Chapter 2: Changing Britain, Changing Men

Introduction

As Britain entered the final decade of the twentieth century the political, cultural and economic outlook appeared rather unsettled. After the economic boom of the late eighties came a recession; housing markets and financial markets collapsed, inflation remained in double figures and the terminal decline in the manufacturing and industrial sectors contributed to high unemployment which had severe implications for working class men and women in particular. The narratives of many films produced during this time foreground the seemingly detrimental effects of these changes upon communities of men and in doing so contribute to the sense of degeneration that seemed to be endemic in the nation.

The decline in industry and manufacturing had substantial ramifications on employment patterns, changing the typical forms of employment open to men. More significantly for my purposes, these changes impacted upon the gendered patterns of work and traditional, patriarchal notions of masculinity that were predicated around a male breadwinning role. The role of the sole male breadwinner that had become a central tenet of post-war masculinity was rendered untenable in the new post-industrial economy as demand for manual skills was replaced by the need for technological ones. The claims that the work force was becoming more favourable to women at the expense of men became increasingly common in the media despite the

fact that the majority of these jobs were menial and part time and that upper

management and board level roles were still, invariably, held by men.[1] Claims that the

workplace was being 'feminised' did not, however, refer only to the literal roles that

women held; rather it related to the ways in which the requirements of the service

industries and other post-industrial sectors appear to be antithetical to traditional

notions of masculinity; as Beverley Skeggs notes the service economy placed 'little

worth' on masculine physicality.[2] The changes that were taking place in the

marketplace affected the domestic and familial environments as well and these

changes further impacted upon the renegotiation of masculinity that was taking place

in the nineties. Further, the increased importance of men as consumers and the

burgeoning markets which catered to their lifestyle, fashion and grooming

requirements marked a further break from established ideas about masculinity.

This chapter foregrounds the links between national identity and discourses of

masculinity within the context of nineties Britain. It explores and explicates the

political, cultural and social environment of Britain in the nineties with specific

reference to issues pertaining to masculinity and male identities. In the previous

chapter it became apparent that much of the existing scholarship on masculinities in

the cinema is from an American perspective and while this work informs this study it

would be erroneous to take the American experience as synonymous with British

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[1] See for example Frean, A. (1998). 'Wives to take over as Breadwinners' in *The Times* December 9th. Or Moore, S. (1994). 'Mooreover: Careering Out of Control' in *The Guardian* November 3rd.
[2] Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of Class and Gender* (London: Sage). p.9.

culture and history; the cultural forms, idioms and narratives of masculinity that are found within the films that this study focuses upon relate very particularly to the national/regional context in which they were produced. This chapter establishes the specific contours of Britain in the nineties and situates this cultural context in relation to the cinematic representations of masculinity with which I am concerned, focusing upon the ways in which cinematic narratives rehearse ideas about what men are or what they should be. The first section of the chapter sets out how and why notions of national identity were being renegotiated during this time and the effects that this process had upon discourses of British masculinity. The sections that follow explore how changing discourses of masculinity were articulated in relation firstly to young men and then to fathers. The final section elaborates upon the specificities of the crisis claims that were endemic in popular culture and cinematic representations of masculinity at the time.

From Warm Beer to Cool Britannia: The renegotiation of 'Britishness' in the Nineties

But Britishness is not simply the issue of the hour. No moratorium on thinking about who the British are will make everything well. The reasons for the present self-consciousness are many and they are simply not going to go away. They would probably include the fact that Britain no longer enjoys status as a world power, whatever explanations are proffered to make sense of its decline; that attempts to halt its economic decline never quite seem to work; that post war immigration has thrown into relief an imperial history that has been repressed, and shown the British to be not quite as tolerant as they have imagined themselves to be; that demands for more autonomy from Scotland and Wales, not to mention the war in Northern Ireland, have thrown into question the claim that a single Britishness is subscribed to in all these countries;

Phillip Dodd, *The Battle Over Britain* (1993:4)

Britain's identity is in flux. Renewed national confidence in the arts, fashion, technology, architecture and design has coincided with the departure from Hong Kong, devolution, further integration with Europe, the imminence of the millennium and Princess Diana's death.

Mark Leonard, *Britain™: Renewing Our Identities* (1997:1)

In 1993 the Prime Minister, John Major, put forward an apparently timeless definition of Britain when he described a 'country of long shadows on cricket grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pools fillers and, as George Orwell said 'old maids bicycling to holy communion through the morning mist.'[3] His vision not only evoked a nostalgic sense of history but, rather more importantly, seemed entrapped by it, unable or unwilling to move on into a post-industrial future dominated by computer technology and a service based economy. His rhetoric romanticised a mythical past failing to acknowledge the impact of the vast changes that had taken place in the latter half of the twentieth century upon popular ideas about a British national identity.[4] His image of Britain spoke more to the past (or at least an imagined, nostalgic version of it) than it did the future and in articulating this construction of the nation Major, like his predecessor, Margaret Thatcher, felt that the answers to Britain's cycle of decline lay in returning to an imagined former glory. But this rhetoric sounded increasingly hollow in the nineties; Britain's status as a global power was significantly diminished, not least because of the shifting parameters of the post-cold war infrastructure. Furthermore the prospect of impending devolution for both Scotland and Wales loomed large and the situation in Northern Ireland was a continuing political issue throughout the decade. The major political parties seemed torn between the need for the nation to

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[3] http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/quotations.html (accessed 2nd June 2009).

[4] Major's speech further illustrates the pervasive but deeply problematic conflation of England and Englishness (and specifically southern/Home counties region of rural England at that) with Britain and Britishness in such a way that marginalised Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (as well as large parts of northern and urban England) and their various histories and own discourses of national and regional identity.

take a central role in Europe and the potential loss of sovereignty and national integrity that this might entail.

In much the same way that social and cultural changes were deemed to have created a 'crisis' for masculinity so too, as the quotes from Leonard and Dodd show, were notions of Britishness in turmoil at the outset of the nineties. As with gender, discourses pertaining to national identity are complexly interwoven into the fabric of our social realities. As Mike Storry and Peter Childs explain, national identity is never a straightforward discourse it is always 'crossed by other kinds of identity.'[5] Furthermore national identity cannot be assumed, it remains 'a matter of allegiance and cultural affiliation,'[6] and as such is continually being negotiated and performed. National identity matters, according to Phillip Dodd because 'it stretches far beyond the ceremonies of state into the very idioms of the language, and even into the way we hold our bodies.'[7] Key among the issues identified by Dodd as being central to the reconfiguration of discourses of British national identity in the nineties was the realisation that the singular notion of Britishness that had been advocated during the Thatcher government had been 'thrown into question' by the divergent needs and specific contexts of the various constituent parts.[8] Regional diversification was not the only way in which a singular notion of British national identity was being brought into question; the 2000 Parekh Report, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* was the

[5] Storry, M. & Childs, P. (2002). 'Introduction' in Storry M. & Childs, P. (eds.) *British Cultural Identities* (2nd ed.) (London: Routledge). p.1.
[6] Storry, M. & Childs, (2002).p.1.
[7] Dodd, P. (1995). *The Battle Over Britain* (London: Demos). p.3.
[8] Dodd, P. (1995). p.4.

culmination of two years of research that attempted to understand the impact of a

changing ethnic demographic on British national identity.[9] Parekh's report described

how multiculturalism impacted upon established discourses of a singular British

national identity making it 'less unified, more diverse and pluralistic.'[10]

While the political rhetoric revolved around a renegotiation of a cohesive national

identity the films produced in nineties Britain seemed rather more aware of those

issues pertaining to regional identities and the specificities of regional cultures. As a

result there are a range of distinctive regional voices that emerge as part of nineties

British cinema and they operate to fragment and problematise the notion of a singular

national identity and a singular national cinema. Among the strongest of these

national/regional inflections is the emergence of Scottish cinema heralded by films

including *Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, 1994), *Trainspotting* and *My Name is Joe*.

