him. Their relationship solidifies when Han Solo is taken away by the Storm Troopers before he is frozen in carbonite. Leia kisses him and tells him that she loves him to which he replies, “I know” (Kurtz & Kershner, 1980). This shows Han Solo’s masculinity as constructed through the lack of expression of emotion. Even though Han Solo does not outwardly admit his love for Princess Leia, viewers know that he loves her unconditionally.

This is evident throughout Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi (1983) as Leia goes to rescue Han. When he wakes up and is blinded, he asks who saved him to which she replies, “Someone who loves you.” Han replies, “Leia” (Kazanjian &
Marquand, 1983). Over the course of the film, Han Solo and Princess Leia fight together against the Storm Troopers. They both protect each other and complete their mission together. Later in *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* (1983), Han Solo thinks that Leia loves Luke instead. He loves her enough to respect her decision to pursue a relationship with Luke stating, “Alright. Yes I understand. Fine. When he comes back I won’t get in the way” (Kazanjian & Marquand, 1983). This is a far cry from Han Solo’s actions when he was first pursuing Leia. This shows that he has changed and evolved into loving Leia past the point of sexual aggression.

Han Solo’s masculine representations are over-the-top and unachievable for the majority of men. Solo’s masculinity is never questioned because of the ways in which he maintains it. He has extensive occupational achievement, enacts physical control and violence, expresses his heterosexuality, and has social power through his maintenance of social masculinity. Unlike other characters in the films, Han Solo is never afraid of being unmasked by other men because for the majority of the films, he cannot be. His version of masculinity is the pinnacle of masculine achievement and what it seemingly is supposed to look like to be a man. He is allowed his unconditional love for Princess Leia and Chewbacca because his masculinity is established.

Han Solo’s son, Kylo Ren, however is constantly trying to prove his masculinity. While Han Solo gets to love others, Kylo Ren must act violently toward those he is supposed to love to prove himself as a man. Kylo Ren tries to deny his father to Supreme Leader Snoke. When Solo is mentioned Ren states, “He means nothing to me” (Burk, Kennedy, & Abrams, 2015). When Kylo Ren sees his father in *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015), Han Solo wants him to take off his mask and see his son’s
face. Kylo Ren states, “Your son is gone. He was weak and foolish like his father so I destroyed it” (Burk, Kennedy, & Abrams, 2015). In this instance, Kylo Ren calls into question Han Solo’s masculinity in a way that had not happened previously in the films. Kylo Ren calling Han Solo weak could be in regard to his aging body in the same way that Han Solo dismissed Obi-Wan Kenobi and his perceived lack of masculinity as his body aged. In this way, the constructions of masculinity that once contributed to Han Solo’s idealized way of being a man are stripped. Han Solo pleads his son to come home and says he misses him. Kylo Ren plays on his father’s love for him to get his guard down and kill him. Kylo Ren’s act of violence toward his father is meant to be the act that proves his masculinity through destroying Han Solo’s love and taking down someone with masculine power.

**Rey: The “Girl” Who Never Held a Lightsaber**

When viewers first meet Rey, they have no idea that Rey is a woman. Rey is covered from head to toe in a tan suit with goggles. Viewers see her grabbing parts of machinery, repelling hundreds of feet down a rope, and landing on her feet before viewers ever see her face and as a result, viewers are met with surprise when the masked person is Rey, a woman. Rey then drags a large net filled with machine parts to a cruiser and loads them placing her weapon on the top. Rey is a strong female character and is such through embodying characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. However, this is only afforded to her because she is portrayed by Daisy Ridley, an actress who is young, white, and sexually attractive. According to O’Reilly (2005), female superheroes are constructed with regard to the male gaze and the binary of the masculine subject/feminine object relationship. This positions Wonder Woman as both physically strong and sexually
attractive. In other words, the reason that Rey can embody these masculine characteristics and behave the way that she does, is because she is physically constructed as sexually attractive and sexually viable.

In one of the first scenes, viewers see Rey contrasted with an older woman who is also cleaning machine parts, Rey stares at the woman intently until she is yelled at by someone in charge. In American society, aging women are typically viewed as nonsexual and almost nonfeminine. Through this juxtaposition, it can be assumed that Rey considers that this is not how she is viewed. She trades her sexuality for physicality because she is sexually desirable. However, this would not be allowed in the same way when she is older and that sexual desirability is no longer valid. Rey’s sexuality is proved through Finn’s attraction toward her when asks her, “You’re a pilot. You can go fly anywhere why go back? You got a family? Boyfriend? Cute boyfriend?” (Burk, Kennedy, & Abrams, 2015). She ignores Finn and states that it is none of his business, attempting to distance herself from heterosexuality and her construction as a woman. She tells Finn to let go of her and stop taking her hand when they run together. This concept is pushed further when viewers see the inside of Rey’s home. The camera focuses on a dying flower whose petals are littering the table, as well as a gender neutral doll that lacks a face. Through these items, Rey attempts to reject the feminine through the neglect of these stereotypical feminine objects. However, it is impossible to separate Rey from her femininity regardless of how much she attempts this throughout the films.

Rey’s gender is called out on numerous occasions by other characters as the films progress. She is constantly referred to as a girl, or more specifically “the girl”. Kylo Ren points this out frequently. In one scene, Kylo says, “Follow the girl and that droid” (Burk,
Kennedy, & Abrams, 2015). In another scene one of the First Order generals is telling Kylo Ren that the droid containing the map to Luke Skywalker escaped with help from FN2187 (Finn) and that the two were accompanied by a girl. At the mention of the girl, Kylo Ren strangles him using the force. When Kylo meets Rey, he refers to her as “The girl he’s heard so much about” (Burk, Kennedy, & Abrams, 2015). Even Leia and Han Solo refer to Rey in this way. What is notable, is how Rey’s gender is juxtaposed toward Kylo Ren in an effort to demasculinize him. In Kylo Ren’s conversation with Snoke about his slaying of Han Solo, Snoke says, “Look at you, the deed split your spirit to the bone. You were unbalanced. Bested by a girl who had never held a lightsaber. You have failed” (Bergman, Kennedy, & Johnson, 2017). In this way, Rey’s gender reinforces just how much Kylo Ren fails as a man as he cannot demonstrate his power and domination over Rey.

