

## **Chapter 1: Understanding Masculinity**

Academic interest in masculinity has grown considerably since the emergence of the 'new men's movement' of the late eighties. This movement evolved partly in response to second wave feminist politics and has expanded to include both pro-feminist and masculinist arms: the former typified by Jeff Hearn, Harry Brod, Michael Kimmel, Victor Seidler, Michael Kauffman and Arthur Brittan; the latter represented by the likes of Robert Bly, Geoff Dench and Warren Farrell.<sup>1</sup> Academic work on masculinity has developed across a number of disciplines including literature, cultural studies, and sociology as well as film and media studies. This work has often evolved in dialogue with feminist politics, sharing concerns regarding the ideologies of gender discourses and critiquing the power relations that are at play in patriarchal society. However, some academic interest in masculinity has been shaped by an agenda that is at best ambivalent towards feminism and at worst openly antagonistic.<sup>2</sup> Early on in the development of masculinity studies a number of feminist film theorists identified the importance of engaging with issues pertaining to masculinity from a feminist perspective. Identifying the potential for academic investigations into discourses of masculinity to become part of a wider cultural dismissal of feminist politics, Joyce E

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<sup>1</sup> Hearn, J. & Morgan, D. (1990). (eds.) *Men, Masculinities and Social Theory* (London: Unwin Hyman); Brod, H. (1987). (ed.) *The Making of Masculinities* (London: Allen & Unwin); Kimmel, M.S. (1987). *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity* (London: Sage); Seidler, V. (1989) *Rediscovering Masculinity: Reason, Language and Sexuality* (London: Routledge); Kauffman, M. (1987) (ed.) *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Brittan, A. (1989); Bly, R. (1990) *Iron John: A Book About Men* (London: Rider & Co.); Dench, G (1994) *The Frog, The Prince and the Problem of Men* (London: Neanderthal Books), Farrell, W. (1994) *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men are the Disposable Sex* (London: Fourth Estate, London).

<sup>2</sup> Examples include Dench and Farrell (both 1994).

Canaan and Christine Griffin urged that ‘feminists therefore must be even more insistent about conducting research on men and masculinity at a time when a growing number of men are beginning to conduct apparently ‘comparable’ research.’<sup>3</sup> Film studies approaches to masculinity has taken much of its methodological approach from feminist film studies, no doubt in part due to the contribution of various feminist film scholars to the field of knowledge. Early work in the area by feminist film theorists including Tania Modleski, Yvonne Tasker, Susan Jeffords, Pat Kirkham, Janet Thumim and the *Screening the Male* anthology by Steve Cohen and Ina Rae Hark were vital in establishing the important role that feminist film studies could play in understanding the construction of discourses of masculinity within our cinematic culture.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter explores how film studies – and *British* film studies in particular - has engaged with masculinity. It situates questions of masculinity and film theory within an interdisciplinary context that engages with cultural studies, sociology and wider media. This understanding of masculinity is further developed within a specifically British cultural context in the following chapter. The first section of this chapter explores how traditions of British cinema studies have frequently marginalized questions about masculinity, foregrounding instead interests in institutional history, national identity and class rather than gender. The second section considers how those forms of film

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<sup>3</sup> Canaan, J.E. & Griffin, C. (1990). ‘The New Men’s Studies: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?’ in Hearn, J. & Morgan, D. (eds.) *Men, Masculinities and Social Theory* (London: Unwin Hyman).

<sup>4</sup> Tasker, Y. (1993); Jeffords, S. (1994). *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press); Kirkham, P. & Thumim, J. (1993). *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men* (London: Lawrence & Wishart); Modleski, T. (1990); Cohen, S. & Hark, I.R. (1992). (eds.) *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in the Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge).

studies that focus upon Hollywood cinema have engaged with discourses of masculinity and how these ideas must be re-inflected in order to fully understand representations and discourses of masculinity within a British context. The third section of the chapter draws on that work which has been undertaken within a British cultural context. Much of this work fits within a broader sociological or cultural studies approach and focuses critical analysis on magazines, advertising and other forms of media representation.

### **Masculinity in British Cinema Studies**

Analysis of representations of masculinity in British cinema remains underdeveloped. Typically, much of the work that does critically engage with gender tends to focus on cinematic representations of femininity rather than masculinity.<sup>5</sup> That is not to say that *Nowhere Men* is unprecedented; it continues the kinds of scholarship that have been at the peripheries of British cinema studies for some time and one of the aims of this section is to position this study within its scholarly context. One aim of this thesis is to begin formulating a feminist intervention which interrogates a range of questions about the representations of men and masculinity which have remained, until now, peripheral to the central thematic concerns of British cinema. Historically British Cinema studies has tended to foreground questions of national identity, industrial and institutional history or generic traditions rather than focusing upon questions of

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Harper, S. (2000); Cook, P. (1997). *Gainsborough 1924-1950* (London: Cassell); Cook, P. & Dodd, P. (1993). *Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader* (London: BFI Publishing); Geraghty, C. (2000). *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the New Look* (London: Routledge).

politics, discourse and ideology and the role that cinematic representations play in mediating both the formation and performance of cultural identities.<sup>6</sup> The body of work that documents the institutional context of 90s British cinema is dominated by, for example, accounts by industry professionals and institutional case studies.<sup>7</sup> This work tends to posit an agenda that is 'historical' and as such is less concerned with the wider social and cultural questions that are central to feminist film studies. More extensive scholarship around questions of race, ethnicity and cultural identities developed over the course of the eighties by the likes of Stuart Hall and Kobena Mercer.<sup>8</sup> This academic interest was connected to the establishment of film workshops by the Black Audio Film Collective (1982-98) and the increasing black presence in British cinema.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The former group is exemplified by Higson, A. (1996). *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd.), Sargeant, A. (2005). *British Cinema: A Critical History*, (London: BFI Publishing), Hill, J. (2009). 'British Cinema as National Cinema: Production, Audience and Reception' in Murphy, R. (ed.) *The British Cinema Book* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (London: BFI Publishing). The latter scholarship includes Lockett, M. (2001). 'Travel and Mobility: Femininity and National Identity in Swinging London Films' in Ashby, J. & Higson, A. (eds.) *British Cinema, Past and Present*. (London: Routledge); Leggot, J. (2004). 'Like Father? Failing Parents and Angelic Children in Contemporary British Social Realist Cinema' in Powrie, P. Davies, A. & Babington, B. *The Trouble With Men* (London: Wallflower Press); Monk, C. (2000). 'Underbelly UK: the 1990s Underclass Film, Masculinity and the Ideologies of 'New' Britain' in Ashby, J. & Higson, A. (ed.) *British Cinema Past and Present* (London: Routledge).

<sup>7</sup> McFarlane, B. (2001). 'The More Things Change...British Cinema in the 90s' in Murphy, R (ed.) *The British Cinema Book* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (London: BFI Publishing); Todd, P. (2001). 'The British Film Industry in the 1990s' in Murphy, R. (ed.) *British Cinema in the 90s* (London: BFI Publishing); Miller, T. (2001). 'The Film Industry and the Government: Endless Mr Beans and Mr Bonds?' in Murphy, R. (ed.) *British Cinema in the 90s* (London: BFI Publishing); Hanson, S. (2001). 'Spoilt for Choice? Multiplexes in the 90s' in Murphy, R. (ed.) *British Cinema in the 90s* (London: BFI Publishing).

<sup>8</sup> Hall, S. (1988). 'Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation' delivered at *The Caribbean Film Festival* reprinted in Special Issue on 'Third Scenario: Theory and Politics of Location' *Framework* (1989) No. 36. p.p.68-82; Mercer, K. Mercer. (1987). *Black Film, British Cinema* (London: ICA Documents).

<sup>9</sup> Films including *Burning an Illusion* (Menelik Shabazz, 1981); *Territories* (Issac Julien, 1985); *Handsworth Songs* (John Akomfrah, 1986); *Passion of Remembrance* (Maureen Blackwood and Issac Julien, 1986) came out of the BAFC workshop programme.