Especially significant for Murray Smith is *Trainspotting* which he describes as being a

film that 'took its place at the centre of a resurgent Scottish cultural and political

nationalism.'[11]

Films including *Twin Town* (Kevin Allen, 1997) and *Human Traffic* (Justin Kerrigan,

1999) helped to establish a more specifically Welsh idiom within British cinema

although arguably this was not as persistent as its Scottish counterpart. Within English

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[9] Parekh, B. (2000). *The Future Of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (London: Profile Books)
[10] Parekh, B. (2000). p.36.
[11] Smith, M. (2002). *Trainspotting: BFI Modern Classics* (London: BFI Publishing). p.9.

cinema there were also a range of regionally specific films being made. Films including *Brassed Off*, *When Saturday Comes* (Maria Giese, 1996), *The Full Monty* and *TwentyFourSeven* emerge from a self conscious engagement with regional cultures and identities through their focus upon those parts of England that appeared peripheral to the political construction of the green and pleasant imagery most closely associated with England and Englishness. London retained its prominence as a glamorised backdrop to British national cinema with films such as *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* which drew on the cultural legacy of the 'swinging' London of the sixties. In mobilising a specific set of tropes of London *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* can be understood in terms of the wider context of 'Cool' Britannia and the film was consciously presenting an alternative to the staid images of Britain that dominated the international market. This image of London was not uncontested; a number of films including *Face and Nil By Mouth* offer a counterpoint to the postmodern exuberance of *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* by drawing on the traditions of social realism. The version of London that is presented in these films deploys a particularly bleak iconography of deprivation, dispossession and impoverishment.

Despite a rhetoric which consistently referenced the emergence of multiculturalism in Britain, British national cinema remained, as Karen Alexander contends, 'overwhelmingly white.'[12] She observes that, in contrast to 'our workplaces, high

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[12] Alexander, K. (2000). 'Black British Cinema in the Nineties: Going, Going, Gone' in Murphy, R. (ed.) *British Cinema of the 90s* (London: BFI Publishing). p.113.

streets and bedrooms' British films tend to proffer a 'narrow and nostalgic view.'[13] She

cites the editorial changes that were made to *The Full Monty* as evidence of the failure

on behalf of the funding institutions and the wider British film industry to nurture the

burgeoning black cinematic presence that had begun to emerge in the 1980s.[14] After a

period of relative vibrancy in the eighties, black and Asian British film making was

rarely commercially successful in the nineties. There are only a handful of films that

articulate a specifically Black British voice in nineties British cinema; the most well

known example is Isaac Julien's award winning *Young Soul Rebels* (1991).[15] So too is

there a paucity of films by British Asian directors. Although *East is East* achieved a

modicum of commercial success the director, O'Donnell, is white. Films such as *London

Kills Me* (Hanif Kureishi, 1991), *Brothers in Trouble* (Udayan Prasad, 1995) and *My Son

The Fanatic* (Udayan Prasad, 1997) largely failed to register commercially, leaving

Alexander to conclude that 'British cinema has failed to reflect the hybridisation so

evident in other areas of British cultural life.'[16]

The cumulative effect of multiculturalism, the dismantling of the Empire and the

reduction in status that came with the emergence of the post-communist world

economy had, as Paul Gilroy puts it, precipitated a loss of 'moral and cultural bearings'

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[13] Alexander, K. (2000). p.113.

[14] Writing about *The Full Monty*, Alexander (2000) says 'It is not by chance that an idea which had all black male leads ended up with just one black male character and went on to become one of the most successful British films ever made. p.113.

[15] Alexander, K. (2000). 'The roll call of black-themed,-penned, -directed and theatrically released films in the nineties…is lamentably low.' p.112.

[16] Alexander, K. (2000). p.112.

with regards to British national identity.[17] Further, Britain's diminished position in the global hierarchy impacted upon the discursive construction of British national identity in a fundamental way, contributing to a sense of uncertainty and unease as to its place within the world. In many ways the quasi-nationalistic violence that flares intermittently at football tournaments is symptomatic of this angst. As Gilroy explains 'war and sport are adjacent in the metonymic chain of Britain's reluctantly post imperial nationalisms.'[18]

These various factors combined to render traditional idioms of Britishness (such as those evoked by Major) anachronistic, leading to what Dodd describes as a sense of 'self-consciousness' about the construction and meanings associated with British national identity.[19] Like the outmoded notions of masculinity that were predicated upon a breadwinner role, those discourses of a British national identity that had persisted since the industrial revolution were no longer workable in a post-industrial, service based economy that operated within an increasingly global financial system. The historian Richard Weight goes further than Dodd stating that by the nineties the idea of Britishness was 'declining to the point of death'; his sentiments around the moribund state of Britishness as a meaningful form of national and individual identity also echoed contemporary pronouncements on masculinity.[20] Thus it would seem that the cultural discourses of Britishness and masculinity are inherently linked, not least

[17] Gilroy, P. (2005). *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press) p.p.90-1.
[18] Gilroy, P. (2005). p.109.
[19] Dodd, P. (1995). p.4
[20] Weight, R. (2002). *Patriots: National Identity In Britain 1940-2000* (London: Macmillan). p.730.

because they shared a common point of definition in the industrial revolution. Furthermore it was the decline of the industrial economy which rendered both traditional notions of masculinity and those of Britishness as a national identity untenable, anachronistic and in need of regeneration.

The so-called crisis of both discourses of masculinity and national identity is, of course, more complex than simply a shift from an industrial base to a post-industrial economy. There were a whole series of factors that contributed to the notion of Britain, as a nation, as being 'in decline' and they ranged from debates about falling education standards, the 'breakdown' both of family life (which referred also to a rise in divorces and a simultaneous drop in marriages) and of 'communities' more generally. A leading article in *The Times* in November 1993 demonstrates how a complex set of issues came to be readily conflated within popular discourse expounding how 'the link between the rise in single-parent families and the growth of the underclass, welfare dependency, crime and the sort of increasingly common unsocial behaviour has given Britain an international reputation for yobbism.'[21] If one follows the line of thought proposed by Benedict Anderson that the nation is in fact a form of imagined community, it is unsurprising that the apparent decline in community values was coterminous with an incoherent discourse of 'Britishness' as a national identity.[22]

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[21] Murray, Charles. (1993).'The Lone Parent Problem' *The Times,* November 14th.

[22] Anderson's central idea was that the nation state was primarily a discursive construction; in essence an imagined political community united by a common culture and a shared discourse. Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on Origin and the Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books).

This sense of Britain as atrophied, declining and in need of repair related both to the lived realities of communities but also to the ideas that were associated with Britain and Britishness both domestically and globally. A poor image of Britain persisted through the decade both domestically and internationally as Mark Leonard attests in another Demos report commissioned early in 1997; Britain and Britishness were seen as entrapped by history. According to Leonard the problems besetting ideas about Britain in the international arena were many. They include the fact that Britain is seen as a 'backward looking has-been, a theme park of royal pageantry', a low-tech country whose businesses are riddled with strikes and hostile to free trade, where the weather and food are bad and the people are 'stand-offish'.[23]

The cultural malaise that appeared to be afflicting the nation in the early part of the nineties was not, however, as terminal as either Weight or Dodd had predicted. In the middle of the decade the downtrodden melancholy gave way to a sense of cultural invigoration that led to London being heralded as 'The Coolest City on Earth' by Newsweek, a moniker that would have been unthinkable just two years previously.[24] This sense of cultural renewal was widespread; the economy was enjoying a period of growth and the housing markets were picking up, unemployment was falling, providing much needed evidence that the country was tentatively moving out of the decline that

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[23] Leonard, M. (1997). p.12.

[24] *Newsweek* October 28th 1996 declared London 'a hip compromise between the non-stop newness of Los Angeles and the aspic preserved beauty of Paris – sharpened to New York's edge.' McGuire, S. & Elliott, M. (1996) 'London Reigns: Hot Fashion, A Pulsating Club Scene and Lots of New Money Made This The Coolest City On The Planet' in *Newsweek,* 4th November. See http://www.newsweek.com/id/103313 accessed 2nd March 2010.

had characterised the previous decade. While the old heavy industries remained moribund the move into a post-industrial, service and technology based economy was inexorable. Retail and consumer sectors grew exponentially during this time and new technologies became an increasingly integral part of day to day business activity. Fuelled by increasing economic stability the so-called 'dot.com' bubble began to grow as investors rushed to take advantage of the possibilities that seemed limitless in this new globalised, high-tech economy.

