

Abstract: Nowhere Men: Representations of Masculinity in Nineties British Cinema.

This thesis provides a feminist analysis of the representations of masculinity and crisis in nineties British cinema. It is informed by feminist film studies, but is predominantly concerned with understanding the culturally specific implications of these narratives. In challenging the validity of male crisis claims, the thesis seeks to establish a theoretical framework that is concerned with the cultural function of cinema as much as it is the formal and stylistic qualities. It argues that the models developed by feminist film scholars in relation to Hollywood cinema can be deployed in a British context, but that this process involves a detailed attention to national specificity. Thus it attempts to provide a detailed overview of the decade's key social, economic and cultural developments before moving to analyse British films of the nineties. The narrative and formal analysis of the three case study chapters are targeted at explicating the shifting discursive construction of masculinity and gender politics in Britain at the end of the twentieth century.

The three thematically defined chapters focus on some of the most pervasive tropes of masculinity in nineties British cinema. A focus on representations of young men and new lads, fathers and dysfunctional and damaged masculinity represent and mediate a range of responses to the discourse of crisis. Detailed textual and contextual analyses are used to make connections between the films and the machinations of gender

discourses and make sense of their resonance within the emergent post-feminist culture of nineties Britain. Located within feminist film studies, *Nowhere Men* centralises questions about the workings of power, ideology and representation. In arguing for a critical understanding of discourses of crisis this thesis seeks to make an intervention in the field of British cinema studies by foregrounding the gendered power dynamics that are inherent in cinematic representations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract		1
Table of Contents		3
List of Figures		5
Acknowledgments		7
Introduction		9
Chapter 1	Understanding Masculinity	29
	• Understanding Masculinity	29
	• Masculinity in British Cinema Studies	31
	• Feminist Approaches to Masculinity in Popular Cinema	41
	• Media Approaches to Masculinity	49
	• Masculinity as Discursive Construction	54
	• Masculinity as Performed Identity	63
Chapter 2	Changing Britain, Changing Men	71
	• Changing Britain, Changing Men	71
	• From Warm Beer to Cool Britannia: The Renegotiation of 'Britishness' in the Nineties	73
	• Youth Culture and the Emergence of Laddism	85
	• Changing Discourses of Family and Fatherhood	96
	• 'Crisis' in 90s Britain	105

Chapter 3	Irony and Authenticity: New Lads and Underclass Youth in Nineties British Cinema	120
	• Irony and Authenticity	120
	• Getting Shit 24:7: The Underclass Lads	123
	• Irony and the Problematic Politics of the New Lad Films	147
	• Lads...The Men Who Should Know Better	172
Chapter 4	Framing Fatherhood: From Redemption to Dysfunction	194
	• Framing Fatherhood	194
	• Fathering and Cultural Inheritance in Multi-Cultural Britain	200
	• The Untenable Breadwinner Role	217
Chapter 5	Villains, Victims and Violence: Mediating Discourses of Crisis and Masculinity in Nineties British Cinema	257
	• Villains, Victims and Violence	257
	• Discourses of Crisis and Damage	264
	• Damaged and Dysfunctional: Two Sides of the Same Problem?	276
	• 'I'll Kill You and Your Slag Shit Cunt Family Too:' Violence and Damaged Men	300
Conclusion		310
Bibliography		326
Filmography		341
Digital References		344
Television Programmes		345
Magazines		346