Although many characters refer to her as a “girl” throughout the films, Rey is constructed very much like a man. She is depicted with masculine characteristics in the way she aggressively attacks a hostile group shown pursuing a seemingly helpless droid (BB8). She runs after Finn with a snarl and hits him with her weapon tackling him to the ground and asserting physical force and control through her violent behavior. She is naturally powerful and defeats Kylo Ren without ever having held a lightsaber before. She is interested in being a pilot and talks about the Millennium Falcon to Han Solo sharing her knowledge of a traditionally male space. Lastly, and most importantly, Rey embarks on her mission of masculine self-discovery in the same manner that Luke does, through a mentorship with a Jedi. Just as Luke daydreamed about being a pilot, so does Rey. Rey is seen early on in *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015) wearing
a rebel helmet, this can be viewed as play in the same manner as Luke when he played with the spaceship toys. Rey reluctantly embarks on an adventure before ultimately meeting her masculine mentors, Han Solo, and later Luke Skywalker who shape her ascent into masculinity.

As established earlier, the Jedi rely heavily on concepts from hegemonic masculinity which Rey learns throughout both *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015) and *Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi* (2017). In one of her lessons Luke teaches Rey about the Force and asks her what she sees, she replies, “The island, life, and death and decay that feeds new life. Warmth, cold, peace, violence, in between it all balance and energy.” Luke questions, “And inside you?” To which Rey replies, “That same force.” Luke says, “And this is the lesson. That force does not belong to the Jedi. To say that the light dies with the Jedi is vanity” (Bergman, Kennedy, & Johnson, 2017). In this statement, Luke ultimately states that the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and masculine power do not belong to men alone. Rey learns these constructs of masculinity and uses them to establish herself as a hero within the *Star Wars* universe by taking this knowledge and embodying the hegemonic masculinity of the Jedi. However, she does this in conjunction with the cost of her objectification as a woman. Just as Hentges & Case (2013) state in their study, while there are female characters present, the female characters are shown in primarily masculine ways embracing characteristics of masculinity, while femininity is not embraced in the same way. It is Rey’s body that defines her gender, but she performs masculine behaviors. This shows viewers that in order to achieve power, the way to do it is through the embracing of
masculinity while distancing feminine characteristics.

**Princess Leia Organa: Princess, General, Mother, Badass**

Even as Rey takes on her more masculine gender markers in the films, Princess (General) Leia Organa seeks power through embracing her femininity and sexuality. This allows her to access masculine power as discussed by O’Reilly (2015). Like Rey, Leia is able to enter into roles where she is allowed more power because she is feminized through her sexuality and physical appearance, and as such, is able to access power through masculine characteristics. She is allowed to have occupational achievement as a war hero and is allowed to demonstrate physical force and control because she looks like Carrie Fisher. She was only nineteen during the filming of *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (1977) and was contrasted in popular culture as a sex object, namely in her gold bikini. As a result, Leia is allowed to be a princess, a war hero, a leader, a general, and a mother in the *Star Wars* universe. Unfortunately, this comes at the cost of Leia’s achievements being undermined by her sexuality and gender representation as a woman as well as the violence that comes with it in the *Star Wars* universe. In addition, much like the other aging characters in the *Star Wars* universe, age plays a price in how this power is constructed and distributed. For Leia, the aging process takes away her title as princess, replacing it with a more masculinized title of general.

For Carrie Fisher, physical appearance and sexuality has always been at the heart of her ability to play the role of Princess Leia. In many of her interviews, Carrie Fisher discusses her sexuality and sexual encounters with others at the time of filming. She also chronicles the strict diets that she was on in order to play Princess Leia in the film franchise in order to maintain a feminine appearance, even in *Star Wars: Episode VII* -
*The Force Awakens* (2015), where she plays a much older version of Princess Leia. In an interview with *Good Housekeeping*, Carrie Fisher revealed the obsession with physical appearance that she still faced on the 2016 film stating, “They don’t want to hire all of me—only about three-quarters! Nothing changes: it’s an appearance-driven thing. I’m in a business where the only thing that matters is weight and appearance. That is so messed up. They might as well say get younger, because that’s how easy it is” (2016, para. 3).

Much of Leia’s characterization is centered around her sexuality. Luke claims that she is beautiful the first time he sees her hologram in *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (1977). This sentiment is echoed by Han Solo who makes sexual remarks and advances toward Leia throughout the films. In one scene, Leia falls on top of Han and he holds her in his lap. When she is asked to be let go, Han Solo tells her not to get excited to which she responds, “Captain being held by you isn’t quite enough to get me excited.” He remarks, “Sorry sweetheart I haven’t got time for anything else” (Kurtz & Kershner, 1980). These remarks ensure Leia’s power is not too threatening to masculinity by establishing her as a sexual object of masculine control. This is viewed especially when Leia is held prisoner by Jabba the Hutt. Leia goes to Jabba in an effort to rescue Han Solo, but she gets captured. Viewers then see Leia dressed in a gold bikini, chained, and being stroked by a large slug-like alien.

Through her sexualization, she is also made to be a victim of gendered violence. She is pulled around by Jabba the Hutt by her chains and is pushed against him after she says “Ow.” The threat of violence against Leia is furthered when viewers see another one of Jabba’s women rebel against him and get dropped to her death. It is not only Jabba that uses violence in conjunction with Leia’s sexuality, Han Solo makes violent and
sexist remarks about Leia as well. In *A New Hope*, Han Solo tells Luke, “Either I’m going to kill her or I’m beginning to like her” (Kurtz & Lucas, 1977). These overtly sexual and violent instances in the *Star Wars* films show how masculinity is constructed through the objectification and sexualization of women as well as violence toward them.

Leia’s power also comes from her ability to enact masculine violence in order to save herself and others. In various instances, Leia wields a blaster and takes out Stormtroopers in an effort to help the Rebel cause. She defeats Jabba the Hutt by wrapping her chains around his neck and strangling him. Carrie Fisher comments on this moment in the franchise in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, by saying, “A giant slug captured me and forced me to wear that stupid outfit, and then I killed him because I didn’t like it. And then I took it off” (para. 11). In this quote, Fisher gives agency to Princess Leia in a moment that she was objectified. It is also through this objectification that Leia gains the power to enact this masculine violence that allows her to defeat Jabba. Leia learns to use the Force and becomes the sole survivor of the attack that hurls her into space by using it to bring her back to the ship. Although she is seen as a damsel in distress in some instances over the course of the franchise, she is also constructed as someone who is capable at being a savior and accessing these more masculine identities.

Much of Leia’s power stems from her occupational achievements. She is a diplomat and a war hero, but that is a space that she has established from early on in the franchise. In *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (1977), Leia is captured by Darth Vader and questioned for receiving transmissions from the Rebel Alliance. Darth Vader places her in the holding cell because of her status as a leader in the Rebel Alliance. In the sequel films, Leia becomes a general in the Resistance and a mother to Kylo Ren.
She holds both the title as princess and general in *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015) and *Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi* (2017) as many characters switch between the two titles when referring to her. One character states, “The General, to me she’s royalty” (Burk, Kennedy, & Abrams (2015). This power is seen as she is given respect as a leader in these organizations even though many of them are male dominated. Leia goes so far as to slap and demote Poe Dameron for acting in dangerous ways that put the Resistance at risk. Leia gains power from her status in each of these roles and uses it over others.