This sense of cultural renewal was further enhanced by the election of the recently rebranded 'new' Labour under the youthful leadership of Tony Blair. New Labour's election bought an end to nearly two decades of Conservative governance with a landslide victory in the 1997 election.[25] The self conscious re-branding of the Labour party that had taken place under Tony Blair marginalised traditional forms of socialism and replaced them with a new party rhetoric which sought to distance itself from traditional forms of class based politics.[26] Shortly after coming to power the new government commissioned the report *Britain™* by Leonard in a move which brought issues of national identity to the fore of popular politics once more. This was part of

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[25] 'New' Labour won an unprecedented 418 seats (equating to 43.2% of the popular vote) to the Conservatives 165 (30.7%) and the Liberal Democrats 46 (16.8%).

[26] Blair's middle class identity and the public persona that he projected were constructed in such a way that they functioned as a specific disavowal of traditional socialism; crucially in doing this Blair was also able to position himself as rejecting the gender politics that had traditionally been associated with the Labour party. His new man status was conferred in a number of ways in the run up to his premiership and shortly after. The much vaunted 'Blair's Babes' helped to confirm Blair's reconstructed egalitarian status. When he became a father again during his first term in office it was deployed in such a way that incorporated those discourses of sensitive, involved fathers which were central to the notion of the new man. The champagne reception that Blair hosted shortly after taking up residency in Downing Street was a public display of his credentials as a leader who was in touch with the electorate and their cultural tastes.

the effort to augment the re-branding of a British national identity with the aim of making it more relevant to the British population and also more appealing to the global tourist and business markets. The report was unprecedented in a British context for the way it situated national identity as a concept that was open to conscious rebranding; it acknowledged the malleable state of national identities and sought to actively facilitate a more positive articulation of Britishness that would fit the new global and national context. Leonard described his task in the report as being about finding 'a better fit between our heritage and what we are becoming.'[27] He was anxious not to be seen as casting aside a cultural and historical heritage in its entirety but rather to lessen the stranglehold that it seemed to have on definitions of Britain as a nation and Britishness as a form of national identity.

The cultural renaissance of the mid nineties, so called 'cool Britannia', was an integral part in the renegotiation of British national identities; Brit-pop, Brit-Lit and Brit-art were all vaunted as contributing to this process of cultural renewal. British cinema was also enjoying something of a renaissance period with a number of commercial successes released in 1995-1998. Among these films were *Trainspotting*, *The Full Monty* and *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*. These films deployed a very different register to the more established (and readily exportable) heritage movies. Where the latter relied upon a series of nostalgic images and idioms of Britishness this divergent strand of British national cinema is clearly part of the conscious refashioning of British

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[27] Leonard, M. (1997).p.1.

national identity. Although all of these films, to an extent, deploy nostalgic impulses they do so in a very different way to the heritage films. I return to this in more detail in chapters three and four.

These films did more than offer an intervention into discourses of national identity however; they simultaneously rehearsed and renegotiated these ideas with specific relation to ideas about masculinity and gender politics by fore-grounding the ways in which cultural change had impacted upon the male characters of the narrative. *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off* are perhaps the most obvious of the examples cited for positing a scenario in which the challenges facing discourses of Britishness were intrinsically related to those facing both men and discourses of masculinity. Both of these films articulate a nostalgic longing for a vanished industrial past. In much the same way that Leonard claimed re-configuring a sense of Britishness that was meaningful within the post-industrial milieu required that the past was not simply 'cast off' but rather incorporated into new modes of discourse, so cinematic narratives articulated a juncture between old and new in which the decline (and subsequent renewal) of Britain and Britishness became coterminous with the disenfranchisement of 'traditional' white, working class masculinities.

The following sections of this chapter set out the ways in which the social and cultural context of the nineties intersected with the various tropes of masculinity explored in this thesis, considering how the debates about changing notions of Britishness and

changing discourses of masculinity became thoroughly intertwined as a result of their

shared history.

Changing discourses of youth and the emergence of 'laddism'

Discourses of gender are intersected by those of generation as much as they are race,

sexuality and class and the specific configuration of discourses of youth is explained

through the first case study chapter. Although there was a degree of uncertainty and

anxiety about the roles of men in society generally there were, during the nineties,

another set of concerns and debates that related specifically to younger men and

teenage boys and it is these issues that I explore in this section. Youth cultures have,

historically, been subject to considerable consternation and political concern about

their perceived threat to the order of society; these moral concerns are constructed

through gendered discourses as scholars such as Angela McRobbie demonstrate in

both *Feminism and Youth Culture* and *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*.[28] She

describes how 'moral panic can be seen as acting on behalf of the dominant social

order;'[29] in functioning as a regulatory discourse moral panics are thus inextricable

from sanctioned discourses of gender and sexuality. While for young women these

concerns invariably relate to sexual behaviour and teenage pregnancies (and more

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[28] McRobbie, A. (2000). *Feminism and Youth Culture* (2nd Ed.) (London: Palgrave Macmillan); McRobbie, A. (1994). *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge). See also McRobbie, A. & Garber, J. (1993). 'Girls and Subcultures' in Hall, S. & Jefferson, T. (eds.) *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. (London: Routledge). McRobbie, A. (1993). 'Shut up and Dance: Youth Culture and Changing Modes of Femininity' in *Cultural Studies*. Vol 7. Issue 3. p.p. 406-426. McRobbie, A. & Thornton, S. (1995). 'Re-thinking 'moral panic' for multi-mediated social worlds' in *The British Journal of Sociology.* Vol. 46. No. 4. p.p.559-95.
[29] McRobbie, A. (1994). p.206.

recently binge drinking) for boys and young men they refer to a wider repertoire of problematic behaviour including violence, criminal activity, involvement in drugs or gang culture.[30]

In 1999 Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, garnered significant attention when he proclaimed that the 'main social issue of our time pertained to the behaviour and role of young men.'[31] Foremost among the concerns being articulated about young British men in the nineties were rising drug use (specifically in relation to rave culture and ecstasy), falling educational attainment and increasing involvement in crime, rising numbers suffering with mental health problems and a simultaneous climb in suicide rates. Young men, particularly those who were 'young offenders [or the product of] single parent families living on housing estates,'[32] it seemed, were coterminous with societal breakdown. For young men it seemed that the uncertainties regarding the roles and definitions of masculinity in contemporary society were being keenly felt. Inevitably, perhaps, it was young working and underclass lads who were, as John Davis explains, bearing the brunt of the economic recession of the late eighties and early nineties 'whilst at the same time providing the raw material for the manufacture of new minority stereotype folk devils, and therefore the justification for the evermore overt mobilization of the forces of social control.'[33] Young disenfranchised white men

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[30] McRobbie, A. (1994). p.206.
[31] O'Donnell, M. & Sharpe, S. (2000). *Uncertain Masculinities: Youth, Ethnicity and Class in Contemporary Britain* (London: Routledge). p.1.
[32] McRobbie, A. (1994). p.206.
[33] Davis, J. (1990). *Youth and the Condition of Britain: Images of Adolescent Conflict* (London: The Athalone Press). p.213.

became symbolic of what McRobbie terms the perceived 'moral vacuum which characterised British society in the 1990s.'[34] Young, poor, inner city boys continue to be vilified today through the discourses of hoodies and chav culture which appears to be synonymous with 'broken' Britain.