That work which has sought to inflect British film studies with a more politicized voice has often focused upon the representations of class and race or takes femininity as its sole focus when dealing with representations of gender. Much of the work that has been done in relation to representations of class and race has inevitably involved a degree of engagement with gender but this has been peripheral rather than an explicit component of the research agenda.<sup>10</sup> As is the case in feminist film studies more generally, work that has focused upon the representation of gender has tended to foreground attention and analysis upon the ways in which women are represented and discourses of femininity are both formulated and mediated by cinema.<sup>11</sup> The work that does foreground a critical approach to gender such as Christine Geraghty's *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the New Look*, Melanie Bell's *Femininity in the Frame: Women and 1950s Popular British Cinema* and Sue Harper's *Women in British Cinema: Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know* as well as scholarship by Pam Cook and Sue Thornham are all vitally important in establishing a framework for understanding representations of gender within a British cinematic context.<sup>12</sup> This work establishes a framework of ideas that relies upon the nationally specific idioms of gender and cinema and as such the ideas inform the approach to cinematic forms of British masculinities. Much of this scholarship however focuses upon earlier periods of history and the processes of theorizing gender within more recent eras has only recently been undertaken. Given this context, my thesis aims to offer an intervention into the

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<sup>10</sup> See Dave, P. (2006). *Visions of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary Cinema* (Oxford: Berg). Dave's work privileges issues of class and explore how various manifestations of class discourse are mediated by British cinema.

<sup>11</sup> See Harper, S. (2000). for example Bell-Williams, M. (2008).

<sup>12</sup> Geraghty, C. (2000). Bell-Williams, M. (2008). and Harper, S. (2000).

established histories of British cinema studies contributing to an understanding of the political significance of cinematic representations of masculinity.

Discussions about masculinity within British cinema studies tend to focus on some eras and genres to a far greater degree than others. The 'spiv' characters from the forties and the 'angry young men' of the late fifties and early sixties are two forms of masculinity that are the most frequently focused on in British cinema studies.<sup>13</sup> The former are described by Andrew Spicer as being 'part of a longer tradition of authoritarian ideas about the vulnerability of lower-class youth,'<sup>14</sup> and much of the cultural debates regarding the significance of these forms of marginalized masculinity resonate within more contemporary forms of British cinema as well. There are further parallels with nineties films in the discussions about the 'angry young men' of the British New Wave who Peter Hutchings describes as being characterized by 'social disenchantment and rebelliousness.'<sup>15</sup> There is, to date, just one book which provides an extended study of both the continuities and changes that representations of masculinity have been going through in the period from the Second World War until the nineties: Andrew Spicer's *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*.<sup>16</sup> Claire Monk's work in the field remains exceptional in terms

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<sup>13</sup> See for example McKibbin, R. (1998). *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Street, S. (1997). *British National Cinema* (London: Routledge); Webster, W. (2005). *Englishness and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Hill, J. (1986); Hunt, L. (1998). *British Low Culture: From Safari Suits to Sexploitation* (London: Routledge).

<sup>14</sup> Spicer, A. (2003) p.130.

<sup>15</sup> Hutchings, P. (2008) 'Beyond the New Wave: Realism in British Cinema, 1959-63' in Murphy, R. (ed.) *The British Cinema Book* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (London: BFI Publishing). p.305.

<sup>16</sup> Spicer, A. (2003).

of the ways in which she foregrounds precisely those questions regarding the political implications of cinematic masculinities that I am interested in interrogating here. I'll discuss her work in more detail at the end of this section.<sup>17</sup>

Spicer's work covers important historical ground by examining the textual configurations of masculinity that have circulated in popular British cinema and culture since World War Two. He provides a 'cartography of varying masculinities [one] that tries to account for their presence and the reasons for the changes that occur.'<sup>18</sup>

Spicer is careful to acknowledge the ways in which cinematic configurations of masculinity are 'complex, mutable signifiers whose meanings change over time through their deployment in different contexts.'<sup>19</sup> Rather than suggesting a false sense of synchronicity between social and cinematic history Spicer's account foregrounds an understanding of the continuum of gender discourses and their manifestations within a cinematic context. Most relevant to the types of masculinity that I am concerned with here are the ones that Spicer identifies as the everyman and the traumatised 'damaged' man. The former was first prevalent during the Second World War and underwent a peacetime 'mutation and reconstruction in order to remain relevant and acceptable.'<sup>20</sup> Spicer traces the historical trajectory of the everyman to his contemporary construction as a paradoxical trope who gains 'his representativeness...

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<sup>17</sup> Monk, C. (2002). p.p.156-166.

<sup>18</sup> Spicer, A. (2003). p.5.

<sup>19</sup> Spicer, A. (2003). p.1.

<sup>20</sup> Spicer, A. (2003). p.80.

through his social marginality.’<sup>21</sup> Spicer’s conceptualization of ‘damage’ as a recurrent motif of masculinity is particularly useful for considering the nineties because of its proximity to notions of crisis. I draw directly on this work in chapter five. Where Spicer offers an account of over half a century of British cinema history which allows us to see the development of particular character types over decades, this thesis attempts an in-depth exploration of a more defined historical period. I make use of some of the types identified by Spicer, but seek to relate these to the specific social and historical context of the nineties. More importantly, writing from a feminist perspective means that my analysis foregrounds questions of gender and power which Spicer’s study does not address.

Spicer’s study provides a helpful overview of the main themes, cycles and trends in the cinematic representations of masculinity in British cinema and as such his work enables me to place my understanding of nineties British cinema within a wider cinematic history. This study continues at the point at which Spicer’s book concludes in order to take a closer look at a much smaller period of time. The themes that I have identified as being productive in developing an understanding of the cultural and discursive functions of cinematic representations of masculinity are clearly not unique to the nineties. Scholarship by Andy Medhurst and Anna Claydon in particular, explore many of the issues that I seek to question in this study in previous eras.<sup>22</sup> In his analysis of

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<sup>21</sup> Spicer, A. (2003). p.188.

<sup>22</sup> Medhurst, A. (1986). ‘Dirk Bogarde’ in Barr, C. (ed.). *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*. (London: BFI); Claydon, A. (2005). *The Representation of Masculinity in British Cinema of the 1960s*. (New



Dirk Bogarde, Medhurst explores questions regarding the ideological construction of manhood and the intersections between cinema representation and their cultural function. Medhurst's discussion of *The Blue Lamp* (Basil Dearden, 1950) describes the film as being 'a troubled examination of post-war youth.'<sup>23</sup> Anna Claydon's work includes studies of masculinity in the sixties and the seventies;<sup>24</sup> over the course of this work she argues that British cinema is characterised by a number of connected tropes and thematic concerns. She describes how there are periodic attempts by British films to 'answer the question, 'What does it mean to be a man?''<sup>25</sup> Her analysis of the effects of dejection and social fragmentation on cinematic constructions of male characters is helpful in understanding the function of themes of 'crisis' and disempowerment in more recent years.

The potential for a variety of approaches to the issues raised by the cinematic representations of masculinity is demonstrated in *The Trouble With Men*, a collection edited by Phil Powrie, Ann Davies and Bruce Babington. In this volume there are several essays that consider cinematic representations of masculinity from a number of different perspectives. The chapters by Robert Shail and Andrew Spicer use star studies as a frame for interrogating the ways in which class inflects the screen masculinities of

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York: Edwin Mellen) and Claydon, A. (2010). 'Masculinity and Deviance in British Cinema of the 1970s: Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll in *The Wicker Man*, *Tommy* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.' in Newland, P. (ed.) *Don't Look Now: British Cinema in the 1970s*. (Bristol: Intellect).

<sup>23</sup> Medhurst, A. (1986). 'Dirk Bogarde' in Barr, C. (ed.). *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*. (London: BFI). p. 347.