However, Leia is only allowed to be the general because now she is older and no longer sexually viable. She was not able to hold this title when she was younger and her physical appearance allowed her to fulfill those masculinized constructions. Now, she is seen as an older woman and can achieve this role because she is no longer considered traditionally feminine and sexual. Princesses are generally thought of as young and beautiful, with age, Leia can no longer occupy this role. Carrie Fisher vocalized this when explaining in an 2015 interview with *Time* in which she states, “Oh my God [Leia] got so much older. I tried to stop her, but apparently that includes death so that didn’t seem like a good solution. Along with aging comes life experience so in every way that is consistent with even being human, Leia has changed” (para. 5). It is not enough for Princess Leia to be characterized as powerful, important, and feminine, in order for Leia not to be a threat to society, she has to be sexualized as well. When she reaches a point where is no longer sexually viable, identities that once defined her as a woman are no longer obtainable. This sends a dangerous message to female viewers that is they can
only be sexualized, or have to be stripped of femininity and sexuality in order to be respected and powerful.

**Obi-Wan Kenobi: Changing Bodies and the Shifting of Masculine Representations**

In the *Star Wars* universe, masculinity is largely dependent on ideas of hegemonic masculinity, toxic masculinity, and bodily masculinity. Obi-Wan’s identity as a man however, embodies an alternative masculine identity constructed by his intelligence and wisdom. This construction is largely tied to age and other masculine traits as well. This is demonstrated in a study done by Bartholomaeus and Tarrant (2016) they found, “For the old men, ‘muscular intellectualness’ may be a way of asserting their masculine authority despite their (often) physically ailing bodies. In addition, their gender, age, and class enable them access to the role of wise ‘‘sage.’’ This concept of a wise ‘‘sage’’ links to old age so is not accessible for the young boys” (p. 363). They continue stating that this construction of masculinity can be viewed as a challenge to hegemonic masculinity or an alternative form of masculinity. The characters need to be able to fight in order to be considered heroes. As Obi-Wan’s body ages over the course of the films, his masculinity shifts as well. Obi-Wan goes from being described as a capable and powerful Jedi Master to being described later on as a fossil. This change in bodily masculinity shapes how other characters interact with him and how he is viewed by others.

In the prequels, Obi-Wan is characterized as a young man. He is masculine with a beard, and a muscular body. When viewers first meet Obi-Wan, he is Qui Gon’s Padawan Learner. Qui Gon shows faith in Obi-Wan’s physical abilities when he goes to the council and tells them that Obi-Wan is ready to face the trials. He states, “He is headstrong and he has much to learn of the living force, but he is capable. There is little
more he can learn from me” (McCallum & Lucas, 1999). This constructs Obi-Wan Kenobi to viewers as physically capable of performing the role of the Jedi. He fights side by side with Qui Gon in the *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace (1999)* against the droids and later Darth Maul. When Qui Gon gets taken down by Darth Maul, Obi-Wan goes after him in an effort to save and avenge his master. He breaks Darth Maul’s double-ended lightsaber before having his own lightsaber kicked off of the platform. Obi-Wan then finds himself hanging off of the platform while Darth Maul tries to knock him off by kicking the side. Obi-Wan hangs on, jumps up, uses the force to summon Qui Gon’s lightsaber and strikes and kills Darth Maul. Through Obi-Wan’s victory against Darth Maul, he proves his masculinity through physical violence and his physical ability. Obi-Wan is respected by the other Jedi’s and is viewed as a great Jedi master. He is a warrior and defeats Darth Maul, General Grievous, and has the opportunity to kill Anakin Skywalker opting instead to leave him to die.

However, Obi-Wan’s masculinity is not based on the acts of violence and physical control alone. Anakin points this out when he is talking to Padme about Obi-Wan he states, “Obi-Wan is a great mentor, as wise as Master Yoda and as powerful as Master Windu” (McCallum & Lucas (2002). In this quote, Anakin does two things. First, he demonstrates that Obi-Wan’s masculine identity is not constructed by physical power alone but also through wisdom and intellect, and secondly, he compares Obi-Wan’s identity to Yoda, a Jedi Master who is much older, as well as Master Windu, who is younger, constructing Obi-Wan as occupying an intersection between young and old. Even as a young man, Obi-Wan is considered wise beyond his years. His master, Qui Gon states, “You’ve been a good apprentice Obi-Wan and you’re a much wiser man than
I am. I foresee you will be a great Jedi Knight” (McCallum & Lucas (1999). This positions Obi-Wan as an intellectual and wise man, traits that would typically be associated with a man who is older. Obi-Wan searches for information and goes to Yoda when he cannot locate his planet in the database and goes to the café for intel on the weapon that was fired at him. His search for knowledge and information sets him apart from many of the other Jedi that viewers come into contact with throughout the Star Wars franchise.

Obi-Wan takes on a father-figure type role throughout the Star Wars franchise which furthers his construction as an older man. This aging process starts in the Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace (1999) when he agrees to train Anakin after Qui Gon’s death. In abiding to Qui Gon’s wishes, Obi Wan takes on a father and mentor role to Anakin when he is still young himself. Anakin communicates to Obi-Wan this father-son type of relationship even though they are still relatively close in age. In one instance, Anakin tells Obi-Wan, “You’re the closest thing I have to a father” (McCallum & Lucas (2002). Anakin tells this to Padme as well, stating that Obi-Wan is like his father. This sentiment is not shared by Obi-Wan who considers Anakin to be like his brother, and not his son. Obi-Wan communicates this to both the Jedi Council when he begs them not to make him kill Anakin. He says, “Send me to kill the emperor. I cannot kill Anakin. He is like my brother. I cannot do it” (McCallum & Lucas (2005). Obi-Wan communicates this to Anakin himself when they are fighting. Obi-Wan states, “You were my brother Anakin, I loved you” McCallum & Lucas (2005).

When Obi-Wan is younger he is seemingly allowed to occupy both of these spaces both as a powerful man characterized by physical ability and a wise man
characterized by wisdom and intellect. However, as he ages, his physical ability is called into question and as such, his masculinity is questioned as well. Uncle Owen tells Luke that Obi-Wan Kenobi is dead and died around the same time as his father. This can be interpreted as Obi-Wan’s masculinity ending at this time as it was no longer constructed by his physical force and violence through his role as a Jedi. After Obi-Wan agrees to watch over Luke on Tatooine, he ceases to be the Obi Wan Kenobi that he was when he was younger.