Nowhere Men focuses on two of the most prominent tropes of young masculinity found in nineties British cinema. The post-industrial underclass youth and the 'new' lad respond in very different ways to the concerns about the problems posed by adolescents and youth culture at the time. Both respond to and inform the various cultural discourses of youth in post-feminist, nineties British culture. The injurious processes of post-industrialisation were at the heart of the construction of idioms of underclass youth in nineties Britain and within the cinematic context the majority of young, underclass characters were situated within communities that had been devastated by the collapse of traditional industries. As Stephen Jackson explains, the economic transformation of Britain led to an 'increase in long-term unemployment in the 1980s [which] means that many people have in effect become excluded from the labour force and, in certain locations, generations have passed through the economically active years of the life cycle without any realistic chance of secure employment.'[35] Christine Griffin points out that these problems were compounded for the younger generation who 'were unable to claim unemployment benefit and register

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[34] McRobbie, A. (1994). p.200.
[35] Jackson, S. (1998). *Britain's Population: Demographic Issues in Contemporary Society* (London: Routledge). p.124.

as unemployed and seeking work: they entered a limbo of invisible dependence on their families and friends – or homelessness and destitution.'[36] The breadwinner ethic of traditional masculinity bore no relation to the world that these marginalized young men inhabited and even though unemployment figures stabilised over the course of the decade those lads who lived in areas that had borne the brunt of industrial decline were perceived as remaining trapped in a cycle of poor education with limited opportunity for escape.[37]

The centrality of the underclass lad to many of the films produced in the latter part of the nineties seemed to be, on a surface level at least, at odds with the discourses of renewal and reinvigoration that were being heavily promoted elsewhere. In cinematic terms there were two main forms of response; on the one hand there were social realist films such as *TwentyFourSeven* and *My Name is Joe* which situated the underclass male as both victim of economic transformation and a social problem that demanded action, and on the other films such as *Trainspotting* or *Twin Town* which, in Claire Monk's words served to frame the male underclass as a 'subcultural lifestyle...for a young, post political male audience.'[38] In the social realist films of the decade the issue of male disempowerment is presented as problematic, a traumatic consequence of post-industrialisation. As such many of these films are shaped by a degree of resentment towards women as the perceived beneficiaries of this new economic

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[36] Griffin, C. (1993). *Representations of Youth: The Study of Youth and Adolescence in Britain and America* (Cambridge: Polity Press). p.63.
[37] See Goodwin, J, (1999). *Men's Work And Male Lives* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing) for various statistical reports on male unemployment in the 90s.
[38] Monk, C. (2000). p.160.

environment; in those films which tackled the issues through comedy the problems posed by the lack of social empowerment required a generic reconfiguration. Rather than positing disempowerment as problematic, films such as *Twin Town* 'address the anxieties of male viewers by portraying the young male underclass in terms of an appealing subculture of dissent from the demands of adulthood, women and work.'[39]

Those films that attempt to reconfigure the social problem of underclass masculinity within a comedic lens draw on a 'laddish' sensibility which seems to take-for-granted the unemployed status of the characters. Where those films that follow in a more social realist tradition tend to explore the rather bleak ramifications of post-industrialisation on the young male characters (for example, Liam's suicide in *My Name Is Joe* or Fag Ash's drug addiction in *TwentyFourSeven*) the more laddish comedies tend to treat unemployment, criminal activity, drug taking and the attendant iconography of poverty in a very different way. As Monk explains, the comedic narratives of these films are designed not so much to explicitly 'capitalise on male resentment of female advancement' but rather to render employment, qualifications and other signs of empowerment as 'marginal to the young male's sphere of interest.'[40] The use of comedy, irony and nostalgia circumvent any meaningful engagement with gender politics in these films. Furthermore irony is used to foreclose feminist critique by rendering it the target of what Linda Hutcheon describes as its 'evaluative edge.'[41] It is

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[39] Monk, C. (2000). p.160.
[40] Monk, C. (2000). p.160.
[41] Hutcheon, L. (1994). *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge). p.2.

this evaluative edge that gives irony its political power, as Hutcheon explains irony 'involves relations of power based in relations of communication. It unavoidably involves contentious issues such as exclusion and inclusion, intervention and evasion.'[42]

Lad culture developed in the mid-nineties, growing out of men's lifestyle magazines *Loaded* and *FHM* to become what Ian Penman described as 'the reigning cultural model.'[43] Although Whelehan's polemical stance on nineties gender politics is characterised by her pop-feminism approach, her definition of the new lad as being 'almost always white; part soccer thug, part lager lout, part arrant sexist' is incisive.[44] She goes on to define the lads' 'frame of reference [as] very clearly demarcated – sport, pop, alcohol, soft drugs, heterosex and soft porn. Further, this is the domain of the male and the male alone, where women function only as objects.'[45] Thus the regressive elements of the new lad are legitimised / depoliticised by an exaggerated ironic tone which simultaneously forecloses political critique.

Where new man was ridiculed for being contrived and overly feminized the new lad was heralded as a more authentic trope of young masculinity, as Rosalind Gill explains: 'new lad is constructed as refreshingly honest, and free from artifice.'[46] The centrality of authenticity to the construction of the new lad is demonstrative of the postmodern

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[42] Hutcheon, L. (1994). p.2.
[43] Penman, I. (1997). *Frank*, October, cited in Whelehan, I. (2000) p. 166.
[44] Whelehan, I. (2000). p.58.
[45] Whelehan, I. (2000). p.58.
[46] Gill, R. (2003). p.48.

style of this particular idiom of masculinity; while the new lad might be marketed as being an authentic rejoinder to the contrived new man this authenticity is, as the case studies demonstrate, only superficial. Further, as Benwell contends, 'it hardly needs to be pointed out that such a version of gender relations, despite its appeals to naturalness is a convenient, politically motivated construction.'[47] Lad culture is frequently described as being 'unapologetic'[48]and 'unashamed,'[49] celebrating both political incorrectness and ironic sexism and in this way too lad culture is typical of postmodern configurations of gender. Lad culture is not only inherently postmodern but also post-feminist; scholars including Benwell, Jackson et al. and Gill have demonstrated that lad culture is clearly a reaction against feminism. But, drawing on Faludi's now familiar backlash terminology, Gill concedes, 'it would be a mistake to read 'new lad' *only* in terms of a backlash against feminism'.[50] Lad culture is typified by a postmodern ambivalence towards all forms of politics (as Monk identifies when she uses the term 'post-political') but the relationship with feminism is often particularly antagonistic.[51] Given lad culture's reliance on 'images [of women] which three decades ago feminists would have denounced without hesitation' and the consistent foreclosure of feminist critique, the new lad emerges as a thoroughly post-feminist

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[47] Benwell, B. (2004). p.6.
[48] Whelehan, I. (2000). p.58.
[49] Benwell, B. (2002). 'Is there anything 'new' about these lads? The Textual and Visual Construction of Masculinity in Men's Magazines' in Litosseliti, L. & Sunderland, J. (eds.) *Gender Identity and Discourse Analysis: Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Company). p.p.151-2.
[50] Benwell, B. (2004). p.p.3-21; Benwell, B. (2002). p.p. 149-174. Faludi, S (1991). *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Chatto & Windus); Jackson, P. Stevenson, N. & Brooks, K. (2001); Gill, R. (2003). p.47.
[51] Monk, C. (2000). p.160.

form of masculinity.[52] Post-feminist culture is, despite occasional appearances to the contrary, inherently conservative as Diane Negra's work on domesticity and discourses of retreatism demonstrates.[53] Like Negra, I remain sceptical about the liberatory potential of these discourses although there are many scholars who understand post-feminism in a more positive way.[54] Thus the nostalgic 'retrosexism' of lad culture which Whelehan describes as 'militantly conservative about women, as well as defensive about the traditional qualities of the male' is readily accommodated within this cultural context.[55]

Most of the scholarship that analyses lad culture has focused on magazines and advertising (where lad culture originated). This work has been useful in defining the central characteristics of laddism as a specifically postmodern construction of masculinity and it has done much to consider the ways in which irony immures feminist critique, rendering attempts to draw attention to the more objectionable aspects of lad culture problematic by positing sexism as a 'joke' which 'dour, ageing' feminists fail to get.[56] The magazine versions of lad culture were constructed in such a way that offensive language, derogatory terms and images could be readily defended by virtue of the fact that they weren't meant to be taken seriously. In other words, in establishing an ironic tone the magazines placed their (openly sexist) content beyond

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[52] Whelehan, I. (2000). p. 59.
[53] Negra, D. (2008). *What A Girl Wants: Fantasizing the Reclamation of the Self in Postfeminism* (London: Routledge), Chapter 2.
[54] See for example, Lotz, A. (2001). 'Postfeminist Television Criticism: Rehabilitating Critical Terms and Identifying Postfeminist Attributes' in *Feminist Media Studies* 1(1).
[55] Whelehan, I. (2000). p.65.
[56] Whelehan, I. (2000). p.60.

critique. Irony it seems has become something of a get-out clause for lad culture – it is a way of dismissing the power and politics of images and media yet at the same time using this power to capitalise on a profitable market of consumers. Despite this the irony of these magazines remains, to use Jameson's phrase, ultimately blank, offering nothing more than a smug acknowledgement of its ironic-ness.