List of Figures

Figure 1	Mark Whalberg, Calvin Klein Advert (1992)	20
Figure 2	Mark Whalberg & Kate Moss, Calvin Klein Advert (1992)	20
Figure 3	L'enfant	98
Figure 4	<i>TwentyFourSeven</i> : Tim's Kitchen	124
Figure 5	<i>TwentyFourSeven</i> : Fag Ash's living room	133
Figure 6	<i>TwentyFourSeven</i> : Darcy bathes Fag Ash	135
Figure 7	<i>Nil By Mouth</i> : Billy prepares heroin	138
Figure 8	<i>Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels</i> : Barry the Baptist	151
Figure 9	<i>Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels</i> : Ed's living room	154
Figure 10	<i>Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels</i> : Garry and Lenny	158
Figure 11	<i>Trainspotting</i> : Renton in the shooting gallery	164
Figure 12	<i>Trainspotting</i> : Renton's father carries him to bed after his overdose	168
Figure 13	Girls and Boys alternate covers for <i>Fever Pitch</i>	175
Figure 14	<i>Fever Pitch</i> : Images from 70s and 90s matches	177
Figure 15	<i>When Saturday Comes</i> : Annie on the shop floor	184
Figure 16	<i>When Saturday Comes</i> : Jimmy training	189
Figure 17	<i>When Saturday Comes</i> : Kitchen scene	204
Figure 18	<i>East is East</i> : George in the Mosque, Bradford and chip shop	213
Figure 19	<i>Brassed Off</i> : End captions	226
Figure 20	<i>TwentyFourSeven</i> : Geoff lying on sofa	236
Figure 21	<i>The Full Monty</i> : Gaz, Dave and Nathan at the steel factory	241
Figure 22	<i>Naked</i> : Johnny in London	270
Figure 23	<i>A Room For Romeo Brass</i> : Morell pounces on Romeo	283
Figure 24	<i>A Room For Romeo Brass</i> : Morell	285
Figure 25	<i>Nil By Mouth</i> : Raymond and Val	295

Figure 26	<i>Human Traffic: Mr Floppy</i>	307
Figure 27	<i>Nuts and Zoo Magazine Covers</i>	308

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible by funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. My most sincere thanks go to my thesis supervisor Yvonne Tasker who has always been a source of advice, inspiration and encouragement. Her support throughout this thesis has been invaluable. I would also like to thank the people who have acted as secondary advisors, Su Holmes and Lawrence Napper, for their guidance and support of this project. Thanks also to Diane Negra for always being willing to talk about ideas and point me in new directions.

I would like to thank the very many friends that I have made while working on this thesis. Thanks especially to Shelley Cobb, Neil Ewen, Hannah Hamad and Lindsay Steenberg for wine, coffee and conversation. My deepest thanks also go to my friends Hannah Bushell, Lucy Bolton and Dee Barker and my brother, Paul, for their unwavering belief in me and for indulging my interminable discussions of British masculinity. I would like to thank my mum, Cilla, for the love and support she has given me throughout my life. Above all, I would like to thank very three special people: Darren Brigham for his continued love, support and encouragement, without him I would never have made it this far. My children, Ori and Zak, who bring love, joy and wonder to my life on a daily basis.

My final thanks go to my father, Ray Godfrey, who inspired me to pursue my dream. I could not ask for more. He was my biggest advocate; he always believed in me, was always proud of me and his love was always unconditional. I give him my thanks and my love.

Introduction



Nowhere Men:

**Representations of Masculinity in Nineties
British Cinema**

'That men are today confused about what it means to be a 'real man' – that masculinity is in crisis – has become a cultural commonplace staring down at us from every magazine rack and television talk show in the country.'

Kimmel, 1987. p.121.

'There is a genuine rise in male dissatisfaction for which there is no shortage of suggested causes. Top of the list is the growing assertiveness of women. As a consequence of the feminist revolution, so this argument goes, women are no longer prepared to be the property of patriarchal men. In this feminist revolution, male power is being overthrown. Men, like colonists seeing their empire crumble, don't like what is happening.'

Clare, 2000. p.p3-4.

'Men, we are told, have it tough too. Media pronouncements give us recurring images of the young adult male trapped in a cycle of depression and dispossession, leading to identity crises and despair.'

Whelehan, 2000. p.113.

Nowhere Men: Representations of Masculinity in Nineties British Cinema

Claims that masculinity was 'in crisis' were seemingly ubiquitous in nineties British culture and, to an almost unprecedented degree, British films from the period were dominated by narratives that presented white, working class male characters who were disempowered, dispossessed and alienated. These themes have surfaced periodically in British cinema history (during the post war years and again during the New Wave) but what distinguishes nineties British cinema is the prevalence of these narratives. It is not the case that nineties British cinema was defined *solely* in terms of a preoccupation with this particular trope of masculinity – heritage dramas and romantic comedies for instance present very differently inflected male characters and constructions of masculinity. What I am interested in, in this thesis, is looking at what I consider to be the dominant trope of masculinity in nineties British cinema: the representations of masculinity and crisis. The discursive construction of cinematic masculinities does not occur within a vacuum; we can only understand representations of masculinity and their function within cinema and society if we understand the ways in which these representations relate to both femininity and discourses of sexuality. Although my dominant focus in this thesis is to understand the ways in which representations of masculinity functioned and fluctuated in the 90s it is not my intention to 'flatten' the landscape, my readings of the discourses of masculinity are necessarily informed by the ways in which the male characters in the texts that I analyse relate to female and gay characters where appropriate.