He is shown as an older man in the original trilogy. Luke Skywalker refers to Obi-Wan as “old Ben Kenobi” a “strange old hermit” (Kurtz & Lucas, 1977). This identity as being an older man characterized Obi-Wan Kenobi for the rest of Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope (1977) as both Luke and Han Solo make comments about his age. Han Solo goes so far as to ask Luke “Where he [dug] up that old fossil” and calls Obi-Wan an old man right to his face (Kurtz & Lucas, 1977). He is also referred to as an old man by Darth Vader, his old apprentice. Obi-Wan also takes on the role as mentor again acting as a stand in father-figure for Luke which ages his as well. Obi-Wan watches out for Luke and mentors him. Obi-Wan’s death is extremely hard for Luke to come to terms with. Even after Obi-Wan’s death, Luke looks to him for guidance and wisdom. Luke calls for Obi-Wan throughout the franchise expecting him to respond with answers. In this way, he is reduced to the masculinity of a mentor or wise man.

Obi-Wan is considered to be powerful and held in high regard. This is due to his status as a Jedi Master and as a white male in power. Due to this status in which he occupies, Obi-Wan’s authority goes largely unquestioned by those around him. He is respected by other characters in the Star Wars franchise because of his status as a Jedi
Master. He is constructed as a powerful man who gained this power through his occupational achievement and through the institution of the Jedi Council in addition to his white male privilege. This power is what allows him to behave in toxic ways such as when he disfigured Anakin and left him for dead. Due to the powerful position that he innately occupies, he is allowed to minimize, ignore, and reframe these toxic actions that he has enacted in his youth because this is the nature of society. Powerful men in charge, are able to control the narrative and for the most part get away with it.

However, Obi-Wan Kenobi’s diminishing of physical power is largely only assumed. He still enacts physical force and violence. This is shown when Obi-Wan cuts off an alien’s arm in the Cantina after he grabs Luke and throws him. This is shown again when Obi-Wan Kenobi enters in to a lightsaber battle with Darth Vader. Obi-Wan holds his own against Darth Vader. It is only when he stops fighting back ensuring that Luke is watching that he is defeated. Even though Obi-Wan is still a great warrior his masculinity and his power is undermined by his age. This demonstrates to viewers the importance of age in maintaining masculinity and social structure. Masculine power is shifting as identities such as age and perceived ability shift.

**Non-Human Characters: Wookies, Hutts, and Gungans Oh My!**

The *Star Wars* franchise has the unique ability to create many different races of aliens and creatures in the universe, however, instead of using this as an opportunity to create different gendered expressions and societal norms, these creatures mimic our own societal structure and gendered hierarchy. The non-human characters in this study, Chewbacca, Jabba the Hutt, and Jar Jar Binks are coded as masculine beings, that is viewers can identify these characters as masculine due to their behaviors and traits. These
characters in particular adhere to an over-the-top almost caricatured gendering and racialized constructions that many of the human characters do not achieve in order to prove the character’s masculinity. In the case of Jar Jar Binks, it is his lack of masculinity that classifies him as a failure in the *Star Wars* universe.

Chewbacca is a main character throughout the original trilogy, the sequels, and the stand-alone film, *Solo: A Star War’s Story*. He is a Wookie and speaks in his own language but is understood by Han Solo and through many of his human-like actions. He is Han Solo’s first mate on the Millennium Falcon, is a great pilot and warrior, and protects the other characters including his best friend, Han. Chewbacca contributes greatly to the success of the other characters within the *Star Wars* films. Viewers are introduced to Chewbacca first, before Han Solo even makes his appearance. Chewbacca is introduced to Luke Skywalker as the ship’s first mate, but he lives up to more than just this title over the course of the films as Han Solo’s copilot, the ship’s primary mechanic, Han Solo’s companion, and war hero. Regardless, Chewbacca is easily dismissed as not being as masculine or important than many of the other characters in the films.

Chewbacca is the Millennium Falcon’s mechanic and repairs multiple issues with the ship over the course of the films. However, his expertise with technology does not just end there. Chewbacca is also seen repairing C3PO in *Star Wars: Episode V- The Empire Strikes Back (1983)* demonstrating his extensive knowledge of mechanics. Han Solo relies heavily on Chewbacca for the maintenance and operation of the ship. Chewbacca understands the temperamental nature of the Millennium Falcon and actively works to make the necessary improvements that the ship requires. This done even at Han’s expense seen when Chewbacca yells at Han for not helping with the repairs in *Star
“As mechanical machinery in rural industries represents many qualities connected with men and masculinity, it is an important display of masculine identity. Machines are a part of the picture men show of themselves, and the machines tell us that the persons are in possession of qualities required of a “real man.” Being capable operators of the machines establishes men’s connection to other men and confirm their distance from women” (p. 152).

Through Chewbacca’s expertise with machines and as a mechanic, his masculinity is constructed through his mechanical skill.

In addition to Chewbacca’s role as a mechanic, he is the copilot of the ship as well. When Qi’ra did not know how to fly the ship, Chewbacca steps in and assists Han Solo. Han Solo relies on Chewbacca to help them escape from Tatooine after the Storm Troopers arrive and start shooting at the ship. Chewbacca is the one who pilots the Millennium Falcon and helps them escape. He is a valuable part of the ship’s crew in this way. Even when Chewbacca is hurt in *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015), and Rey says that Han Solo needs a copilot, Solo is quick to point out that he already has one. However, Chewbacca’s role as the pilot of the Millennium Falcon begins after Han Solo’s death but is somewhat short-lived. Chewbacca pilots the ship and rescues Rey and Finn as the planet collapses in *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015) bringing them back to Leia. However, when Chewie and Rey embark on their journey to Luke Skywalker, Rey takes over the pilot seat of the Millennium Falcon.

In *Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi* (2017), Chewbacca takes over as the ship’s
pilot as Rey relies on Chewbacca as he sends her in a pod to Kylo Ren’s ship. Chewbacca takes over this role again when he pilots the Millennium Falcon during the attack on the First Order while Rey is in the gunner position saving the entire Resistance by housing them on the Millennium Falcon but in both of these instances, Chewbacca is still seated on the right in the copilot seat, not in pilot’s seat.

As stated in the section on Han Solo, Chewbacca was Han Solo’s constant companion throughout the franchise. The two share an emotionally intimate bond and rely on one another throughout the films. After Han Solo’s death, Chewbacca immediately responds wounding Kylo Ren and detonating the bombs to destroy the Starkiller Base in an effort to avenge the death of his friend. Chewbacca must then take over for Han Solo and resume his responsibilities on the Millennium Falcon through his relationship with Rey who Han Solo wanted to add to the crew.

