

Abstract

This dissertation examines the representation of post-9/11 American masculinity in crisis through an in-depth analysis of three significant cinematic depictions of the Joker character: Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008), David Ayer's *Suicide Squad* (2016), and Todd Phillips's *Joker* (2019). Anchored in the theoretical framework of masculinity studies and masculinity in crisis discourse, this study explores how these films portray fractured and subverted masculine identities in response to broader socio-cultural and political shifts. R.W. Connell's conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity serves as the analytical framework. I focus on three critical elements: patriarchy, class hierarchies, and emotional toughness, all of which serve as markers of hegemonic masculinity in crisis. These elements interrogate the tensions within traditional models of manhood and identify how these crises are articulated through the Joker's cinematic representations. This dissertation contextualizes American masculinity, tracing its evolution from the 20th to the 21st century. It examines cultural shifts influenced by events like 9/11 and the Great Recession. By integrating Stuart Hall's theory of representation, the analysis explores how cinematic depictions of the Joker reinforce or subvert specific models of masculinity. This study contributes to the understanding of various masculinities in post-9/11 American cinema, reflecting broader socio-cultural anxieties and reshaping dominant gender norms. It analyzes each manifestation of masculinity, determining whether these films react to, represent, or challenge rigid expectations of manhood in the United States. I define Nolan's Joker as the embodiment of an anarchic masculinity that profoundly rejects hegemonic norms in favor of anarchy and anti-capitalist insurrection. Secondly, I regard Ayer's Joker as a prime example of dissociative masculinity, which is characterized by emotional disintegration, misogyny, and violent patriarchal traits. I ultimately defined Phillips's Joker as embodying a carnivalesque masculinity, in which Arthur Fleck's unsightly physique, fractured relationships, and social marginalization combine to facilitate his transformation into a mock-king archetype. Through this role as a carnivalesque jester, he temporarily subverts conventional ideals of manhood, challenging hegemonic structures before ultimately reaffirming his position's (in)stability. Viewed holistically, this dissertation examines how cinematic representations of the Joker surrounding power dynamics, body politics, and intimacy illustrate the post-9/11 American masculinity in crisis, socio-cultural anxieties, and the shifting challenges to hegemonic ideals in contemporary society.

Keywords: Filmic representation, hegemonic masculinity, Joker figure, masculinity in crisis, post-9/11 American masculinity, villainy