While lad culture was initially a product of the men's magazine market it proliferated across a wide range of media very quickly, altering slightly according to the specific requirements of different media forms. A number of 'laddish' personas were developed by Radio 1's Chris Moyles and Chris Evans and on television by Frank Skinner and David Baddiel among others. A televisual manifestation of lad culture was evidenced in programmes such as *Men Behaving Badly* (ITV then BBC 1, 1992-8), *Fantasy Football League* (BBC 2, 1994-6) and *Don't Forget Your Toothbrush* (Channel 4, 1994-5). Lad culture permeated all forms of British media culture in the nineties and cinema was no exception. Arguably the films that were produced during this period are not as openly sexist as men's lifestyle magazines, and doubtless this is partly because of their reliance on a wider audience in order to make profit. As such the imagery of the loud, ironically sexist, nineties lad became somewhat differently inflected on our cinema screens. The ironic tone that was such a distinctive aspect of the magazines was still present but was refracted somewhat. Rather than the hyperbolic irony of the printed word, cinema is able to draw on a range of factors including performance, cinematography and audio as well as dialogue to convey meaning. This gives films such

as *Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels* and *Trainspotting* a generalised ironic tone that infuses the entire narrative rather than the more singular explicit moments that are found in the likes of *Loaded* and *FHM.* The use of irony is particularly problematic in *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* where it legitimates a sustained repudiation of feminism while foreclosing the potential for serious political critique. From the outset both films display their postmodern sensibilities and laddish irreverence with the comic treatment of crime and drug culture respectively. From the nostalgic soundtrack to the numerous intertextual references of *Trainspotting* (including allusions to the Beatles album cover for Abbey Road) to the East End Samoan bar in *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, both films refuse to accord their narratives the gravitas that would be expected in the more 'typically' British genre of social realism.

Cinematic engagement with lad culture was actually quite wide ranging in the nineties. There are some films, such as the adaptation of Nick Hornby's lad novel *Fever Pitch*, Lock*, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* and *Trainspotting* that have come to be synonymous with cinematic articulations of lad culture but the influences extend to a number of less known films such as *Human Traffic* and *When Saturday Comes* and the sub-cycle of gangster movies that proliferated in the final years of the nineties and early 2000s. This cycle includes films such as *Final Cut* (1998), *Fast Food (1998) Love, Honour and Obey* (2000) and *Rancid Aluminium* (2000) and was widely derided for being 'numbingly repetitive' and relying on so-called 'designer violence.'[57] Lad culture

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[57] Walker, A. (2000). 'Alexander Walker Recommends...' in *The Evening Standard* May 4th.

also seems to influence the tone of a number of other films, or moments within films that otherwise don't seem to be explicitly about 'new' lads – *The Full Monty* is an obvious example but others include the drug taking and strip-club scenes in *Nil By Mouth* and the postmodern period crime film *Plunkett and MacLean* (which was based on the lives of two real highway men) which parodies the rather more sincere sensibilities of traditional heritage cinema.[58] Thus cinematic articulations of laddism were actually rather more diverse than their magazine counterparts in many ways. There are a number of important points of divergence between magazine and cinematic representations of new lads (these are picked up further in chapter three); not least among these is the difference in socio-economic status of the lads. Magazine lads were posited as active consumers, taking a certain level of affluence for granted whereas many of the cinematic new lads are hovering in the liminal space between working and underclass cultures and are thus clearly removed from the socially sanctioned forms of consumption that are proposed in magazine models of lad culture.

Chapter three, <u>Irony & Authenticity: New Lads and Underclass Youth in Nineties British Cinema</u> further elaborates on the ways in which authenticity was differently refracted in the lad films and social realist genre. In doing so I suggest that these forms of film making must be understood as articulating different responses to the shifting social and economic parameters of Britain in the nineties.

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[58] *Plunkett and McLean* continues the conventions of Gainsborough and Hammer Horror in the ways in which it uses the period setting and genre conventions.

Changing Discourses of Family and Fatherhood

'Man the tender hearted has developed, in the twentieth century, a new sentimentality that reduces, if it does not yet eliminate, the stern patriarchalism of the past.'

<div align="right">P.N Stearns (1990, p1.)</div>

The nineties was a period in which the structure of the family was (like the notion of masculinity) undergoing a shifting definition as a result of changing work patterns and the diversity of family situations that came about through divorce, remarriage and the increased social acceptance of gay relationships. The father became something of an epicentre for both the renegotiation of 'the family' and the simultaneous reconstruction of masculinity. What is particularly notable about this trend in nineties culture is, as Stella Bruzzi explains, that for the first time since second wave feminism put issues of parenting and gender on the cultural agenda, fathering was being discussed and defined as 'a male issue' and not just through the prism of women's issues.[59] Further, she states that

'fatherhood became viewed as a process of personal development, the vehicle for teaching a man how to feel. Because of the need in the 1990s to equate masculinity with feelings and emotional articulacy, it became apparent why the male whose very role is defined by nurturing, sensitivity and expressiveness became so central to these discussions.'

<div align="right">Stella Bruzzi (2005, p.156)</div>

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[59] Bruzzi, S. (2005). *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-War Hollywood* (London: BFI Publishing). p.115.

Despite the apparent post-feminist reconstruction of fatherhood the patriarchal father (in either the stern/authoritative or sensitive/nurturing form) remains key to the well being of the family and thus, symbolically to the well being of the nation state. The nuclear family unit functions as the normative pinnacle of society; when the family unit is under threat or broken, so too is the nation. As Robert Lang explains, the ideological function of the paternalistic family unit is to legitimise both heterosexuality and 'patriarchy's material and ideological legacy.'[60]

Frequently cinematic representations of fathering were, as Stearns indicates, typically remote, authoritarian figures; what is new in the nineties is not so much that fatherhood proliferated as trope of cinematic masculinities but rather that representations of fathers became increasingly diverse and the processes of fathering were posited as central dimensions of masculinity. Cinematic narratives centralised the narrative trope of the father as key site in which the various problems and crises facing men could be negotiated. The shifts that occurred in discourses around 'the family' and more specifically the role of the father within it during the course of the nineties can be traced to the emergence of the 'new' man in the middle and latter part of the eighties. The discursive configuration of new man invested in a notion of masculinity that was nurturing and emotionally sensitive. The new man was also keen to be involved in the domestic chores that had traditionally been demarcated as 'feminine'. As Estella Tincknell explains, the emergence of the sensitive new man had important implications

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[60] Lang, R. (2002). *Masculine Interests: Homoerotics in Hollywood Film* (New York: Columbia University Press). p.18.

for media representations of fatherhood; where once cinematic fathers were remote, stern and patrician, in the latter end of the eighties and early part of the nineties 'these representations underwent a fundamental shift.'[61] The centrality of fatherhood to the new man image of the period is best exemplified by the 1988 Athena poster 'l'enfant' (figure 3). This image and other similar ones that emerged at the time placed emotional sensitivity and nurturing as integral to these new forms of masculinity. Furthermore they facilitated a process whereby the representation of fatherhood became central in the reconstruction of discourses of masculinity at the end of the eighties and into the nineties. As the nineties progressed the new man evolved; his nurturing, sensitivity was re-commodified via the prism of post-feminist paternalism in order to appeal to both the female and male consumer markets.
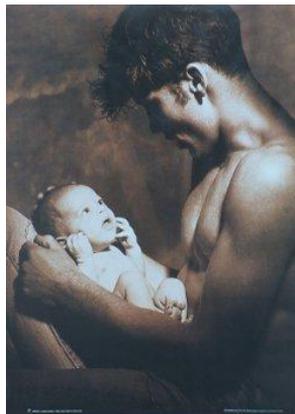
Figure 3: Athena poster *L'Enfant*

Where the reconstruction of masculinity that was the new man was assumed by many to be progressive, a number of feminist film scholars such as Tania Modleski were

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[61] Tincknell, E. (2005). *Mediating the Family: Gender, Culture and Representation* (London: Hodder Arnold). p.55.

perturbed by the ways in which narratives about men as fathers actually further

marginalised female characters in the one space where they had, traditionally, been

central.[62] In her discussion of the Hollywood movie *Three Men and A Baby* (Leonard

Nimoy, 1987) Modleski makes a similar point to Lang, explaining how the film deploys

the iconography of progressive gender politics in such a way that fundamentally

reinvests in the centrality of the patriarch.[63] Although Modleski focuses on an

American context her arguments remain salient to the situation in Britain as well

where the cinematic concern with men as fathers often required mothers to be

marginal or excluded entirely. This trend is seen in films produced throughout the

nineties from *Jack and Sarah* (where the mother dies in childbirth) to social realist films

such as *TwentyFourSeven* to comedies such as *The Full Monty* in which mother figures

remain at the peripheries of the narratives. Even in *Nil By Mouth,* a film that presents a

brutal narrative of domestic violence, the story is very much about the trauma of the

central character, Ray, and his troubled childhood and the resultant problems these

have caused him as a father himself. Thus while Ray beats his pregnant wife, Val, so

badly that she has a miscarriage it is he who remains the central narrative axis.