In addition to his occupational achievements on the Millennium Falcon as a co-pilot and mechanic, Chewbacca was a war hero serving in the Clone Wars through his rescuing of Master Yoda and his aid in rescuing Princess Leia and the destruction of the Death Star. Chewbacca was the co-pilot for many attacks during important battles in the Star Wars franchise and played an important role in defeating storm troopers ensuring the success of the missions.

However, regardless of his accomplishments, Chewbacca is often looked down on and his accomplishments are easily dismissed. In Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope (1977) when Han Solo and Luke Skywalker are presented with medals, Chewbacca does not receive one. Following Han Solo’s death, Chewbacca should be the rightful pilot of the Millennium Falcon, however, this title goes to Rey as she takes over Han Solo’s pilot
seat leaving Chewbacca to occupy the co-pilot position that he has previously
maintained. Although there are times in which his accomplishments are recognized, he
still maintains a second class citizen status due to his racial identity as a Wookie. His
racialization gives him less power and is viewed as undesirable this is demonstrated in
*Star Wars: Episode V-The Empire Strikes Back (1980)* when Princess Leia states, “I’d
just as soon kiss a Wookie” (Kurtz & Kershner (1980). This comment demonstrates
Chewbacca’s undesirability due to his difference in identity from the white human
characters in the films.

Furthermore, he is often referred to as a beast and is often talked about for his
extreme violence. Chewbacca and Han Solo meet when Han is thrown into Chewbacca’s
cage to be killed. Han talks Chewbacca out of killing him and persuades him to help them
escape and become smugglers. Chewbacca then uses his inhuman strength to get out of
the cage. Chewbacca and Wookies like him viewers are told will rip people’s arms out of
their sockets when angered. Much of Chewbacca’s violence is administered by his two
hands instead of by a weapon like many of the human characters in the film, although
viewers recognize Chewbacca’s weapon choice with his crossbow. In this way,
Chewbacca’s masculinity becomes realized through his violence and physical force and
control. In addition, Chewbacca is considered primitive in a way that many of the other
characters are not. In *Star Wars: Episode VI- Return of the Jedi (1983)*, Chewbacca’s
primitive ways are what gets Han Solo and Luke Skywalker captured by the Ewoks.
Chewbacca goes to eat the dead animal that the Ewoks had placed as bait for their trap
which captures Chewbacca, Han, and Luke. This is realized again in *Star Wars: Episode
VIII - The Last Jedi (2017)* when Chewbacca roasts one of the porgs to eat as a meal.
This is meant to position Chewbacca as uncivilized and therefore lesser than the other (white) heroes in the *Star Wars* franchise.

Like Chewbacca, Jabba the Hutt’s masculinity is also dramatically expressed and racially charged. According to Shaheen (1984), there are four primary stereotypes of Arabs in television and film, “they are all fabulously wealthy; they are barbaric and uncultured; they are sex maniacs with a penchant for white slavery; they revel in acts of terrorism” (p. 4). In this regard, Jabba the Hutt hits every single one of these stereotypes. Jabba the Hutt lives in a palace on Tatooine. When viewers see Jabba the Hutt in *Return of the Jedi*, he is being fanned with women at his feet while he smokes hookah. He is called mighty and powerful by Luke Skywalker and C3PO and is respected for his power by the other characters. Jabba’s appearance is grotesque. He is a large slug-like alien who is slimy, obese, and snot filled. He takes pleasure in violence as well as sexual exploitation. He is surrounded by women which he controls. When viewers enter Jabba’s palace, they see him being fanned by women and holding their chains. Jabba touches the women without their consent and holds them as his prisoners including, Princess Leia. Viewers see women who are forced to dance for him and if they attempt escape, Jabba makes them fall into a chamber to be killed without a second thought.

For Jabba the Hutt, his masculine power stems from his status as a gangster. He is feared on Tatooine as a vile gangster and is characterized by his sexuality and the violence attached to it. While Jabba the Hutt is powerful in his presentation of toxic masculinity and crude behavior, his masculinity is not comparable to the hegemonic ideals of many of the white human characters in the *Star Wars* films. His masculinity is
used to represent the “Other” while positioning the white human characters in direct opposition to the crude masculine representations of Jabba the Hutt.

Jar Jar Binks in opposition to the other two non-human characters is caricatured in the opposite way, instead of making Jar Jar insanely masculine, he is characterized as a joke, specifically he is characterized as the racist stereotype of the coon from minstrel shows. According to Pilgrim (2012), “the coon was portrayed as a lazy, easily frightened, chronically idle, inarticulate, buffoon” (para.1). This is the way that Jar Jar Binks is portrayed in Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace (1999). Jar Jar is first seen as being confused and overwhelmed when he sees the other aliens running away. Instead of moving in the opposite direction and getting away, he stands idly until he clutches onto Qui Gon and is dragged to the ground. Jar Jar speaks in an improper English seemingly drawn on from Caribbean influence. Jar Jar’s intelligence is constantly in question, especially from Qui Gon and Obi-Wan Kenobi. Qui Gon states, “You almost got us killed are you brainless?” Jar Jar responds, “I spake.” To which Qui Gon says, “The ability to speak does not make you intelligent” (McCallum & Lucas, 1999). Jar Jar’s caricature as a buffoon is furthered by his many instances of over the top stupidity. In one scene, Anakin warns Jar Jar to keep his hands away from the energy blasters, Jar Jar however already stuck his tongue between the beam causing it to go numb. This is something that no sensible individual would do. Jar Jar is afraid of everything and is in constant need of being saved by the white human characters in the films. In addition, Jar Jar cannot fight out of his own accord. It is only when everything is going terribly wrong that Jar Jar is able to enter into these more masculine spaces such as when Jar Jar becomes a war general and a senator which ultimately leads to the rise of the Empire. It is through these
representations in which viewers see a failed masculinity in Jar Jar Binks through his direct opposition of many of the masculinized ideologies that are portrayed in the films.

**Jyn Erso: Daughter of Gallen Erso, Imperial Weapons Designer**

Jyn Erso is the protagonist of the anthology film, *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016). In the film, she saves the Rebellion by transmitting the plans for the Death Star and exposing the weakness that her father built into the weapon. She fought the Rebels who were rescuing her, took down Storm Troopers, and climbed hundreds of feet up the data vault to retrieve the plans for the Death Star. Erso inspired troops and led the attack on Scarif. However, Jyn Erso, like many of the other women in the *Star Wars* universe is only allowed to be the warrior that she is because she is conventionally beautiful. In addition, Jyn Erso’s identity and power is enhanced by her relationships to powerful men including her father, Galen Erso, her father-figure, Saw Gerrera, and Captain Cassian Andor. While her association with strong men gives her more opportunity than many others in the *Star Wars* universe.