It is important, at this early stage, to clarify the term 'crisis.' Crisis is used extensively to refer to a wide range of different things. Even within the tighter parameters of discussions about masculinity the term is polymorphous. For my purposes I understand the term as signalling something of a continuum; it can refer to the light-hearted, comedic narratives of male disempowerment that are typified by *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) but also to the more severe incarnations of 'damaged' masculinity that I analyse in the final case study chapter. As such the term is differently inflected throughout the thesis but is always used to refer to the ways in which cinematic narratives deploy tropes of masculinity as beleaguered, disempowered and uncertain. As a feminist I maintain, along with other critics, a sceptical approach to the idea that masculinity is in crisis but while I, like Imelda Whelehan and Sally Robinson, am keen to interrogate the political implications of these claims I believe it is vitally important to acknowledge the social context within which these claims are being made.¹

That these claims regarding the apparent reduction in social and economic power of men were so pervasive during the nineties is, in itself, a cultural phenomenon that demands further interrogation. Swathes of empirical evidence regarding unemployment, mental health, education, poverty, crime, violence, drug and alcohol abuse for example constantly reiterated the seemingly immutable idea that men were

¹ Whelehan, I. (2000). *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism* (London: The Women's Press); Robinson, S. (2000). *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press).

suffering from a range of social problems.² Claims about male crisis were, and are, invariably bound up with quasi-backlash discourses which in turn rely upon a tacit understanding of the 'feminising' effects of the ruling liberal elite.³ While it would be naïve to deny the ramifications of social and economic factors, my interest in the claims of crisis is not about proving or contesting the extent to which the crisis of masculinity, as a social phenomenon, existed. This study then is not driven by a sociological agenda but rather is concerned with how the social context informs the claims to crisis that have pervaded cinematic narratives throughout the decade. Films including *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off* (Mark Herman, 1996) couch their narratives of male crisis within a recognizably post-industrial milieu and in doing so they draw on the attendant associations of the social context in order to validate the narrative deployment of crisis. The central concern of this thesis is, therefore, not so much to question whether a crisis of masculinity was 'real' or not during the nineties (for Robinson this is a moot point) but rather to examine how the notions of crisis are articulated and mediated within the cinematic arena and to interrogate the political ramifications of these discourses.

Equally central is an argument that British discourses of crisis are distinct from those that are found in America in particular, and that this distinction has to do with class and economics. Scholars including Sally Robinson and Tania Modleski have both

² Edwards, T. (2005). *Cultures of Masculinity* (London: Routledge). p.p. 7-16.

³ See for example <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/terence-blacker/the-liberal-elite-is-smug-and-patronising-532641.html> accessed 27th February 2010.

See also Hoff-Somers, C. (2000). *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men* (London: Simon & Schuster).

written extensively about the American crisis of masculinity as functioning to make the hitherto unmarked male norm more visible.⁴ The centrality of class and social economics does not, however, bear the same significance in an American context as it does in the British one. Both the American and British discourses of crisis do, however, share the capacity to 'reauthorize patriarchal power relations and masculine hegemony' but this is necessarily accomplished in nationally specific ways.⁵ It is important to clarify my position here. I do not in any way wish to underestimate the very real social, economic and (broadly speaking) psychological effects of de-industrialization and the concomitant impact of neoliberal ideologies upon - in particular - working-class communities in the United Kingdom.⁶ My contention is that while these the slow-burning socio-economic shifts have fostered discontent and psychosocial dislocation amongst many British men, the way in which this frustration has manifested itself in cultural terms is often regressive vis-à-vis gender and/or sexual politics. To paraphrase Martin Fradley, it is not that claims of gendered 'crisis' are wrong in a broadly sociological sense, but that the ideological scapegoating that is symptomatic of 'male crisis' in the texts I interrogate is, in many ways, representative of the social and media perceptions of many of the United Kingdom's male subjects.⁷

⁴ Robinson, S. (2000). Modleski, T. (1991). *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a Postfeminist Age* (London: Routledge).

⁵ Robinson, S. (2000). p.9.