The discursive construction of fathering within the British social and cinematic context

is most often mediated through class and race. Invariably it seems that the further

down the socio-economic hierarchy a father is the more likely it is that he is precluded

from a narrative which imbues fathering with redemptive qualities and is instead

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[62] Modleski, T. (1991).
[63] Modleski, T. (1991). p.p.76-7.

presented as part of a wider social problem in which inadequate fathers become

coterminous with societal breakdown. Indeed the majority of cinematic fathers

represented in the nineties fall into this group, they are working or underclass men;

films such as *Jack and Sarah* which present a middle class, professional father are the

exception rather than the rule. It is notable, however, that while Jack's middle class

status facilitates his new man persona his role as chief carer for a new born baby is

represented as something he is not 'naturally' equipped to do and thus his status as

carer requires a comedic treatment. Rather more typical of nineties British cinema are

problematic, inadequate working and underclass fathers. The array of problems that

became associated with these types of male characters range from alcoholism and

drug addiction to violence and criminal behaviour. Films such as *Brassed* Off,

TwentyFourSeven, and *Raining Stones* (Ken Loach, 1993) present their male characters

as being the ones who have lost out with the rise of the post-industrial economy. Men

such as Jeff (Bruce Jones), Darcy (Bob Hoskins) and Adrian (Collin Higgins) in

TwentyFourSeven, Danny (Pete Postlethwaite) and Phil (Stephen Tompkinson) in

Brassed Off and Bob (Bruce Jones) and Tommy (Ricky Tomlinson) in *Raining Stones*

have been left unable to fulfil a traditional notion of father as breadwinner and it is

they who, arguably, have been forced into the domestic sphere of family life rather

reluctantly.

The resultant 'crises' that these various characters face are frequently blamed on the

psychological damage that is caused as a result of the discrepancies between their

ideological notions of masculinity and the disempowered position that they find themselves in. The implication in such dynamics of victimhood and blame is that this situation has occurred, partly at least, as a result of female empowerment which is cast as inevitably being achieved at the expense of men. This narrative trope of underclass father operates in stark contrast to the forms on offer to the professional or middle class new man for whom the domestic opportunities that are associated with becoming a father are presented as not only indicative of individual maturity but also as inherently recuperative.

In much the same way that youth culture is often demonised by politicians, so too 'the family' is a terrain fraught with anxiety and potential for social chaos and, as is the case with discourses about young people, it is often those families at the lower end of the socio-economic scale who are deemed most threatening to the social order. Deborah Chambers' work on the family explores the language used by politicians and policy makers and finds that:

'the carefully chosen words and phrases used...evoke notions of family crisis and moral disintegration: 'disaster', 'dissolution of the family', 'absence of fathers', 'critical threat'. They work to create a deep sense of moral anxiety around the idea that the family is permanently under siege. The main emphasis is on the problem of the man's role in the family as father. Fatherhood is singled out as the crucial part of the family under threat.'

Chambers, 2001, p4.

Chamber's statement shows how formally political discourses of fathering were also contentious during the nineties and whereas the moral panics around the decline of

the family in the eighties tended to demonise the figure of the welfare-dependant single mother the focus in the nineties was inflected more firmly on the father. Thus there were a number of factors contributing to the ways in which discourses of fathering were being negotiated and reconstructed in nineties Britain and it is these issues that many of the cinematic narratives of fatherhood are responding to and intervening in. Alongside debates about the familial role of men were renewed claims about father's rights and the problem posed by absent fathers who, Chambers goes on to explain, 'delegitimize' the family unit.[64] Tincknell highlights the paradox of this situation in which mediated narratives of fatherhood were 'increasingly visible and celebrated in contemporary popular film...while being lamented as materially absent from family life in the real world.'[65]

This contradiction is, Tincknell claims, symptomatic of the more generalised incoherence surrounding cultural ideas about masculinity which was often manifested in the form of contradictory configurations of mediated masculinities. Thus images of laddism and their attendant rejection of domestic and familial responsibility sat uneasily alongside those configurations of masculinity which centralised fathering and articulated familial relations as being 'a newly acceptable form of emotional empowerment for men.'[66] These two popular forms of mediated masculinity appear to be diametrically opposed in terms of the ways in which ideas about domesticity, family

[64] Chambers, D. (2001). *Representing the Family* (London: Sage). p.4.
[65] Tincknell, E. (2005). p.55.
[66] Tincknell, E. (2005). p.55.

and fathering are configured within their varying discourses but both are symptomatic

of the emergence of post-feminist culture and, as Stella Bruzzi terms it, a cultural

context which blamed feminism for the 'disintegration of masculinity and family

values.'[67]

Bruzzi, Modleski and Tincknell all recognise the double-edged aspects of these forms of

post feminist fathering in popular culture. The more positive forms of fathering that

were being articulated in nineties British cinema proposed a version of masculinity

which seemed to be a positive reconstruction. The traditional disciplinarian father

figure was no longer dominant; men were becoming more involved in domestic chores

and the rearing of children and this, it seemed, addressed some of the concerns that

had been raised by feminist politics since the second wave. However, as Modleski

identifies, in presenting fathers as actively engaged in domestic life popular cinema

invariably rearticulates a patriarchal hierarchy by reducing the influence and power of

women within that sphere of representation.[68] As Skeggs also explains, despite claims

around male disempowerment and unemployment, men remained able to 'gain power

(if not capital) in relationships with women.'[69] In other words, those representations

that appear to indicate some genuine progression towards gendered equality in the

home and family invariably foreclose women's voices by rendering feminist politics

obsolete; further through processes of 'feminisation' patriarchy becomes, in Tincknell's

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67 Bruzzi, S. (2005). p.155.
68 Modleski, T. (1990). p.77.
69 Skeggs, B. (1997). p.9.

words, simultaneously 'deconstructed and reconstructed' within the domestic and familial realm.[70]

The other main trope of fatherhood that proliferated in the cinematic narratives of the nineties tended to be more explicit in its engagement with feminist politics. Those fathers who were represented as disempowered and marginalised or otherwise traumatised as a result of post-industrial unemployment can be more easily read as symptomatic of a 'backlash' against feminism. Underpinning many of these narratives is the suggestion that feminism is to blame for male disempowerment. Feminism and female empowerment becomes responsible not only for the rise in male unemployment and concomitant male disempowerment, but by extension for the breakdown in family units and thus for the collapse of social morality that politicians deemed to be inflicting terminal damage upon British society.

Chapter four, Framing Fatherhood interrogates how cinematic representations were being reconfigured within the post-feminist and post-industrial context of nineties Britain. The chapter expands on the ideas outlined here about the role of the father in continuing the material and ideological legacies of patriarchy and the attendant role of the heterosexual family unit as a metaphor for the nation. This chapter further interrogates the consistent conflation of working and underclass men with negative or damaging forms of fathering.

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[70] Tincknell, E. (2005). p.60.

Discourses of 'crisis' in 90s Britain

'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.'

Michael Kimmel (1987, p121)[71]

'It seems that hardly a week can go by now without there being some kind of debate in the media about the state of the 'nineties man'.'