<sup>24</sup> Claydon, A. (2005) and (2010).

<sup>25</sup> Claydon, A. (2010). p.133.

Michael Caine and Hugh Grant respectively.<sup>26</sup> Further essays by John Hill and James Leggott raise a number of issues that are central to this thesis. Hill's exploration of working class masculinities and his specific focus upon mining masculinities and *Billy Elliot* (Stephen Daldry, 2000) is concerned with understanding the connections between progressive and traditional discourses of masculinity and male heterosexuality; Hill concludes that, despite popularising 'a number of progressive ideas about gender roles and sexual orientation,' *Billy Elliot* ultimately 'signals its own reluctance to depart too radically from the very ideologies of masculinity and virility that it is otherwise questioning.'<sup>27</sup> Leggott's essay on the representation of the father-son relationship raises a number of questions and issues that I develop in chapter four particularly around the construction of working class fathers as a paradoxical performance of virility and disempowerment.<sup>28</sup> Leggott's essay analyses the ways in which the paternalistic mentor figure became a key trope for the narrative 'recuperation of endangered homosocial realms' and concomitant investment in reclaiming 'contested patriarchal territory.'<sup>29</sup>

Nigel Mather's work presents a generically focused study which explores the interactions between class, community, race, romance, comedy and drama in nineties

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<sup>26</sup> Shail, R. (2004). 'Masculinity and Class: Michael Caine as 'working-class hero' and Spicer, A. (2004). 'The Reluctance to Commit: Hugh Grant and the new British Romantic Comedy' both in Powrie, P. Davies, A. & Babington, B. (eds.) *The Trouble With Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press).

<sup>27</sup> Hill, J. (2004). 'A Working-class Hero Is Something To Be? Changing Representations of Class And Masculinity in British Cinema' Powrie, P. Davies, A. & Babington, B. (eds.) *The Trouble With Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press). p.105.

<sup>28</sup> Leggott, J. (2004). p.167.

<sup>29</sup> Leggott, J. (2004). p.164.

British cinema.<sup>30</sup> Mather discusses both *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*, interrogating how class is deployed as a structural device that focuses on ‘the lives and experiences of first and second generation unemployed white males.’<sup>31</sup> Also working within a generically defined arena is Steve Chibnall who has studied the resurgence in British gangster films in the final years of the decade and their function as a ‘covert carrier of unrespectable conceptions of Englishness and unreconstructed definitions of masculinity.’<sup>32</sup> Chibnall acknowledges the regressive nature of movies such as *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* where ‘sophisticated social organization has been replaced by a Hobbesian jungle of ruthless competitors, struggling for survival and supremacy’ in ‘the boy’s playground.’<sup>33</sup> Chibnall certainly recognizes that the resurgence of gangster films ‘might index wider gender anxieties’ relating to ‘changing occupational structures and social expectations and to the demonstrable gains of feminism.’<sup>34</sup> However, he unconvincingly contends that it is erroneous to see the lack of female characters in *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* as evidence of directorial misogyny arguing that it simply reflects ‘the irrelevance of women to the stories Ritchie wants to tell.’<sup>35</sup>

Whether the retreat into the homosocial environs of *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* is misogynistic or not becomes a moot point for Chibnall and this rhetoric

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<sup>30</sup> Mather, N. (2006). *Tears of Laughter: Comedy-Drama in 1990s British Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

<sup>31</sup> Mather, N. (2006). p.29

<sup>32</sup> Chibnall, S. (2008).

<sup>33</sup> Chibnall, S. (2008). p.p.377-8.

<sup>34</sup> Chibnall, S. (1999). p.282.

<sup>35</sup> Chibnall, S. (1999). p.284.

demonstrates precisely the problem that Angela McRobbie, Imelda Whelehan, Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker have identified as so endemic in post-feminist culture:<sup>36</sup>the way in which a tacit understanding of feminism's success facilitates the 'evident erasure of feminist politics from the popular.'<sup>37</sup> McRobbie terms this the 'double entanglement of post-feminism' and explains that it functions to dismantle feminism by rendering critique on the basis of gender as both anachronistic and symptomatic of an overly confrontational form of feminist politics. I pick up on the specific function of irony in films such as *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* in legitimating 'retro sexist' discourses of gender.

Claire Monk has produced a series of articles in which she raises a number of questions pertaining to the representation of masculinity in popular nineties British cinema.<sup>38</sup> Monk's critical approach is predicated around many of the issues that I am interested in here. She highlights the problematic potential of lad culture and the figure of the 'new' lad and the role of postmodern irony in making misogyny increasingly respectable.<sup>39</sup> Her work addresses broader questions regarding ideas about the processes by and through which 'crisis' masculinities are incorporated into mainstream cinematic narratives of the nineties. She is one of the few academics working on nineties British cinema in such a way that draws attention to the complex

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<sup>36</sup> McRobbie, A. (2004). 'Post Feminism and Popular Culture' in *Feminist Media Studies* vol. 4. issue 3. Whelehan, I. (2000); Negra, D. & Tasker, Y. (2007). 'Introduction: Feminist Politics and Post Feminist Culture' in Negra, D. & Tasker, Y. (eds.) *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press).

<sup>37</sup> Tasker, Y. & Negra, D. (2007). p.5.

<sup>38</sup> Monk, C. (1999);(2000).

<sup>39</sup> Monk, C. (2000). p.162.

interrelation between gender, race and class. Further she recognises, as I do, that the discourses of crisis and 'post-feminist male panic' in the nineties had far reaching political implications.<sup>40</sup>

From this brief summary it is apparent that while there is some evidence of a broad based engagement with issues of masculinity within recent British film studies, there is not a strong critical tradition of sustained textual or discourse analysis. Such an approach has, however, been quite extensively undertaken in relation to Hollywood cinema where there is a more established tradition of critical feminist film studies relating to representations of masculinity. Although those forms of analysis which have focused upon American cinema and American culture cannot simply be transposed onto the rather different contours of British culture they provide an important point of reference. The following section looks at how these approaches to American cinema can help to further a more critically aware understanding of representations of masculinity within nineties British cinema.

### **Feminist Approaches to Masculinity in Popular Cinema**

It is not surprising, given its global dominance that academic studies of masculinity have focused on Hollywood rather than British cinema. It is within this context that a sense of how feminist film theory has approached and theorised cinematic discourses of masculinity emerges more strongly. This work has grown to form an expansive body

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<sup>40</sup> Monk, C. (2000). p. 157.

of material which crosses both historical and generic boundaries.<sup>41</sup> It includes psychoanalytic accounts such as Kaja Silverman's work as well that which is more concerned with questions about the cultural and political significance of cinematic representations and masculinity.<sup>42</sup> While Silverman's work was a groundbreaking attempt at developing a line of enquiry that theorised male sexuality and issues of male desire in the cinema, it is perhaps less explicitly influential for my own methodological approach. It is particularly that critical work which has focused upon the discursive construction of masculinity in Hollywood cinema which informs my methodological approach to the representations of masculinity in nineties British cinema. However, this work is shaped by the cultural context of the United States and thus is motivated by an agenda that foregrounds a range of social concerns that cannot necessarily be transposed onto the rather different contours of British cinema and British culture. As such the concerns that are fore-grounded in much of this scholarship require an element of reconfiguration in order to take this cultural specificity into account - even where there appears to be a direct correlation between the discursive and cultural concerns of the two nations. This section outlines some of the approaches to masculinity that are most productive for an analysis of the British context and considers how they should be re-inflected.

Academic interest in cinematic representations of masculinity is a fairly recent phenomenon; Brian Baker identifies how 'the period from 1992 to 1994 was a kind of

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<sup>41</sup> See for example Susan Jeffords (1994) work on Reagan era cinema or Cohan, S. (1997). for an historically based study. See Krutnik, F. (1991). *In A Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London: Routledge) or Tasker, Y. (1993) as two examples of genre based studies of screen masculinities.