⁶ In the year 1991-2 the number of men employed in manufacturing and industry fell by 51,000. See Maguire, K. (1992). 'Male Unemployment reaching Levels Not Seen Since 1930s' *The Telegraph* 16th October. By 1997 male unemployment stood at 9.1% compared to 3.6% in female workforce. This leads Neil Harris to conclude that 'Women have won the war of the workplace.' Harris, N. (1997) 'Why Are Men Being Held Back?' *The Times* 27th March.

⁷ Fradley, M. (2004). 'Maximus Melodramaticus: Masculinity, Masochism and White Male Paranoia in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema' in Tasker, Y. (ed.) *Action and Adventure Cinema* (London: Routledge).

Furthermore Tim Edwards explicates how discourses of crisis inevitably 'incorporate a sense of panic or anxiety' about that which has either happened already or may come to pass in the near future.⁸ Kirby Farrell goes further, explaining how for men in particular the processes of economic and social change have both socio-somatic and psychic manifestations. He explains that 'job termination means loss of self esteem and fear of social death.'⁹ This fear of social death becomes a recurrent reference point for many of the narratives of working class and underclass men in nineties British cinema. It is, as the three case study chapters will demonstrate rendered both literally, in films such as *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off*, and symbolically in *TwentyFourSeven* (Shane Meadows, 1997) and *Naked* (Mike Leigh, 1993).

This study focuses specifically on the nineties for a number of reasons; firstly British cinema underwent something of a renaissance during the nineties both in terms of output and popularity and as such it would seem that the narrativisation of male crisis was not only culturally resonant but commercially profitable. Furthermore, as Claire Monk explains, 1990s British cinema was preoccupied with men and masculinity in crisis 'to an almost unprecedented extent.'¹⁰ As such the films from this era can play an important role in developing an understanding of the shifting discourses of masculinity and cultural ideas about maleness at the end of the twentieth century. With regards to

⁸ Edwards, T. (2006). p.7.

⁹ Farrell, K. (1998). *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury & Interpretation in the Nineties* (The John Hopkins University Press, London). p.11.

¹⁰ Monk, C. (2000). 'Men in the 90s' in Murphy, R. (ed.) *British Cinema of the 90s* (London:BFI Publishing). p.156.

British cinema history, the nineties were a surprisingly prolific period, despite the fact that in 1990 just sixty films were produced and the British film industry, according to Robert Murphy, 'seemed a sickly plant unlikely to survive the millennium.'¹¹ Over the decade film production increased in strength; production peaked in 1996 with 114 films being produced.¹² Despite the figures remaining strong in the latter half of the decade there remained a seemingly insurmountable chasm between those films that Murphy describes as 'typically British' and those that secured American or other international funding. The latter group of films includes crossover hits such as *The Commitments* (Alan Parker, 1991) and *Four Weddings and A Funeral* (Roger Michell, 1994) as well as a number of prestigious heritage films such as *Howards End* (James Ivory, 1992) or *Shadowlands* (Richard Attenborough, 1993).

In defining the parameters of this study I decided to exclude heritage films, largely since my primary focus is on the ways in which film texts deployed the cultural context of post-industrialisation and post-feminism in order to mediate the discursive construction of masculinity in crisis. That is not to say that heritage cinema does not raise issues germane to a discussion of contemporary gender discourses. In fact the opposite can be said of a number of films that deploy the nostalgic lens of heritage drama in order to reify certain discursive formations of gender that are specifically informed by their post-feminist context but, crucially, for my purposes, heritage drama

¹¹ Murphy, R. (2000). 'A Path Through the Moral Maze' in Murphy, R. (ed.) *British Cinema of the 90s* (London: BFI Publishing). p.1.

¹² <http://www.culture.gov.uk/creative/pdf/Film.pdf>. Accessed 14th Feb 2010.

does not contextualise the characters within the specific socio-historic context of post-industrialisation.¹³ Thus the films that I have chosen as case studies and examples are all either social realist films or films that have an obvious relationship to the peripheries of this mode of film making. Out of all of the films I look at there are only two that are not set in the nineties; *East is East* (Damien O'Donnell, 1999) and *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996). Despite their not having contemporary settings both films are clearly thematically relevant to the issues that I wish to explore. I approach this period of intense film production through three case study chapters which relate to what I consider to be the core tropes of British masculinity in the nineties: the thesis' focus on representations of youth and lad culture, fathers, and representations of damaged and dysfunctional masculinity allows an interrogation of some of the period's central and recurrent themes. As this implies the thesis proceeds from an assumption that the best way to make sense of discourses of masculinity is within a specific historical context.