Nigel Edley & Margaret Wetherell (1996, p.97)[72]

Claims that masculinity was 'in crisis' were made repeatedly throughout the nineties. These claims were not confined to one national or cultural context but they are, necessarily, inflected in culturally specific ways. Within a British context the most commonly cited factors in the crisis of masculinity consistently revolved around a notion that men's social and economic power had been undermined and eroded as a result of wide ranging cultural changes. Post-industrialisation had taken a devastating toll on industrial working class communities. The decline of traditional industries resulted in large numbers of white, working class men losing their livelihoods. Many of these men had limited prospects within the new economic environment; their skills and experiences were not compatible with the demands of the emergent service sector. The seemingly indubitable consequences of post-industrialisation served to validate the discursive construction of white, working class British masculinity as being irrefutably in crisis. Further social 'symptoms' of this crisis were frequently cited in the

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[71] Kimmel, M.S. (1987). p.121.
[72] Edley, N. & Wetherell, M. (1996). 'Masculinity, Power and Identity' in Mac An Ghail, M. (ed.) *Understanding Masculinities* (Birmingham: Open University Press,). p.97.

media and often included statistics regarding the rising suicide rate among men, increased depression and mental health problems, rising crime figures and growing drug problems and inner city deprivation.[73]

During the nineties a diverse body of literature which sought to explain or understand the supposed crisis of masculinity developed. This literature came predominantly from a North American, British or Antipodean context and encompassed a variety of perspectives including pop-psychology and social sciences as well as media and arts based interventions.[74] Where politicians and the popular press and conservative scholars appeared quick to posit a causal relationship between the crisis of masculinity and societal change liberal academic responses tended to be rather more considered in their approach to the phenomenon. British sociologist, Tim Edwards, explains that the range of factors which contributed to this crisis invariably makes straightforward assumptions problematic. He states that the crisis of masculinity is

'seen to refer to factors as diverse as the impact of second wave feminism on men, competition with women either at school or at work, the escalating levels of violent acts men are seen to commit, anxieties concerning how men should act in the home or within the media, or the undermining of traditional male sex roles.'

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[73] See for example Cohen, D. (1996). 'It's a Guy Thing, Men are Depressed and that's official' in *The Guardian* 4th May 1996; Coward, R. (1994). 'Whipping Boy's Perspectives: Unemployed, Unmarriageable, criminal and above all male' in *The Guardian* 3rd September 1994; Fukuyama, F. (1997). 'Who Killed the Family?' *The Sunday Times* 21st September. See also the Guardian report on the speeches made by Lord Skidelsky and Sir Wiggin ('Devalued families' and 'Breakdown of a breakup' respectively), published 2nd April 1996.
[74] See for example Clare A. (2000); Faludi, S. (2000); Horrocks, R. (1994). *Male Myths and Icons: Masculinity in Popular Culture*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan); Solomon-Godeau, A. (1997). *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation,* (London: Thames Hudson,).

Edwards goes on to define seven key areas around which discourses of crisis were constructed: health, education, crime, sexuality, work, family and representation.[75] While each of these areas pertains to a specific set of anxieties and debates about the implications for men, they are linked by a common theme which holds that the crises facing men in late twentieth century Britain have been caused directly or exacerbated by the noxious combination of post-industrial decline and the concomitant gains of women as a result of the successes of second wave feminism. Edwards, himself critical of the claims being made regarding a wholesale crisis of masculinity, cites a wealth of examples which demonstrate how the mechanics of these discourses work to position men as less privileged than women.[76] These include evidence about how men's health and regimens of medical care are consistently poorer than women's; how men have been negatively affected by the 'near pornographic' media images of masculine 'perfection'; how men and boys are performing badly in school and more likely to be involved in crime; and how the success of feminist politics has occurred alongside post-industrialisation to undermine any sense of certainty regarding men's roles in the family or in the work place.[77]

Thus the crisis of masculinity that emerged during the latter period of the twentieth century has an intrinsic and complex relationship to feminist politics generally (and second wave feminism specifically) which is shaped, on occasion, by antagonism but

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[75] Edwards, T. (2006). p.p.8-16.
[76] Edwards, T. (2006). p.p.8-16.
[77] Edwards, T. (2006). p.p. 7-16.

more often by ambivalence. While it is tempting to read the discourses of crisis in terms of a straightforward backlash against second wave feminism, these arguments tend to be rather reductive in nature, positing a cause and effect relationship that belies the complexities of the connections and variances of the situation. Feminism becomes, to an extent, a scapegoat on which many of the problems facing men can be blamed and while this may not be surprising, given that any political agenda aimed at impacting upon women's lives is implicitly engaging with ideas about men too, the ready conflation of female empowerment with male disempowerment is symptomatic of the pervasive vilification of feminist politics within a patriarchal hegemony. As Stephen Heath explains 'men have a necessary relation to feminism, the point after all is that it should change them too.'[78] Victor Seidler, who has been involved in the critical study of masculinity since it first emerged in the eighties, goes further, contending that feminism 'deeply challenges the ways that men are and the ways that men relate.'[79] The implications of this have been subject to varying political interpretations; where liberal, progressive writers and scholars, including Edwards, Seidler and Connell, saw the potential for change as something to be not only welcomed but celebrated there are an equal number of people who take a more conservative, masculinist view point which interprets this potential as insidious and damaging to men. Sally Robinson explicates the relationship between crisis and feminism further: feminism rendered

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[78] Heath, S. (1987). 'Male Feminism' in Jardine, A. & Smith, P. *Men in Feminism* (London; Meuthen). p.1.
[79] Seidler,V. (1990). 'Men, Feminism and Power' in Hearn, J. & Morgan, D. (eds.) *Men, Masculinities and Social Theory* (London: Unwin Hyman) p.215.

masculinity visible, 'embodied in gendered and racialised terms,'[80]and in doing so

feminist politics 'call[ed] into question the privileges of unmarkedness' that had

hitherto benefited white men within a patriarchal culture.[81]

Masculinist responses to feminism, like discourses of crisis, inflected in nationally

specific ways despite their ideological proximity. The North American mythopoetic

men's movement, which became synonymous with Robert Bly, was couched in the

language of pop-psychology. It drew on a cultural context of frontier masculinity which

had no obvious point of comparison or connection within a British context.[82] The idea

that feminism held only negative potential for men are refracted rather differently

within a British context. Geoff Dench, Melanie Phillips and Christina Hoff Somers have

all been influential figures in forming a British masculinist response to the apparently

pernicious effects of neo-liberal ideologies.[83] The rhetoric of this literature is

unapologetically anti-feminist and conservative. Phillips' polemic, for example,

expounds on how the British state has become increasingly feminised and how, in turn,

this has served to alternately emasculate or demonise men.[84] Christina Hoff Sommers

has also contributed to the debate, arguing that feminism has not only damaged men

and discriminated against them but, further, it has disrupted the 'natural' social order

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[80] Robinson, S. (2000). p.1.
[81] Robinson, S (2000). p.1.
[82] Bly, R. (1990).
[83] Dench, G (1994). Hoff Sommers, C. (2000); Phillips, M. (1999). *The Sex Change Society: Feminised Britain and the Neutered Male* (London: Social Market Foundation).
[84] Phillips, M. (1999).

by destabilising the social, economic and familial roles of men and women.[85] While many of these latter examples are characterised by their opposition to the perceived damage caused brought about by the success of feminism and thus are clearly part of a quasi backlash rhetoric it is, perhaps, more productive to understand the debates within the broader parameters of post-feminism. The concept of backlash, which was popularised by Faludi, implies a rather straightforward process of systemic repudiation. Couched in hyperbole, Faludi explains that the backlash constitutes a 'counterassault on women's rights, a backlash, an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard won victories the feminist movement did manage to win for women.'[86]

Post-feminism, however, posits a rather more complex matrix of relationships and tensions between patriarchal ideologies of gender and feminist politics. Post-feminism is, largely, characterised by a negative definition of feminism and feminist politics as theorists including McRobbie, Tasker and Negra have explained.[87] Crucially this repudiation relies upon a tacit understanding of feminism as no longer necessary. As Tasker and Negra explain, this involves a number of interwoven discursive components including the 'valorisation of female achievement within traditionally male working environments.'[88] Furthermore 'post-feminist culture works in part to incorporate,