<sup>42</sup> Silverman, K. (1992). *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Routledge), see also Jeffords, S. (1994).

'origin point' for the study of screen masculinities,<sup>43</sup> although investigations into and theories about masculinities were already well established in other areas before this point.<sup>44</sup> This work, which encompasses sociology, cultural studies, anthropology and media studies will be covered in the following section. Certainly it was during the early part of the nineties that many of the seminal studies in terms of cinematic representations of masculinity, both historical and contemporary, were published. In addition to the work of Jeffords and Silverman were Yvonne Tasker's *Spectacular Bodies*; a number of edited collections including *Male Trouble* edited by Constance Penley and Sharon Willis, *Screening the Male* edited by Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark and *Me Tarzan* edited by Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim were also published around this time.<sup>45</sup> These collections were united by a common impetus, summarised in the introduction to Cohan and Hark's collection as a (post-) feminist critique of patriarchy that was underscored in turn by 'the apparent effacement of the masculine as a social construction in American Culture.'<sup>46</sup> Thus, while it would appear that the agenda established by these various theorists has been successful in making the multiple and unstable nature of 'masculinity' as a discursive construction more apparent, they were also vital in drawing attention to the ways and means by which cinematic representations of masculinity operate to maintain a patriarchal hegemony. This

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<sup>43</sup> Baker, B. (2006). *Masculinity in Fiction & Film: Representing Men in Popular Genres 1945-2000* (London: Continuum)

<sup>44</sup> Pfeil, F. (1995). *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference*. (London: Verso); Modleski, T. (1991).

<sup>45</sup> Tasker, Y. (1993). Penley, C. & Willis, S. (eds) (1993). *Male Trouble: A Camera Obscura Book* (Mineapolis: University of Minnesota Press), Cohan, S. & Hark, I.R. (eds) (1993).

<sup>46</sup> Cohan, S. & Hark, I.R. (1993). 'Introduction' in Cohan, S. & Hark, I.R. *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge). p.p. 2-3.

methodological approach has not been readily adopted within British cinema studies and thus issues relating to power relations, the visibility (and invisibility) of masculinity as a normative discourse remain under theorized.

The representations of masculinity found in the texts explored in this thesis are, as the previous section demonstrated, largely unquestioned in terms of the cultural function that they fulfil. As such, one of the central aims of this thesis is to explore the political significance of certain key tropes of masculinity that were prevalent in British cinema at this time and to understand their complex (and sometimes contradictory) meanings within a post-feminist cultural context. The films drawn upon include representations of men that conform to the ideologically sanctioned discourses of masculinity as active, strong etc. but also to those that are disempowered, embattled or somehow apparently marginalised within society. It is this latter group that scholars such as Cohan and Hark focus on, exploring how the machinations of crisis and disempowerment can be used to shore up 'considerable social and sexual – not to say spectatorial power.' Further they explicate one of the potential cultural functions of crisis narratives as helping to 'preserve [masculine] hegemony only by confessing its anxieties at every turn.'<sup>47</sup> The arguments that Cohan and Hark present regarding the ways in which narratives of disempowerment and trauma can in fact reify patriarchal ideologies of gender (and thus power) are particularly pertinent to the study of British

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<sup>47</sup> Cohan, S. & Hark, I.R. (1993). p.2.



masculinities in the nineties given the preponderance of narratives which presented exactly these configurations of masculinity through social realist conventions.

Although the work being produced in the early part of the nineties was groundbreaking in terms of establishing a critical agenda for the study of masculinity, it was not unprecedented in academic circles. Over a decade previously the journal *Screen* published three influential essays: Steve Neale's "Masculinity as Spectacle", Richard Dyer's "Don't Look Now: The Male Pin-up" and Pam Cook's "Masculinity in Crisis".<sup>48</sup> Cook's article focused upon Robert DeNiro's portrayal of the boxer Jake La Motta in Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (1980) and drew upon the dominant forms of psychoanalysis in order to analyse the ways in which the problems of disempowerment and violence were presented in the narrative. Cook's article sets up a number of questions that have been central to the theorisation of cinematic masculinity in the intervening period. Most notably for my purposes is her discussion about the conflation of crisis and violence and how this is simultaneously celebrated and 'validated as an essential component of masculinity' but also condemned for being transgressive, excessive and self destructive.<sup>49</sup> Further Cook contends that 'masculinity is put into crisis so that we can mourn its loss.'<sup>50</sup> In his article Steve Neale sought to demonstrate how the ideas presented by Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and

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<sup>48</sup> Neale, S. (1983). 'Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema' in *Screen*. 24: 6. Cook, P. (1982). 'Masculinity in Crisis?' in *Screen*. 23: 3-4; Dyer, R. (1982). 'Don't Look Now: The Male Pin-up' in *Screen*. 23/4.

<sup>49</sup> Cook, P. (1982). 'Masculinity in Crisis?' reprinted in Cook, P. (2005). *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema*. (London: Routledge). p.139.

<sup>50</sup> Cook, P. (2005). p. 139

Narrative Cinema” could be used to further an understanding of the ways in which representations of masculinity are constructed by cinematic texts.<sup>51</sup> Neale’s objective was to interrogate how ‘heterosexual masculinity has been identified as a structuring norm in relation to both women and gay men’ but remained hitherto undiscussed.<sup>52</sup> In re-working Mulvey’s ideas, Neale was the first scholar to really address the ways in which the conventions of cinematic form related to both the way in which masculinity was represented but also to the ways in which spectators figured into processes of identification and meaning-making.<sup>53</sup> Richard Dyer’s essay “Don’t Look Now” considers how the increased sexual objectification of men serves to destabilise notions about masculinity.<sup>54</sup> These articles are forerunners of the kinds of work that is on-going today; work including that by Murray Pomerance, Frances Gateward, Phil Powrie, Bruce Babington and Anne Davies build directly on the theoretical frameworks established by Neale, Cook and Dyer.<sup>55</sup>

Despite these groundbreaking articles work on cinematic representation only gradually developed and very little was done to further the field for some time. Tania Modleski’s *Feminism Without Women* was published at the very beginning of what would become

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<sup>51</sup> Neale, S. (1983). Mulvey, L. (1975). ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ in *Screen*. 16, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Neale, S. (1983). reprinted in Cohan, S. & Hark, I.R. (eds) (1993). p.p. 10-11.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Willemen’s 1981 article on Anthony Mann precedes Neale’s work by two years but it was Neale’s article that really brought the issue of representations of masculinity to a more mainstream academic audience. Willemen, P. (1981). ‘Anthony Mann: Looking at the Male’ in *Framework* vols. 15-17. reprinted in Kitses, J. & Rickman, G. (eds.) (1988). *The Western Reader* (New York: Limelight Editions).

<sup>54</sup> Dyer, R. (1982).