As a subject of academic enquiry feminist studies of masculinity have their genesis within sociology and cultural studies. Where this work exists in relation to cinematic representations of masculinity it tends to focus upon Hollywood cinema.¹⁴ Where

¹³ See Antje Ascheid (2006). 'Safe Rebellions: Romantic Emancipation in the 'Woman's Heritage Film'' in *Scope* Issue 4, February 2006. <http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/article.php?issue=4&id=124> (accessed 12th March 2010). Ascheid points out that 'a particular kind of heritage film that has emerged within the context of post-feminist chick-flick/lit culture in the 1990s – activates and seemingly reconciles often contradictory narrative trajectories within a pre-feminist historical setting to create post-feminist fantasies of romantic emancipation.' p.1.

¹⁴ See for example Tasker, Y. (1993). *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and The Action Cinema* (London: Routledge); Cohan, S. (2000). *Men, Masculinities and Movies in the 1950s* (Bloomington: Indiana

studies of British cinema have engaged with issues of gender the focus has traditionally been on representations of women and femininity.¹⁵ Thus the study of masculinity in British cinema has, hitherto remained largely unexplored territory; notable exceptions are John Hill's work on the fifties, sixties and eighties, Andrew Spicer's historical survey, *Typical Men: Representations of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*, and a number of articles by Steve Chibnall, James Leggott and Claire Monk.¹⁶ Monk is the only British cinema scholar to have undertaken any sustained political critique of the representation of masculinity and as such her work is an important antecedent to this thesis. In extending the parameters that Monk has established and interrogating the representations of masculinity in more depth I aim to develop a more detailed theorisation of the representations of masculinity within a British context than has been accomplished thus far. A central objective of the thesis is, thus, to formulate a feminist intervention into the study of masculinity in British cinema. Moreover the thesis seeks to make sense of the discourses of male crisis within the particular context of post-feminism (a term I discuss further in chapter one).

University Press); Jeffords, S. (2004). 'Breakdown; White Masculinity, Class and US Action-Adventure Films' in Tasker, Y. (ed.) *Action and Adventure Cinema* (London: Routledge); Fradley, M. (2004).

¹⁵ See for example Harper, S. (2000). *Women in British Cinema: Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know* (London: Continuum); Williams-Bell, M. (2009). *Femininity in the Frame: Women and 1950s Popular British Cinema* (London: IB Tauris).

¹⁶ Spicer, A. (2001). *Typical Men: Representations of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris); Monk, C. (2000); Monk, C. (1999). 'From Underworld to Underclass: Crime and British Cinema in the 90s' in Chibnall, S. & Murphy, R. (eds.) *British Crime Cinema* (London: Routledge); Chibnall, S. (2001) 'Travels in Ladland: The British Gangster Film Cycle 1998-2001' in Murphy, R. (ed.) *The British Cinema Book* (2nd ed.) (London: BFI Publishing); Hill, J. (1986). *Sex, Class & Realism: British Cinema 1956-63* (London: BFI Publishing); Hill, J. (1999). *British Cinema in the 1980s: Issues and Themes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Leggott, James. (2004). 'Like Father?: Failing Fathers and Angelic Children in Contemporary British Social Realist Film' in Powrie, Phil. Babbington, Bruce. & Davies, Anne. (ed.) *The Trouble With Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*. (London: Wallflower).

As noted above, claims regarding a crisis in masculinity are not confined to one cultural or national context, as the work on American masculinity by Susan Faludi, for example, demonstrates.¹⁷ The discursive construction of nineties masculinity in crisis is, fundamentally a social phenomenon which, within the British context, relied upon a tacit understanding that social and economic changes had impacted on men in negative ways. As Arthur Brittan explains ‘the presumption is that this crisis was brought about by the erosion of male power in the workplace and in the home...however, all this has changed – they have lost their sense of gender certainty, their sense of place in the world.’¹⁸ The social phenomenon of masculinity in crisis was thus (inevitably) refracted and reconstituted through media representations. On the one hand it was invariably posited as a phenomenon with an economic genesis, but on the other, the nineties crisis of masculinity was as much about a diversification of discourses of masculinity as it was about the social and economic disempowerment of men. This proliferation of diversity is seen by Anthony Easthope as a fundamental factor in the nineties crisis of masculinity because it worked to undermine what he terms ‘the masculine myth.’¹⁹

Anthony Easthope, along with Sean Nixon and Tim Edwards have all theorised the ways in which commodity culture has impacted upon both ideas about and styles of

¹⁷ Faludi, S. (2000). *Stiffed: The Betrayal of Modern Man* (London: Chatto & Windus)

¹⁸ Brittan, A. (1989). *Masculinity And Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), p.23.