Jyn Erso is portrayed in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016) as conventionally feminine. Viewers see Jyn Erso as a child with her hair in pig-tailed braids. They see her in her room gathering up her stuffed animals and dolls before she has to go into hiding. Her parents are affectionate toward her, especially her father, who refers to her as “Stardust” (Kennedy, Shearmur, & Edwards, 2016). It is easy to attribute Jyn’s aggressive behavior to being abandoned and feeling unloved. Viewers see a “softer” side of Jyn throughout the film showing that her exterior toughness is not all of her

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1 An alternative reading of Jar Jar Binks, can be found in the Darth Jar Binks theory, [https://www.reddit.com/r/StarWars/comments/3qvj6w/theory_jar_jar_binks_was_a_trained_force_user/](https://www.reddit.com/r/StarWars/comments/3qvj6w/theory_jar_jar_binks_was_a_trained_force_user/) This theory constructs Jar Jar as furthering the Empire’s agendas through his buffoonery.
personality. When the battle takes place on Jedha, Jyn saves a crying child and reunites her with her mother showing Jyn in a maternal light as she puts herself in danger to save the child. Her femininity is furthered through her interactions with Cassian Andor as she shares intimate moments with him after her meeting with the Rebel Council and on the beach of Scarif communicating the potential for a heterosexual relationship.

Throughout the film, Jyn’s identity as Galen Erso’s daughter is brought to viewer’s attention. Her identity becomes the daughter of powerful men. Only once is she referred to in a gender neutral way as a child. Aside from this one occurrence, she is always referred to as his daughter marking her by her gender. This relationship is central to her character’s identity. It is how she is introduced to others and how she introduces herself in many situations throughout the film. This identity is what makes her valuable to the Rebels as they use this information to gain insight into Galen Erso’s whereabouts. Jyn makes it clear to the Rebels that she does not have any communication with her father and thinks of him as dead to her. This is drastically different from how their relationship was shown in the beginning of the film, with Jyn and Galen sharing an intimate bond as father and daughter. This bond is rekindled for Jyn when she is shown the hologram in which Galen communicates his love for her and how much he has missed her. This show of affection from Gallen is enough to bring Jyn to her knees softening her tough exterior.

From this moment on, Jyn’s thoughts about her father and her identification with him shift. In the hologram, the flaw in the Death Star is communicated to Jyn with only Saw Gerrera and herself gaining this information. From that moment, Jyn is set on finishing out her father’s revenge and attempting to clear her father’s name she embraces
her identity as the daughter of Galen Erso, an imperial weapons designer. Jyn takes on this mission as her father believes in her and needs her to expose this flaw. This gives Jyn permission to fulfill this task and in turn occupy a masculine space as the one in power as she leads troops into battle to obtain the Death Star plans. This would not have been possible for her without embracing her identity as Galen Erso’s daughter. In the end of the film, she introduces herself to Orson Krennic by saying, “You know who I am. I’m Jyn Erso daughter of Gallen and Lyra, You’ve lost. My father’s revenge, he put a flaw in the Death Star. He put a fuse in the middle of your machine and I’ve just told the entire galaxy how to light it.” Her power comes from her association with powerful men. This lays the groundwork for how she is treated and viewed in the film as a person of power and importance.

In addition to Jyn’s relationship with her birth father, her identity is also constructed by another man in power, Saw Gerrera. Saw Gerrera acts as Jyn’s adoptive father-figure and raises her. Saw Gerrera is powerful as a Rebel leader and extremist. He enlists Jyn as a child soldier in his army which contributes to her knowledge as a fighter. She gains knowledge of how to behave in militarized spaces due to her relationship with Saw Gerrera. Her fighting abilities can also be attributed to the time that she spent with him. The Rebels use this relationship to gain access to both Saw Gerrera and Galen Erso, as they know that Jyn has existing relationships to them. Jyn’s relationship with Saw Gerrera takes her directly to Gerrera on Jedha while the others are kept in cells and meet with his associates. This relationship grants her access and privileges her in a way that many of the men in this film are unable to achieve. She gains social power through her
involvement with this man of power that gives her both physical force and control in a way that she otherwise would not have had.

Another powerful man that Jyn Erso is associated with is Captain Cassian Andor. As stated earlier in this section, a heterosexual relationship or the potential for one is continuously implied throughout the film, but also a complicated relationship built on respect and trust. Cassian betrays his orders sparing the life of Jyn’s father. He listens to Jyn when she says that he is wrong or is acting in ways that the shouldn’t. In other instances in the film, Cassian actively supports and believes in Jyn. He supports her and trusts her as is evidenced from when he chooses to let her keep her blaster regardless of Kaytoo’s wishes. This support is proved again after Jyn talks to the Rebel Council. She is turned down by the council who does not believe her and refers to her as a criminal. Cassian addresses Jyn afterward saying (Kennedy, Shearmur, & Edwards (2016),

They were never going to believe you. I do. I believe you. We’ve all done terrible things on behalf of the rebellion, spies, terrorists, assassins. Everything I did I did for the rebellion and every time I walked away from something I wanted to forget I told myself it was for a cause I believed in a cause that was worth it without that we’re lost everything that we’ve done would have been for nothing. I couldn’t face myself if I gave up now none of us could.

In this interaction, Cassian shows support for Jyn and brings along other soldiers to help them fight. It is seemingly his influence that validates joining Jyn in completing her mission. This concept is solidified by Kaytoo’s comment, “Jyn, I’ll be there for you. Casisan said I had to” (Kennedy, Shearmur, & Edwards (2016). Cassian’s approval is what helps solidify Jyn’s position of power like other men in her life.
**Poe Dameron and Finn: Toward a Better Representation of Masculinity**

Something that is present in the newer films, *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015) and *Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi* (2017), is a conscious questioning and rearranging of hegemonic and toxic masculinity through some of the masculine characters in the films. This is evident in the sequel films through the construction of Poe Dameron and Finn. While both embody aspects of hegemonic masculinity, specifically physical force and control as well as occupational achievement, there are many scenes within these films that make viewers question aspects of hegemonic masculinity. This is present through the construction of Poe and Finn’s friendship, Finn’s expression of emotion, and the attention given to Poe’s use of violence to solve complex issues.

Poe and Finn love each other and form a bond in some very non-hegemonic non-toxic ways. Poe and Finn form a friendship after Finn helps Poe escape from the First Order. The two bond during their escape with Poe actually naming Finn and thus giving him recognition for his individuality. Poe and Finn actively express their love for each other. They are viewed in both *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015) and *Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi* (2017) physically embracing and showing excitement for their reunion after Poe is seen alive and after Finn wakes up from his coma. In addition, they call each other buddy and form an emotionally intimate bond throughout the films as they embark through missions to save the Resistance.