<sup>55</sup> Pomerance, M. & Gatewood, F. (2005). *Where The Boys Are: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth* (Michigan: Wayne State University Press); Powrie, P. Davies, A. & Babington, B. (2004). (eds.); Pomerance, M. (2001). *Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls: Gender in Film at the end of the Twentieth Century*. (New York: State University of New York Press).

a burgeoning body of work and, nearly 20 years on it remains a pioneering study in terms of understanding post-feminist culture and the discourses of gender therein. Although she covers a range of issues and texts regarding representations and discourses of masculinity in the book, it is, for my purposes, her work on the popular comedy film *Three Men and A Baby* (Leonard Nimoy, 1987) that is most useful. Here, Modleski neatly summarises how the 'contemporary reconceptualisation of fatherhood' appeared, at a surface level, to be progressively reconstructed (offering a narrative based around men partaking in that which had traditionally been designated 'feminine' work) but were, in fact, deeply problematic not least because of the ways in which the role of the mother is effaced in order to centralise that of the father. Modleski's arguments about the portrayal of fatherhood in Hollywood cinema resonate with the narratives that are often seen in British films from the nineties but there are a number of ways in which the portrayals of fatherhood differ considerably from those which she analyses. While the British comedy *Jack and Sarah* (Tim Sullivan, 1995) is the film that perhaps comes closest to offering a narrative that presents a form of fatherhood that is strikingly similar to that which Modleski describes, it is nevertheless something of an aberration. There are (as I argue in the chapter on fathers), rather more examples of failing or inadequate fathers in British cinema than of any other sort and this is undoubtedly tied to the prevalence of social realist drama over comedy as a typical generic form. Modleski's point, however, that the significance of this increased centrality of fathering to cinematic narratives of masculinity is that it works to consistently marginalise the role (and thus any audience investment in) of the

mother certainly appears to hold true as the case studies in chapter four attest. In fact her point is borne out in a slightly different context (albeit unintentionally) by Steve Chibnall's comment regarding the lack of women in Guy Ritchie films due to their being 'irrelevant' to the narrative.<sup>56</sup> What is clear is that nineties British cinema (and culture more generally) invested in a discourse of masculinity that was not always equated positively with fatherhood but progressed in such a way that the acceptance of the authority of the father was consistently reified even though the narrative path to acceptance was often fraught.

The huge body of work that has focused a critical gaze upon the representations of masculinity in Hollywood cinema has worked to develop a critical and theoretical basis for this study. Scholars including Yvonne Tasker and Susan Jeffords developed a more nuanced methodological framework which accommodated the multiple meanings of cinematic representations of masculinity in action films in order to demonstrate the interrelationship between culture and cinema and the centrality of social and economic context to their meanings.<sup>57</sup> As the previous section demonstrated, this form of analysis of masculinity has hitherto remained underdeveloped in British cinema studies with the closest comparable work being James Chapman's cultural history of the Bond movies.<sup>58</sup> As such, the ideas that have emerged out of American Cinema studies about the complex and multiple meanings of narratives of masculinity give

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<sup>56</sup> Chibnall, S. (1999).

<sup>57</sup> Tasker, Y. (1993), Jeffords, S. (1993).

<sup>58</sup> Chapman, J. (1999) *Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of James Bond Films* (London: I.B. Tauris).

some basis to begin working through how the representations of masculinity found within British cinema relate to their specific cultural and historical context. The specificities of this context are further developed in the next chapter. Understanding the ways in which the various configurations of masculinity that are found within nineties British cinema relate to wider cultural issues around what Claire Monk terms 'post-feminist male panic' is a crucial aspect of this study, and all of the chapters engage in various ways with narratives about men who appear to have been disempowered by the changes that have taken place both in the economy and in our cultural discourses of gender.<sup>59</sup>

### **Media Studies Approaches to Masculinity**

Media Studies and Film Studies exist in a dialogic relationship to one another and the fact that the investigations into both cinematic and other media representations of masculinity grew at the same time meant that media studies approaches to masculinity have clearly informed those taken by scholars whose interest is specifically in cinematic forms. Notably, in terms of a British cultural context the paucity of work on cinematic representations of masculinity is redressed, to an extent, by those that focus upon other media forms. These various studies interrogate the multiple discourses of masculinity within their social context more rigorously than British cinema studies have done thus far.

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<sup>59</sup> Monk, C. (2000).

Much of this work was initially inspired by the emergence of the so-called 'new man' in the mid- to late 1980s and the concomitant claims that 'the social and economic changes of the past two decades are beginning to call masculinity into question' resulting in a widespread sense of disempowerment.<sup>60</sup> The significance of the proto-feminist reconstruction of masculinity which was the 'new' man appeared to herald a considerable departure from traditional discourses of masculinity which had, until this point, relied upon 'those traits that imply authority and mastery.'<sup>61</sup> The 'new' man, by contrast was 'generally characterized as sensitive, emotionally aware, respectful of women and egalitarian in outlook.'<sup>62</sup> The exponential growth in men's lifestyle magazines and the centrality of these 'new' man discourses to them made the area a productive site for British media scholars such as Sean Nixon, Tim Edwards and Anthony Easthope.<sup>63</sup> The various versions of masculinities found in men's magazine cultures has proved to be particularly fruitful for British media scholars and this work has evolved to produce an understanding of discourses of British masculinity during the eighties and nineties that is driven by a desire to understand the complexities of these forms of mediated masculinity within a changing cultural context. These studies have been fundamental in developing an understanding of the discursive formation of masculinities during this time, developing a methodological framework that is arguably more politically compatible with an analysis of masculinity in British cinema than

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<sup>60</sup> Rutherford, J. & Chapman, R. (1988). 'The Forward March of Men Halted' in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity* (London: Lawrence and Wishart). p.11.

<sup>61</sup> Kimmel, M.S. (1987). p.13.

<sup>62</sup> Gill, R. (2003). 'Power and the Production of Subjects' in Benwell, B. (2003) *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines* (London: Blackwell). p.37.

<sup>63</sup> Nixon, S. (1996); Edwards, T. (1997); Easthope, A. (1992).

comparable film studies material. Scholars including Bethan Benwell, Ben Crewe and Peter Jackson, Nick Stevenson and Kate Brooks have all contributed to a body of scholarship that explores the politics of men's lifestyle magazines within a post-feminist context.<sup>64</sup> Drawing on a combination of ethnographic approaches and textual analysis this work has sought to not just understand the commercial success of the men's lifestyle magazine market but more importantly explicate what this success 'tells us about the changing nature of contemporary masculinities.'<sup>65</sup> Benwell's theorisation of the role of irony within lad magazines is particularly relevant. In establishing how 'irony functions to give voice to reactionary and anti-feminist sentiments and to continually destabilise the notion of a coherent and visible masculinity' Benwell pursues a critical agenda that is particularly productive in understanding how lad culture became specifically inflected in cinematic forms.<sup>66</sup> All of these scholars acknowledge that these new forms of masculinity require investigation and interrogation, and although none of the work actually uses the term post-feminism they all implicitly acknowledge the role that post-feminist ideas play in magazine constructions of both masculinity and femininity.

Given the centrality of consumerism to the configurations of both new man and new lad it is unsurprising that, in addition to the magazine based research into the

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<sup>64</sup> Benwell, B. (2003). (ed.) *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines* (London: Blackwell); Crewe, B. (2003) *Representing Men: Cultural Production and Producers in the Men's Magazine Market* (Oxford: Berg); Jackson, P. Stevenson, N. & Brooks, K. (2001). *Making Sense of Men's Magazines* (Cambridge: Polity Press).

<sup>65</sup> Jackson, P. Stevenson, N. & Brooks, K. (2001). 'Introduction' in Jackson, P. Stevenson, N. & Brooks, K. (eds.). p.1.

<sup>66</sup> Benwell, B. (2004). p.3.

representations of masculinity within a British context, much attention has been focused upon exploring the multiple ways in which notions about male gendered identities are constructed within advertising. Sean Nixon has developed a strand of culturally based media research that explores the political significance of the ways in which corporate marketing campaigns deploy images and ideas pertaining to masculinity in order to create a certain brand image.<sup>67</sup> While much of his work concentrates specifically on the configuration of the 'new man' and is, therefore, concerned with a moment in time that precedes the nineties, it figures as an invaluable contribution to the theorization of the inherent instability of discourses of gender in consumer culture.<sup>68</sup> In this work Nixon outlines a precedent for the ways in which consumerism specifically effects both ideologies and social practices of masculinity. Given that these ideas become central to the media construction of the 'new' lad in the mid nineties, his ideas retain relevance beyond historical boundaries. Nixon, along with Easthope and Edwards has been influential in forming a specifically British intervention into the cultural and political significance of the 'new man' in advertising and fashion. This work takes as its focus the complex interrelations between media forms, market economics and social discourses. Nixon's study leads him to conclude that the discursive conceptualisation of new man imagery demonstrates 'the interdependence of economic and cultural practices and their relations of reciprocal effect in the sphere of cultural production.'<sup>69</sup> Easthope's approach is rather more concerned with making

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<sup>67</sup> Nixon, S. (1996).