¹⁹ Easthope, A. (1992). *What A Man’s Gotta Do! The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture* (London: Routledge). p.166.

masculinity.²⁰ As Nixon explains, there was a moment towards the end of the eighties where there was a sense that there seemed to be 'some wider decisive shifts occurring in popular representations of masculinity.'²¹ Not only did masculinity and male cultures become more visible from this point on, they developed and evolved across a wide range of media forms. The cinematic representations of masculinity with which I am concerned in this thesis must therefore be understood as a continuing this trend. The discourses of laddism, fathers and crisis must all be understood as coming out of this cultural moment. The crisis of masculinity thus became a transmedia phenomenon which encompassed not only cinema but also literature (especially the so-called lad lit phenomenon typified by Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch*, 1992), television (with shows such as *Men Behaving Badly* ITV 1992-4; BBC 1994-9), men's lifestyle magazines which included *FHM* (Emap), *Loaded* (IPC), *Maxim* (Dennis Publishing) and *Men's Health* (The National Magazine Company Ltd) and advertising. The proliferation of these various configurations of masculinity resulted in the emergence of a range of contradictions which posited a tension between the reconstructed and unreconstructed modes of masculinity. Moreover these conflicting formulations of masculinity serve to underscore the disparity between men as consumers and men as disempowered vis-à-vis the inexorable processes of post-industrialisation. Images of masculinity which posited a masculine identity constituted and defined by consumption were seen as further evidence of the feminising effects of male consumerism. This stimulated an

²⁰ Easthope, A. (1992); Nixon, S. (1996). *Hard Looks: Masculinities, Spectatorship and Contemporary Consumption* (UCL Press, London); Edwards, T. (1997). *Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society* (London: Cassell Press).

²¹ Nixon, S. (1996). p.3.

unprecedented male consumer market for suitably masculinised beauty products which was, by necessity, underscored by a self-conscious, if somewhat narcissistic, insistence on heterosexuality.

Sean Nixon observes that many of these images 'offered a more sexualised representation of the male body in ways which drew on codes traditionally associated with representations of femininity.'²² Furthermore, as Richard Dyer points out 'what is at stake is not just male and female sexuality, but male and female power. The maintenance of power underpins further instabilities in the image of men as sexual spectacle.'²³ Furthermore, as Tim Edwards suggests, the new definitions of heterosexual masculinity that came into being at the end of the eighties (typified by the new man) were compelled to disavow the homoerotic potential of displaying the male body in these new codified ways. The Calvin Klein campaign fronted by Mark Wahlberg (figures 1 and 2) is a case in point; any potential for (mis)reading his sexualised presentation in the first image as anything other than heteronormative is foreclosed by the obvious use of Kate Moss as the focus of the eroticism in the accompanying campaign images.

²² Nixon, S. (1996). p.3.

²³ Dyer, R. (2002). *Only Entertainment* (2nd ed.) (London: Routledge). p.128.

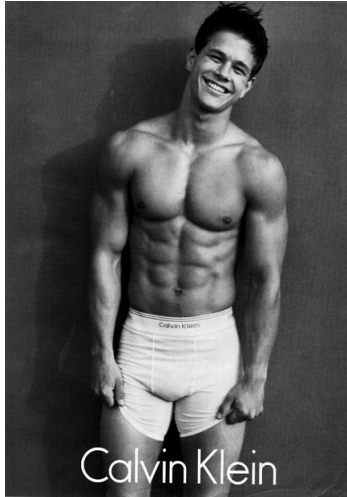


Figure 1: Mark Wahlberg, Calvin Klein Advert, 1992

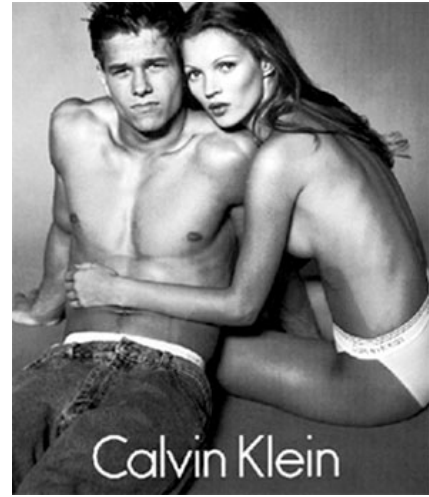


Figure 2: Wahlberg & Kate Moss, Calvin Klein Advert, 1992.