In addition to their relationship with each other, Finn and Poe challenge hegemonic and toxic masculinity on their own as well. Finn, in particular, does this through showing of his emotions including, love and fear. This is in opposition to how...
emotions are typically hidden within the *Star Wars* universe. As was mentioned earlier, Luke Skywalker was told to bury his feelings, while Finn actively expresses them. This is present in the first scene in which viewers are introduced to Finn. In this scene, the Storm Troopers are meant to enact violence against those living in the village. They are meant to kill them mercilessly with their blasters. However, instead of the emotionally disconnected violence viewers are used to seeing within the film franchise by the Storm Troopers, Finn expresses fear and discontent. Another Storm Trooper runs his bloody hand across Finn’s helmet leaving Finn looking emotionally distressed. He does not participate in the slaying. When he goes back to the First Order, Finn takes his helmet off and breathes heavily obviously shaken from what he has experienced. At this display of emotion, Captain Phasma orders Finn to report for reconditioning, this demonstrates that this display of emotion is not considered normal behavior. In another instance, Finn is afraid of what might happen to them if they are attacked by the First Order. Finn expresses to Rey his fear of the First Order and what they are capable of. He shows how scared he is. This is revisited in *Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi* (2017), when Finn is running away. Rose calls Finn a Resistance hero Finn denies this title, drawing attention from the viewers of his fear and need to escape.

While Finn has traits that actively demonstrate distance from hegemonic masculinity, Poe largely embraces and embodies hegemonic masculinity. This is shown through Poe’s characterization as the best pilot in the resistance. Poe leads the attacks against the First Order demonstrating acts of bravery and generally blowing things up and enacting violence. In Poe’s attack against the First Order in *Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi* (2017), Poe leads an attack to take down a dratnaut. While he succeeds in
destroying the ship, it comes at the expense of sacrificing many members of the fleet. General Leia slaps Poe and tells him that he is demoted after the attack. He tries to argue and say that he succeeded. Leia brings this mentality into question saying, “Poe get your head out of your cockpit. There are things that you cannot solve by jumping in an x-wing and blowing something up” (Bergman, Kennedy, & Johnson, 2017). This comment brings this masculinized and normalized violence to the attention of viewers in a way that has not been done before. While Poe struggles to learn this lesson in the film, it is one that he learns during the Resistance’s escape from the first order on the escape pods organized by Holdo. Poe is able to embrace this mentality and apply it to his own construction as a leader in the ground attack against the First Order. Poe is able to realize that the success of the mission is not worth the lives of others and as such does not need to be completed through physical force and violence but rather through wisdom and intelligence which he uses to help lead the Resistance to safety.
CHAPTER V:
CONCLUSION

*Star Wars* is central to American popular culture. It has influenced generations of American viewers but has gone largely unanalyzed when it comes to a critique of the discourses about masculinity presented in the films. This study seeks to shed light on this issue, as it has real world consequences and effects. It is easy to dismiss men’s gender representations as the default, but as media scholars we must pay attention to the messaging that mass media artifacts, like *Star Wars*, convey about hegemonic and toxic masculinity in our society to produce social change.

Masculinity in the *Star Wars* franchise is constructed primarily through the demonstration of traditional hegemonic masculinity. While alternative forms of masculinity are seen in the films, they are considered less than the idealized forms that are presented and upheld. This reinforces our societal power structure that is dominated by hegemonic masculinity. Many of the characters within the *Star Wars* franchise demonstrate and reinforce these ideologies. This is seen through the construction of Luke Skywalker’s masculinity and the hegemonic masculinity of the Jedi. This media representation can be viewed as another way in which hegemonic masculinity and its domination reinforce power relations in society. These characters are constructed in idealized ways that favor a specific form of masculinity at the expense of alternative forms of masculinity and over femininity as a whole.

Toxic masculinity is also upheld in the films as well. Characters like Darth Vader and Kylo Ren embody toxic masculinity in order to prove their masculinity that was otherwise questioned as they fail to uphold traditional and idealized forms of masculinity.
As hegemonic masculinity is a narrow and difficult to achieve standard, toxic masculinity is seen as an attainable and justified way of proving masculinity within the *Star Wars* franchise when the characters are unable to embody these ideologies. Characters resort to embodying toxic masculinity in order to regain power and control. This can be damaging as it demonstrates to viewers that toxic masculinity is an option in order to regain power and control when masculinity is called into question.

Through the construction of complex characters such as Han Solo and Obi Wan Kenobi, masculinity is negotiated. The characters seemingly behave in ways that deviate from traditional masculinity in some ways while following ideologies of hegemonic masculinity in others. For a time this allows for alternative masculinities that are still respected and validated. However, when they begin to age and as such break away from ideals of bodily masculinity, their masculinity is called into question. This reinforces the standard of a narrow and fleeting way of performing masculinity while negating others.

Many of the female characters in this study embraced characteristics of hegemonic masculinity in order to gain power within the films. This was done through their construction as sexual objects. This construction maintains that women are reduced to the objective and can only adhere to the role of the subjective when they are objectified in this way. In this way, there is a diminished value of the feminine in favor of masculine characteristics. As *Star Wars* is primarily created for boys and men, the limited female characters in the films are sexualized and objectified while at the same time adhering to masculine ideologies. This could be viewed as increasingly problematic as viewers both male and female could internalize this hierarchy of gender. Feminine identities can also be constructed through their association with powerful masculine characters, this can give
agency to feminine characters in a way that is unobtainable on their own through social masculinity.

The characters in the Star Wars franchise construct masculinity primarily through physical force and violence. This reinforces dangerous ideologies that masculinity is tied to physicality and acts of violence. This can be damaging to our society through its normalization of gendered violence as evidenced in the films. Physical force and control is the primary way in which characters are constructed as masculine and as a result, other forms of problem solving are not considered. In addition, racist stereotypes that are present in the films, construct men of color as violent by nature.

Throughout the study a pattern emerged of characters performing acts of being a savior. This included saving themselves, saving others, or saving their way of life. In the films acting as a savior is a large part of how the characters construct their masculinity. It is central to the storyline and is present in every film and with every character in this study. This narrative takes many forms throughout the franchise but is present throughout. This is evident starting in Star Wars: Episode III: A New Hope (1977) when Luke embarks on his journey with Obi-Wan Kenobi to rescue Princess Leia. It is seen again in Star Wars Episode IV: The Empire Strikes Back (1980) when Han Solo goes out into the tundra to save Luke from freezing. Anakin Skywalker transforms into Darth Vader because he is trying to save Padme in Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith. It is even present in the newer films when the characters in Rogue One: A Star Wars Story (2016) when Jyn risks her life to transmit the plans for the Death Star in order to save the galaxy. Overall, the purpose of the Jedi is to restore peace to the galaxy, saving it
from the Sith. This is seen over and over again and constructs the characters as heroes in their own right through their ability to save the galaxy.