<sup>68</sup> Nixon, S. (1996).

<sup>69</sup> Nixon, S. (1996). p.199.



visible the symbolic and ideological meanings of representations of masculinity and the role that these images fulfil in maintaining patriarchal power structures. He draws on psychoanalytic approaches to theorise an understanding of gender and of the structures of power and regulation that persist within patriarchy. The debates about the proliferation of diverse styles of masculinity and the increasing visibility of these are central, if differently inflected, in all three of the case study chapters. Edwards work also explores visual culture, fashion and the construction of masculinity in advertising, though is rather more sceptical of the assumption that the new man represented any real shift in the power structures of gendered discourses, considering economic factors to be the most compelling. These debates are obviously salient to my discussion about lad culture but they are equally important in considering the reconstruction of fathering and the commodification of crisis tropes more generally.

Where the new man was extensively critiqued for being contrived and bearing little relation to the actual practices of men or wider cultural ideas about masculinity, the 'new' lad was heralded as an arguably more 'authentic' form of masculinity, as Rosalind Gill explains, 'against the duplicity of this figure [the new man] new lad is constructed as refreshingly honest and free from artifice.'<sup>70</sup> Discourses of fathering and their role in the construction of a variety of cinematic fathers can be seen to retain, in some instances at least, elements of the 'new' man rhetoric. Issues pertaining to consumerism, reconstruction and the instability of gendered identities are all vitally

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<sup>70</sup> Gill, R. (2003). p.48.

important with regards to the various ways in which British cinema in the nineties mediated and intervened into the debates about men suffering from some kind of 'crisis'. Issues pertaining to the much vaunted 'crisis' of masculinity are, on the whole, much less central to the approaches that studies such as those by Nixon and Edwards have taken primarily because the debates did not particularly transfer into the men's magazine market or advertising images.<sup>71</sup> In the following section I examine how the 'crisis' of masculinity has been understood, and develop ideas about how we can think about the forms of masculinity that circulated in the narratives of British cinema in the nineties in terms of a more nuanced approach.

### **Masculinity as Discursive Construction**

My approach to the representation of masculinity in nineties British film demands an engagement with a range of other academic disciplines; because film is a cultural form, to approach it as if cinema existed in some kind of vacuum away from the influences of other media, social history and so on would be inappropriate. Cinematic narratives are an integral part of the mediation of cultural ideas and, in turn, cultural ideologies and discourses inevitably inflect the construction of narratives and gendered characters within cinematic forms. The representations of masculinity found within nineties British cinema are particularly complex because they are informed by an emergent post-feminist context which significantly complicates their potential political meanings (as my analysis of lads and irony will show). Moreover, these representations relate not

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<sup>71</sup> Nixon, S. (1996), Edwards, T. (1997).

only to the historic context of British cinema but the role that British cinema plays in informing a specifically British idiom of post-feminist masculinity. To talk about gender (whether masculinity or femininity) is to acknowledge it as, in Stearns words, ‘an evolving social construct, reflecting some continuities but many more changes. In talking about manhood we are inevitably talking about history.’<sup>72</sup> This section of the chapter focuses attention on the wider theoretical underpinnings to the conceptualization of masculinity employed in this thesis. In drawing on both cultural studies and more traditionally sociological approaches to masculinity this section elaborates on the discursive function of masculinity (and the discursive construction of a ‘crisis’ of masculinity therein).

While masculinity is often conceived of as a discursive construction – a set of ideas and normative standards, it is also, as Judith Butler has demonstrated, a performed set of rituals.<sup>73</sup> The various rituals and performances that she refers to are informed by (and work to inform) a whole range of discursive notions about men and their gendered identities; moreover discourses have a regulatory function which is further implicated in the performances of gendered bodies.<sup>74</sup> This section focuses on the various aspects of the discursive construction of masculinity, setting out how this conception of gendered identities underpins the thesis and my approach to the cinematic

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<sup>72</sup> Stearns, P.N. (1990). *Be A Man! Males in Modern Society* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (London: Holmes and Mercer) p.3.

<sup>73</sup> Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identities* (London: Routledge); Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge).

<sup>74</sup> Foucault, M. (1991). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth: Penguin).

representations of men and masculinity; the one that follows elaborates on the performative component of gender and draws links between the two.

The theorization of masculinity as a discursive (and thus constructed) entity has been very well developed in cultural studies and sociological approaches to masculinity. Conceiving of masculinity in this way is a result of the influence of feminist critiques of gendered categories and definitions in early studies of masculinity. The impetus for interrogating the means by which masculinity is both defined and constructed was motivated by the need to understand how the construction of masculinity relates to the power structures that stratify society (such as class, race, sexuality) and to account for the heterogeneous experiences of masculinity within them.<sup>75</sup> The idea that masculinity is a discourse (or a myth as Anthony Easthope contends) does not mean that the definitions, meanings or practices remain static or monolithic.<sup>76</sup> Rather it refers to the ways in which ideas about male gender and the practices associated with them are continually evolving. Much of the earliest work in the area was informed by sex role theory, and as such was concerned with the idea of analyzing the various roles and attributes that were associated with a coherent notion of masculinity rather than, for example, conceiving of it as constituted by a level of inconsistency that renders

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<sup>75</sup> Kimmel, M. (1990). 'After Fifteen Years: The Impact of the Sociology of Masculinity on the Masculinity of Sociology' in Hearn, J. & Morgan, D. (eds.) *Men, Masculinity and Social Theory* (London: Unwin Hyman).

<sup>76</sup> Easthope, A. (1992). p.6.

such definitions futile; yet, as R.W. Connell explains 'masculinity is not a coherent object about which a generalizing science can be produced.'<sup>77</sup>

This also means that ideas about masculinity are inherently political and inextricable from discourses of power. Further, the ideological construction of masculinity is in no small part bound up with the construction of discourses of sexuality.<sup>78</sup> David Gutterman explains, 'as members of any particular culture, community or group, individuals are given a vast array of scripts that together constitute social subjects. Some scripts are branded onto individuals more emphatically than others.'<sup>79</sup> In relation to gender these discursive formations intersect with social practices: the ideas and norms by which we define gendered identities impact upon the practices of gendered bodies. I explain this in more detail in the section that follows. Additionally, if masculinity is, therefore, subject to various other discourses of power within society then it cannot be conceived of in isolation; gender is, of course, one of the fundamental cornerstones by which human identities are formed but it always intersects with other discourses such as race, class, sexuality and so on. All of these various components of human identity are inherently bound to the cultural politics of patriarchal society and its 'norms.' Moreover, as Kaja Silverman establishes, the questions raised with regards to ideologies of masculinity are of profound significance because 'if ideology is central to the maintenance of classic masculinity the affirmation

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<sup>77</sup> Connell, R.W. (1995). *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press). p.67.

<sup>78</sup> Hearn, J. & Morgan, D. (1990). p.p.10-11.

<sup>79</sup> Gutterman, D. (1994). 'Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity' in Brod, H. & Kaufman, M. (eds.) *Theorising Masculinities* (London: Sage). p.223.

of classic masculinity is equally central to the maintenance of governing reality.<sup>80</sup> In other words, there are a number of ways in which even those discourses of masculinity that appear to present a sense of masculinity as compromised or 'in crisis' are involved in the maintenance of patriarchal ideologies of gender. Cinema, in turn has a necessary relation to these processes. The narratives of the films and the representations of the various characters within them are inevitably informed by these various cultural discourses of identity: we are thus able to 'read' characters according to their class for example. Cinema, however, also plays an important role in mediating these discourses. Thus the narratives and representations in films can be seen as intervening in the cultural production of these discourses as opposed to simply 'reflecting' them. Cinematic images of men and their attendant relation to discourses of masculinity must, therefore, be interrogated and examined and not assumed to bear a straightforward relation to the material practices of masculinity and male behaviour in social situations.