The latter, unreconstructed configuration of masculinity is most obviously typified by the emergence of the new lad in the middle part of the decade. The new lad was, in a number of ways, diametrically opposed to the 'feminised' construction of the reconstructed new man of the late eighties and early nineties. Where the reconstructed males of advertising and fashion made sense in a context of pseudo liberal gender relations, the unreconstructed masculinities of the new lad was predicated upon a rejection of the implied feminisation of the forms of reconstructed masculinity that are represented by the new man. The new lad's relationship to gender politics is, essentially a post-feminist one which relies upon a tacit familiarity with a feminist rhetoric that is subsequently repudiated via irony with the effect of

reproducing an inherently conservative incarnation of masculinity.²⁴ I develop this line of enquiry in more detail in chapter three.

The cultural configurations of masculinity that were present in nineties British culture were, in many ways, symptomatic of the confusion that Kimmel refers to in the quote at the outset of the introduction. The media and cultural formations of masculinity that were in circulation comprised contradictory components; the fiercely unreconstructed masculinity of the new lad, for example, existed alongside a formation of masculinity that was apparently becoming increasingly involved in parenting and family life. Thus this thesis proceeds from the assumption that the forms of masculinity in existence in nineties British culture demand further investigation; moreover, given the political dynamic of the crisis claims, there is an urgent need for this to be undertaken from a feminist perspective. Although this is a film studies thesis it is informed by a cultural and feminist studies perspective; what is most compelling about these films is how they mediate the discursive terrain of gender in the nineties, and why it should be that narratives of male disempowerment should be such a prolific (and commercially viable) trope of masculinity at this time. I further argue that the cinematic construction of male disempowerment functions, and should be understood, within the discursive environment of the emergent post-feminist context. In many ways the very fact that masculinity was being proclaimed as being 'in crisis' with such insistence indicates how much is at stake in the field of enquiry. This thesis seeks to critique and qualify the

²⁴ Benwell, B. (2004). 'Ironic Discourse: Evasive Masculinity in Men's Lifestyle Magazines' in *Men and Masculinities* vol. 7, issue 1. July 2004.

(symbolic) claims of crisis by contending that despite apparent changes in the social role of men, male power remained largely intact and unchallenged. Furthermore I argue that the eulogistic characteristics of many nineties British films that must be understood as enabling a nostalgic impulse that was able to simultaneously discredit feminist gender politics and recapitulate the conservative formations of traditional white masculinity.

This thesis combines both film and cultural studies methodologies in order to delineate a textual and contextual study of the representations of masculinity in nineties British cinema. The gender politics of this period offer a particularly productive arena for investigation and analysis. The claims of crisis and the concomitant emergence of post-feminism converged to create a context in which the political stakes appeared high. Furthermore the preoccupation with masculinity that characterises British cinema in the nineties means that there is a wealth of hitherto un-mined material that exemplifies the machinations of gender politics and the complex connections that exist between cinema and the discursively constructed forms of masculinity and crisis. In order to explore these connections and understand the ways in which cinematic representations raise issues about masculinities I draw on a combination of textual and discursive analysis which enables meaningful connections to be drawn between cinematic narratives and cultural discourses of masculinity. I analyse both the aesthetics of the films and their narrative structures and representations with a view to understanding how the idioms of the cinematic lexicon construct and mediate

representations of masculinity. In positioning this as a critical, feminist study of masculinity and British national cinema I seek to offer an alternative approach to the dominant methodologies associated with canonical British film studies. As I explain in chapter two, there is a paucity of work done in terms of the representations of gender in more recent British cinema and as such this thesis offers an original intervention into the field of study.