*Star Wars* fans learn from this text that being a savior is desirable because that is what they have been taught over and over again throughout this franchise. As a result, it is not surprising that groups like “Down With Disney’s Treatment of Franchises and Their Fanboys” behave in the manner that they do. *Star Wars* teaches boys and men through public pedagogy that in order to construct their masculinity they should partake in acts of being a savior in order to save themselves, others, and their way of life. The men in this group could be viewed as protecting their way of life. These white men see themselves in the *Star Wars* franchise, as evidenced through their identification as the “true Rebel Alliance” (Shoard, 2018). They think that they are right and saving the world because that is what *Star Wars* taught them to do. For them, saving their way of life means that they need to save what they think that *Star Wars* is, the white male hero.

In order to move away from problematic representations of masculinity, examples of a healthy masculinity must be presented. This would involve making it okay for all male characters in the films to demonstrate compassion, empathy, and emotion. As it stands now, not all characters in this film are allowed to demonstrate these human emotions. For most men in the films, the only emotion that they are allowed to show is anger. Otherwise, they are only meant to be stoic and hide their feelings from others. A better version of masculinity would make it okay for male characters to be allowed to be wrong without endangering the universe. For many characters in *Star Wars*, there is a great sense of shame around being wrong or making mistakes. This needs to be viewed as being acceptable. Male characters should be allowed to be seen without the mask of
hegemonic masculinity and be viewed without shame or pity. Bodily masculinity is shown throughout *Star Wars* as only having one acceptable form of the masculine body. Different types of masculine bodies should be shown as being acceptable. Age and ability are not constant and should not be viewed as a source of shame or weakness.

In addition, there should be a better representation of female characters and characters of color. There not many female characters in *Star Wars*, virtually all of which are objectified. *Star Wars* needs female characters who are allowed to be both strong characters and leaders, but also feminine beings. In the films, there is almost an erasure of feminine traits that privileges masculinity over the feminine. There needs to be a shift away from standard masculine subject and feminine object in order to bring equity. There are a limited number of characters of color, many of which are shown in very problematic and stereotypical ways. Characters of color deserve the complexity afforded to the white characters in the franchise.

Due to the nature of the films, it is virtually impossible to see a non-violent masculinity. *Star Wars* is an action film centered around a war. This means that it is innately steeped in violence. While the option of showing a masculinity without the use of violence in this franchise is impossible, the previous suggestions will get us closer to better representations of gender in *Star Wars*. While the newest films in the franchise get us closer to these representations, it is important to note that we are not there yet.

Although the films construct masculinity in some problematic ways, in newer films these ideologies and representations are being called into question. Through having Luke question the Jedi Order and their ideologies, he is calling into question the structure of hegemonic masculinity and its problematic aspects. Hegemonic masculinity and its
violence are being brought to viewers’ attention, and new ways of being a man in non-toxic ways are being demonstrated. Leia brings hegemonic masculinity to Poe’s attention, and therefore the audience’s attention as well, that there are more ways to solve problems than getting into an x-wing and blowing something up. This is a step in the right direction. *Star Wars* as a cultural phenomenon needs to be studied and considered for its metanarratives and what it means for our societal power structures. While we are seeing changes throughout the generations of films, we need to do better in order to bring about societal change with regard to gender equality and better masculine representations.

**Strengths and Limitations**

The study builds off of hegemonic masculinity, a subject area that has been researched throughout multiple disciplines including communication, sociology, and psychology. In using CDA, the researcher was able to develop a thorough understanding of the issues surrounding masculinity within the *Star Wars* franchise through an intersectional and historical view. Through using this in-depth analysis to analyze the artifact, it may bring to light how these discourses created in the character compositions reinforce societal power structures and thus may bring about the means to change them.

As this study uses a qualitative method, Critical Discourse Analysis, it is only one researcher’s interpretation of the artifact and is not generalizable. Instead, it is meant to reveal systems of power and domination present within this widely consumed artifact that may have been overlooked. In using CDA, the researcher will be able to get a thorough understanding of the issues surrounding masculinity within the *Star Wars* franchise through an intersectional and historical view.
The illustrative sample is a limitation as it excludes some characters over others as the researcher remembers and perceives their adherence to hegemonic masculinity. It does not have the benefit of having a random sampling and depends on the researcher’s own judgement of which characters were analyzed within this study. As the study is interpretive in nature, what the researcher deemed worthy of analysis is subjective. There are characters that may be interpreted differently and others that could have been discussed further but the characters discussed in the study were addressed due to the researcher’s own interpretation. Further, while there were twenty characters that were analyzed in this study, not all characters were discussed at length in this thesis. This was primarily due to time and space restrictions that limited the amount of characters that could be analyzed within the discussion section. The characters that were included in this study were prioritized based on the analysis that was conducted that allowed for a further interpretation of these characters over others. They were chosen because they were exemplary of patterns that emerged out of the analysis.

Characters such as Yoda, Qui Gon Jyn, and Emperor Palpatine are not discussed in length in this study but the institutions and systems that they represent are. Yoda and Qui Gon are representative of the problematic aspects of the Jedi and the upholding of hegemonic masculinity. Their leadership is what contributes to the toxicity of the Jedi, but overall they fill the role of the institution that they are a part of. The same could be said for Emperor Palpatine. He embodies the power that toxic masculinity and the Sith promote but does this through his embodiment of the institution itself. These characters and their ties to these institutions contribute to the construction of masculinity for other characters including Luke and Anakin Skywalker. This could be furthered and discussed
in future studies but given time and space constrictions in the current study were not addressed at length.

In addition, not all characters were coded in this study and the film franchise is still continuously being produced. At the time of this thesis, *Star Wars: Episode IX- The Rise of Skywalker*, the final canon film in the *Star Wars* franchise, has not yet been released and as such has not been analyzed in this study.

**Future Areas of Inquiry**

Future areas of study may include interviews with viewers of the films and their responses to the masculine representations of the characters. In conducting a study with *Star Wars* fans, especially male fans, we may gain a more thorough understanding of how the masculine characterizations in *Star Wars* may have an effect on viewers in their own lives and in their own gendered constructions. Future studies may also further develop the complexities of other characters not analyzed at length in the current study.
CHAPTER VI:
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