Social theorists including Jeff Hearn, Dave Morgan and R.W. Connell have written extensively about the political nature of masculinity and theorized the ways in which it functions as a hegemonic construction.<sup>81</sup> As Hearn and Morgan explain 'the concept of hegemonic masculinities addresses itself to these issues pointing to the dominance within society of certain forms and practices of masculinity.'<sup>82</sup> This conceptualization of

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<sup>80</sup> Silverman, K. (1992). p.16.

<sup>81</sup> Hearn, J. & Morgan, D. (1990).

<sup>82</sup> Hearn, J. & Morgan, D. (1990) p. 11.

masculinity is particularly useful in accommodating its multiplicity and understanding the various relations that exist between masculinity and other identity discourses and societal structures. The claims of 'crisis' that shaped the discursive context of studies into masculinity in the nineties are intertwined with the notion that ideas about gender are hegemonic and that, during the nineties, the established hegemony was in the process of what would seem to be a troublesome period of transition. The hegemonic model of masculinity that had developed through processes of industrialisation was predicated on a series of norms, ideas and attributes that appeared increasingly irrelevant and even untenable in the social and economic context of the late twentieth century; it is partially a result of this that masculinity was proclaimed by some to be 'in crisis.' The quote from Michael Kimmel cited at the beginning of the introduction notes that 'men today are [so] confused about what it means to be a 'real' man, that masculinity in crisis has become a cultural commonplace.'<sup>83</sup> The central tenets of what might be described as 'traditional' patriarchal masculinity included roles, behaviours and attitudes that were no longer sustainable in the post-industrial economy. Not only did the post-industrial, service based economy have little use for the manual physical skills that were central in heavy industry, the concomitant rise of women in the work place was seen as having a fundamental impact on the discourses of breadwinner around which traditional masculinity was predicated. As Maggie Carey explains, 'the belief that traditional definitions of masculinity no longer work, that the models of

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<sup>83</sup> Kimmel, M. (1987). 'The Contemporary 'Crisis' of Masculinity in Historical Perspective' in Brod, H. (ed.) *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies* (London: Allen & Unwin).p.121. For further debates about the 'crisis' of masculinity see Bly, R. (1990) or Clare, A. (2000).

masculinity that today's men inherited are no longer desirable or appropriate and that they need to be challenged and re-worked' was endemic in nineties gender discourses.<sup>84</sup> Central to the tenets of normative discourses of masculinity was the notion of the male as provider or breadwinner, a position which many of the cinematic narratives of the nineties render questionable as a result of social and economic changes. Other developments had impacted upon the propriety of traditional notions of masculinity, for example, the 'new' man's supposed sensitivity and relaxed domesticity contravene the dichotomous notions of traditional masculinity that insisted upon an association of the domestic with the feminine.

Nineties British cinema was, as I have already noted, preoccupied with male characters who appeared to be 'in crisis:' men whose roles in society were no longer certain or whose traditional notions of male behaviour were represented as inappropriate or those men who were somehow struggling to come to terms with deeper questions or who felt, most keenly a loss of social power which Andrew Tolson sees as being equated to a loss of gender identity.<sup>85</sup> The plethora of troubled, 'crisis' masculinities which permeated nineties cinematic narratives are implicit in their critique of economic change in the form of post-industrialisation, and cultural change in the form of the supposed success of feminist politics. Scattered throughout nineties British cinema are explicit references to the damage that feminism has wrought upon men;

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<sup>84</sup> Carey, M. (1996). 'Perspectives on the Men's Movement' in McLean, C. Carey, M. & White, C. (eds.) *Men's Ways of Being* (Oxford: Westview Press). p.153.

<sup>85</sup> Tolson, A. (1977). *The Limits of Masculinity* (London: Tavistock Publications) p.146.



*The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off* being among the more vociferous in their condemnation of feminism as destructive and an aberration of the supposed natural order of things. The misogyny that is, at times, explicit in both of these films is specifically post-feminist. Both films take the success of feminism for granted; furthermore it is this tacit acknowledgement that feminist goals have been accomplished that is used to justify the angry recriminations of the various male characters. There are a number of parallels between the misogyny of these films and the gender politics of the earlier British New Wave films such as *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1958). The central protagonist, Arthur Seaton (Albert Finney) is presented as trapped and flailing against a social order that feels imposed upon him from above. Although the women in the film are, as Melanie Williams points out, 'generally presented as agents of entrapment,'<sup>86</sup> the dynamic of gender politics in the film is refracted through very different social and economic contexts than those seen in nineties films. The closing sequence of *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* confirms Seaton's agency, there are options open to him and he has a degree of social mobility. The same does not hold true for the post-industrial male victims of *Brassed Off* or *The Full Monty*. Although the female characters in *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* were presented negatively, they do not actively preclude the male characters from their 'rightful' role and it is around this issue that the distinction between these films becomes most apparent. In the nineties films the situation of the male characters is far bleaker; they lack Seaton's social agency or his recourse to mobility and rebellion.

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<sup>86</sup> Williams, M. (2008) 'Twilight Women of 1950s British Cinema' in Murphy, R. (ed.) *The British Cinema Book* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (London: BFI Publishing). p. 287.

The misogyny of the nineties films then is far more openly predicated around cycles of blame.

Claims that masculinity is 'in crisis' are problematic on a number of levels. If we are to reject a notion of masculinity as knowable and stable and instead accept Connell's contention that masculinity is continually changing, then it would appear inevitable that claims of crisis predicated upon societal change are tenuous at best. If one looks more deeply at the narratives of crisis and the apportioning of blame that is central to them, it becomes clear that they are, as Silverman implies, invested in maintaining a patriarchal status quo achieved through the denouncement of feminist politics. While the discursive constructions of masculinity may have changed in many ways in the latter part of the twentieth century (growing to accommodate an apparent greater sensitivity for example) what is clear, even in the narrative representations that purport a crisis of male power, is that the substance of patriarchal power remains intact.<sup>87</sup> The lack of feminist intervention within British cinema studies around these narratives is something which I hope to rectify with this research and draw much needed attention to the ways in which the multiple meanings of these texts are implicated within post-feminist politics more generally.

This section has illustrated some of the central ideas in approaching masculinity as a discursive construction that is bound to power relations and matters pertaining to

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<sup>87</sup> Brittan, A. (1989). p.2.

cultural politics. But gender is more than an abstract discourse, it is a matter of social practice, it is a lived identity, and as such all of these ideas have a more material dimension than some of the theories analyzed above evoke. The following section elaborates upon the ways in which the disciplinary power of gender discourses work to regulate the behaviour of bodies and thus impacts upon the ritualistic performances of masculinity.

### **Masculinity as Performed Identity**

While masculinity is clearly a discursive construction embedded within power relations and subject to normative ideologies, it is also a lived experience which is rooted in the social organisations of work and family life.<sup>88</sup> As such, ideas about masculinity come to have a bearing upon social reality and the day to day practices of men. It is, as Connell explains, about the 'way in which social practice is ordered, the everyday conduct of life is organised.'<sup>89</sup> Thus masculinity is both symbolic and material simultaneously. The representations of masculinity that are displayed in media texts are constructed as performances of gendered identities. These performances are always informed by the discursive construction of masculinity but they simultaneously work to inform the construction of discourse in a series of ways.

In order to understand the social relevance of representations of masculinity within the context of nineties Britain it is important to balance a concern with the discursive

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<sup>88</sup> Tolson, A. (1977). p. 139.