The thesis is structured into five chapters, the first two of which provide a theoretical, historical and cultural context for the case studies that follow. The first chapter, 'Understanding Masculinity' outlines the methodological rationale for the research and enables me to establish the theoretical approach that I am taking to the study of cinematic masculinities. In this chapter I outline the existing scholarship on masculinity in British cinema studies and further explain how my approach is informed by a rather different methodological stance. In foregrounding a feminist critique of the films I approach the topic of masculinity in nineties British cinema with a view to better understanding the functions of power, performance and the political dynamics of gender within nineties Britain. The second chapter, 'Changing Britain, Changing Men' has two functions; firstly it expands upon my interdisciplinary approach to the field of study by establishing the socio-historical context for the case study chapters and secondly it situates my readings of the films and their representations within the wider cultural environment. This is particularly important given the ways in which many of the films rely upon their location within a specific context in order to make sense of the

narratives of male disempowerment that they present. This is followed by three case study chapters which have been designed to reflect some of the central ways in which British films were engaging with and mediating predominant tropes of masculinity. The first of these case study chapters, 'Irony and Authenticity: Representations of New Lads and Underclass Youth', examines the two dominant tropes of young masculinity that are found in films from the era. The formal style and political engagement of these two forms of representation provide a productive contrast which facilitates a discussion about the various ways in which cinematic texts of the time were influenced by and involved in mediating conflicting discourses about the state of young men in Britain. I draw on examples of films that fit within the emergent 'lad culture' phenomenon of the middle and latter part of the decade and seek to understand the cultural function of these films against the more avowedly political texts that are represented by the likes of *TwentyFourSeven*. The lad films form an obviously distinct strand of nineties British cinema that responded to the idea of masculinity in crisis by disavowal that was most commonly worked through by an ironic codification of disempowerment as a commodified lifestyle choice. These films, typified by *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (Guy Ritchie, 1998) function as a cultural counterpoint to the bleakness that was more typical of the characterisation of masculinity in nineties cinema. I contrast the postmodern frivolity of these films with the explicitly politicised configurations of underclass youth that are found in a number of social realist films such as *TwentyFourSeven* and *My Name is Joe* (Ken Loach, 1998). Where the laddish films respond to the notion of a crisis of masculinity as a gendered identity by consciously

and playfully evoking nostalgic machismo the latter films are clearly positioned as a treatise on the disempowerment and marginalisation of white, underclass British youth and explicitly reject the postmodern playfulness that was such an integral part of lad culture. The chapter concludes by exploring the ways in which the new lad engaged with discourses of masculinity that foreground the recuperative possibilities of fatherhood.

The following chapter, 'Framing Fatherhood' focuses explicitly on the ways in which British films mediated issues around masculinity and parenting through class and ethnicity. Many of these films posit the father as a cipher through which ideas about gender and a crisis in masculinity can be mediated and redefined and posit a direct link between social class and ineffectual or damaging male parenting. While cultural discourses of reconstructed masculinity remained invested in the positive potential of emotional empowerment afforded to men through their roles as fathers, British films invariably offered a rather less optimistic perspective particularly in relation to working class or unemployed fathers. One of the key themes in this chapter is to understand the ways in which the preoccupation with father and son relationships is frequently used as a narrative device through which to mediate the impact of the changing discursive formation of masculinity.

The final case study chapter, 'Villains, Victims and Violence: Mediating Discourses of Crisis and Damage', examines some of the more complex representations of

masculinity that are found in nineties British film and explores how less mainstream films can be understood as deploying a rather more nuanced configuration of the masculinity in crisis rhetoric. This chapter analyses three different configurations of masculinity that are representative of cinematic tropes of damaged male characters. Drawing on examples from *Naked, A Room for Romeo Brass* (Shane Meadows, 1999) and *Nil By Mouth* (Gary Oldman, 1997) this chapter examines the ways in which these films appear to reject a straightforward sociological treatise on masculinity in favour of a more multifaceted and psychologically complex form of characterisation but still invariably articulate a version of male disempowerment that relies upon the same tropes as the more mainstream examples. Taken together, these three case studies focus on key tropes of masculinity in nineties British cinema in such a way that relates to some of the dominant cultural discourses of masculinity at the time.

In adopting a critical approach to the cinematic narratives and representations of masculinity upon which I focus I present an alternative approach to the dominant paradigms of British film studies. Furthermore the thesis serves as a critical theorisation of the ways in which discourses of masculinity in crisis were both constituted and mediated in nineties Britain. Overall, the thesis aims to offer a feminist account of masculinity in nineties British cinema. In doing so I make use of both British and American feminist scholarship. However, the analysis that follows is informed by an understanding of the specificity of British culture, society and cinema in the nineties.