<sup>89</sup> Connell, R.W. (1995). p.71.

aspects of gendered discourse with those issues pertaining to the practical and ritualised components. Judith Butler's work is particularly useful in understanding the discursive or performative nature of masculinity.<sup>90</sup> Butler's influential account of gender draws attention to the various ways and means by which gendered discourses are constructed (in much the same way that Connell argues) and the centrality of ritual conducted through regulatory strictures of heterosexual, patriarchal ideologies. The male bodies seen on screen thus perform versions of masculinity that cannot be understood without reference to the discourses that inform them; the standards of masculinity that are sanctioned within society are shaped by patriarchal, heteronormative ideals which demand that certain rituals and forms of behaviour are endorsed as positive while others are stigmatized for supposed deviance. The discourses of masculinity function in some ways as a code against which the performances or actions of men are both interpreted and judged. The compulsion to conform to the socially sanctioned ideas of masculinity are continually seen in the male characters of nineties British cinema. In *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, for instance, Ed (Nick Moran) and his friends exchange banter which constantly implies homosexuality as an aberration of 'real' masculinity (and by implication, feminine).

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<sup>90</sup> Butler, J. (1990); also Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'sex'* (London: Routledge); Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge); Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge).

Gender is a matter pertaining to bodies. For Butler even the body is a construction bought into being through language and systems of 'knowledge'.<sup>91</sup> David Jackson neatly summarises the interrelationships between biology, gender, discourse and bodies when he states that 'at birth I inherited a male body (with specific biological characteristics and genetic endowments) but it quickly became a masculinised body through the social meanings and relations it encountered in learning to take part in a capitalist, patriarchal society.'<sup>92</sup> The social strictures that Jackson refers to are culturally specific; the modes of behaviour that are sanctioned in one society may be stigmatized in another. Within the late capitalist environment of nineties Britain, valorised forms of masculinity were best described by Kimmel as being 'still bound up with behaving differently from women.'<sup>93</sup> The bodies with which this study is concerned are those that are represented through the prism of cinematic narratives. Their mediated form adds another component to the ideological investments that they are bound to. Audiences read these bodies not only through their narrative trajectory but also through a range of cinematic conventions in order to interpret and produce multiple meanings and readings.

The notion of performativity has been widely used by scholars working in a range of disciplines.<sup>94</sup> Here I am using Butler's term as a way of thinking about the means by

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<sup>91</sup> Butler, J. (1993).

<sup>92</sup> Jackson, D. (1990). *Unmasking Masculinity: A Critical Autobiography* (London: Unwin Hyman) p.48.

<sup>93</sup> Kimmel, M. (1987). p.15.

<sup>94</sup> See for example Elizabeth Grosz, (1994). *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) or David Buchbinder (1998). *Performance Anxieties: Reproducing Masculinity* (London: Allen & Unwin).

which bodies bring gendered discourses into being through the repetition of acts. The notion of performativity further facilitates a conceptual working that foregrounds the fragmented and multiple nature of representations, drawing attention to the nuanced differences in classed, racial and sexual identities of the bodies with which I am concerned. Given that patriarchal society places such an investment in heterosexual masculinity there is a cultural requirement to continually engage in gendered performance 'as flawlessly as possible,' for to fail in this would leave one suffering from 'the withdrawal of power...and the consequence of the displeasure, and possibly ridicule, of other men.'<sup>95</sup> The compulsion to perform a culturally sanctioned version of masculinity is a recurrent theme in the cinematic texts with which I engage; on occasion the requirement is commuted to the status of a joke (as in *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*), less so in some of the more serious gangster films (such as *Hard Men* (J.K Amalou, 1996), *Face* or *I.D*) but the undercurrent remains the same: to fail to meet the standards of masculinity within one's cohort can lead to the character being ostracised or, in the case of *Hard Men* killed. Some of the films that I discuss actively deploy the falsity of performed identities, an example being *I.D* where the central protagonist John (Reece Dinsdale) is an undercover cop infiltrating rightwing football gangs. His safety relies on being able to perform a version of masculinity which is complicit with his persona. In using the role of undercover cop the film (possibly inadvertently) interrogates both the false construction of gender and the regulatory function that discourses of gender possess.

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<sup>95</sup> Buchbinder, D. (1998). p.vii.

The performances of masculinity in the films analysed in the thesis also demonstrate the generic component of cinematic performances of masculinity. British cinema has a well established tradition of social realist cinema, and the representations of masculinity that are found in these grittier films of the nineties tend to be confined to the lower echelons of working class or underclass cultures. They are more violent, and are often drug users and alcoholics. The deprivation of their lives is written onto their bodies and thus contributes to a very specific performance of masculinity which is immediately recognizable to audiences. Crisis, then, is inevitably a process that is performed in class specific ways. The tropes of crisis and trauma that characterise many of the male characters discussed in this thesis relate to their socio-economic disempowerment; they lack employment, they lack social mobility and they lack the opportunities to change or even the optimism that something could change. Working and underclass men, in short, experience crises in an economically tangible way. This contrasts with the tropes of crisis that are deployed for middle class male characters. Claims of economic disempowerment and concomitant social alienation would clearly be untenable for these characters; as such, claims of crisis must be modified. Films such as *Four Weddings and A Funeral*, *Peter's Friends* (Kenneth Branagh, 1992), *Jack and Sarah* and *Martha Meet Frank, Daniel and Laurence* (Nick Hamm, 1998) all have male characters who could be considered as being in crisis. In each example, however, the crisis is a personal or psychic one rather than a socio-economic one. Whereas Ray Winstone, Billy Mills-Creed (both in *Nil By Mouth*) or Peter Mullan (*My Name is Joe*) perform a rough, hand-to-mouth masculinity, the middle class specificity of characters

such as *Four Wedding's* Peter (Hugh Grant) or *Martha's* Laurence (Joseph Fiennes) suffer from insecurity and neurosis that belies their relation to dominant forms of masculinity.

Butler links the performative nature of gender to the regulatory discourses of heteronormativity and again this is something that is central to many of the films explored in detail in the case studies. The hegemonic investment in heterosexuality which results in the stigmatisation of homosexuality is endemic in the narratives of many British films. It is particularly noticeable in both *TwentyFourseven* and *The Full Monty*. In the former there is an encounter between two of the lads in a pub toilet. They exchange banter about girls and being promiscuous but at the film's close it is revealed that the two men are in a relationship. The process by which they break down the staunchly heterosexual performances to discover that they are attracted to one another is conducted off screen and thus remains contained, apparently extraneous to the main narrative. In the latter, the two gay characters sneak around, their gayness figuring as doubly threatening to the homosocial dynamic of the stripper group. As with *TwentyFourSeven* their romance occurs largely off-screen and thus the heteronormative discourses of masculinity continue undisturbed having acknowledged and contained gayness. The cinematic representation of masculinity relies upon a self-conscious performance but it is, nonetheless, a performance that is both informed by and works to inform the cultural discourses of gender. That these cinematic narratives construct these practices and rituals of gender within the fictitious space of the cinema screen does not render the performed nature of the representations less important;



rather the performed nature of these representations figures closely within the discursive arrangement of masculinity and helps to make visible those power structures which seek to appear inconsequential.

This chapter has outlined how British cinema studies has approached the issue of gender and specifically the representation of masculinity and crisis but equally noted how much remains to be done in the area; certainly in contrast to American cinema and masculinity the paucity of work is apparent. The relative scarcity of work in the area means that inevitably this thesis draws upon scholarship from outside the UK. The work that has been done by American academics contains many points of reference and commonalities with the problems and issues that were circulating in British culture during the nineties, but in drawing on this work I am not suggesting a straightforward transposal of theoretical frameworks so much as an augmentation or adaptation in order to take into account the national and cultural specificities of nineties Britain. Finally I have developed the conceptual framework in terms of both discourse and performances of masculinity which underpin the case studies that are found in the thesis. In the following chapter I elaborate upon both of these within the specific cultural context of nineties Britain and analyse how these impacted upon the reconfiguration of discourses of masculinity.