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[85] Hoff Sommers, C. (2000). But see also Vilar, E. (2008). *The Manipulated Man* (3rd ed.) (London: Pinter & Martin Ltd); Nathanson, P. Young, K. (2002). *Spreading Misandry: The Teaching of Contempt for Men in Popular Culture* (Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press); Phillips, M. (1999).
[86] Faludi, S. (1993). p.13.
[87] McRobbie, A. (2004); Negra, D. & Tasker, Y. (2006).
[88] Tasker, Y. & Negra, D. (2006). p.1.

assume or naturalise aspects of feminism,'[89] in such a way that leads McRobbie to note

that post-feminism emphasises how feminism is 'no longer needed,' it becomes

undone and 'made to seem redundant.'[90] Narratives of films such as *The Full Monty* are

predicated precisely on this premise; the 'common sense' acknowledgement of

feminist success is paramount to the claims of crisis on the part of the male

characters.[91] The discussion of masculinity as being in crisis becomes imbricated in

what Angela McRobbie terms the 'double entanglement' of post-feminist culture;[92] in

casting feminism as the overarching cause of the crisis of masculinity the discursive

construction of crisis relies upon a notion of feminism as successful and having

achieved empowerment for women at the expense of men. In mobilising a dynamic by

which feminism is demonised as one of the fundamental root causes of the problems

besetting nineties men feminism becomes contiguous with the breakdown of society

that has been precipitated as a result of these problems. Thus the claiming of a crisis in

masculinity relies on an appropriation of male victimhood that has come about as a

result of (successful) feminism in order to claim that men are now the disempowered

victims of an unequal gender hierarchy. Robinson's allusion to a 'master narrative of

white male decline in post-sixties America' resonates within a British context;[93] the

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[89] Tasker, Y. & Negra, D. (2006). p.2.
[90] McRobbie, A. (2006). 'Post Feminism and Popular Culture; Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime' in Tasker, Y. & Negra, D. (eds.) *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (London: Duke University Press). p.27.
[91] A rather differently refracted relationship to post-feminism and gender politics is evidenced in the 'laddish' films of the decade. The ironic tone of films such as *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* is implicated in the 'double entanglement' of post-feminism (McRobbie, 2006, p.27) and relies upon an acknowledgment of feminist ideas in order to eschew them.
[92] McRobbie, A. (2007). p.28.
[93] Robinson, S. (2000).p.2.

disempowered, disenfranchised white man has become as much a symbol for the decline of the British way of life as it has the American and within British films the narratives of crisis are dominated by white men whose place within the cultural status quo is no longer assured.[94] Despite some similarities the cinematic manifestations of crisis retain elements of cultural specificity. Many of the texts that Robinson interrogates appear to use crisis as a narrative device designed to re-centre the white man at the hegemonic core of American culture. Within British cinema crisis is deployed to rather different ends; the tropes of crisis are more commonly seen in relation to lower class male characters. These men are the ones who have been disempowered and whose social and economic status has been most severely curtailed by the cultural changes that have taken place in Britain. As such, these male characters function as a testimony to the destruction wrought by Thatcherism. Moreover, as I have previously noted, Spicer explains, that it is the counter-hegemonic status of these forms of male character that is most important: 'his representativeness comes through his social marginality, not, as in previous periods, through his ability to express an acceptable standard.'

The claims of male victimhood and the articulation of crisis within British cinema of the nineties demand further interrogation within the context of post-feminist culture. A plethora of films from this period take their narrative starting point from an assumption that white British male power has been compromised and reduced by the

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[94] Robinson, S. (2000). p.2.

combined forces of post-industrialisation and women's liberation. While the majority

of these images of masculinity seem to concur with the basic premise that men were

facing a whole range of problems commonly associated with the discourses of crisis the

political impetus behind these narratives is, I contend, more troublesome and in need

of further interrogation.[95] In presenting images of masculinity as disempowered or in

crisis these narratives invariably revolve around an assumption that the fundamental

power structures of patriarchy have been broken.[96] Further, in appearing to have

questioned and broken these structures the cinematic narratives of crisis become

complicit in heralding the arrival of new forms of gendered hierarchies which are in

fact, only illusory. There is a danger in assuming that these discourses of a visible,

apparently disempowered masculinity are evidence of a genuine reduction in the social

power of men and patriarchal culture. As Robinson argues 'while it is true that "crisis"

might signify a trembling of the edifice of white and male power, it is also true that

there is much symbolic power to be reaped from occupying the social and discursive

position of subject-in-crisis.'[97] The three case study chapters foreground different

aspects of male responses to the apparent shifts in social and economic power that

were pervading British culture at the time.

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[95] As previously stated my concern is not so much with the questions as to whether the claims of crisis are valid in a sociological or material sense rather my abiding interest is in interrogating the political implications of crisis as a symbolic trope of masculinity.

[96] In other words the claims of crisis with which I am concerned are inherently post-feminist in the way that they assume the success of second wave feminism in breaking down traditional forms of patriarchy

[97] Robinson, S. (2000). p.9.

Andrew Spicer's account of the tropes of masculinity that proliferated within nineties

British cinema demonstrates the pervasive nature of crisis narratives. Many of the

types of masculinity that he identifies are frequently constructed in such a way that

makes a straightforward connection between ideas about the crisis of masculinity and

a loss of male power. He describes, for example, how the type of masculinity he terms

'the underclass everyman' gains his representativeness through his marginality.[98]

Spicer explains that these male characters are

'adrift in a society represented as hopelessly run-down. Their male confidence is
eroded because they lack the traditional strengths of working class masculinity; a
secure place as the principal breadwinner and head of the family, and comradeship
with mates at work or in a union.'[99]

The sociosomatic effects of this scenario are played out in the narrative of *Brassed Off*

when Phil (having lost his job, his family and most of his possessions to debt collectors)

has a breakdown that culminates in a failed suicide bid. *Brassed Off* is typical in that it

makes connections between the decimation of industry and the concomitant loss of

social and economic power with the crisis of white British masculinity. Crisis

masculinities are in evidence in a range of films across a variety of genres from the

comedies such as *The Full Monty* to gangster films such as *Face* and numerous social

realist films such as *TwentyFourSeven*. Spicer's work is particularly helpful for the way

in which it distinguishes these forms of crisis masculinity from another related trope

which he terms 'damaged men'.[100] This form of masculinity is, in Spicer's opinion 'so

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[98] Spicer, A. (2000). p.188.
[99] Spicer, A. (2000). p.188.
[100] Spicer, A. (2000). p.195.

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frequent in recent British cinema that it could be said he has become its most

representative image.'[101]

While there are numerous films which represent men who are in crisis or suffering in

some way the term 'damage' does not apply equally to them all and although it is

beneficial at this point to briefly explain the key distinctions I elaborate on this in the

course of chapter five. Where narratives of crisis lent themselves to commercial

exploitation the cinematic configurations of the damaged men were rather less

appealing to mainstream sensibilities. Where crisis masculinities were found in a range

of genres including comedies and mainstream dramas 'damaged' men are most often

portrayed in the bleaker 'social realist' films or in films which are situated more as 'art'

cinema than mainstream fare. Many of these films are confrontational and unremitting

in the ways in which they tackle violence, sexual abuse, drug abuse and alcoholism. The

portrayals are often far more visceral and explicit than those films which present a

more diluted narrative of crisis, films, like *The Full Monty*, that Monk describes as

transforming 'the problems of male unemployment and social exclusion and related

psychic crises into incongruously feel good comedy.'[102] The men in both *Brassed Off*

and *The Full Monty,* for example, are clearly suffering the consequences of post-

industrialisation, they are disempowered and bereft of hope, but their responses to

their situation distinguish them from the violent, destructive 'damaged' men. The light-

hearted nature of these films and their positioning within the more mainstream genre

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[101] Spicer, A. (2000). p.195.
[102] Monk, C. (2000). p.159.

of comedy demands that these men do not respond to their situations with the forms

of resentment, retaliation and violence that are the signature trope of 'damaged'

masculinities. Films such as *The Full Monty* deploy what Spicer terms 'Ealingesque

whimsy' in order to deliver a fantasy ending which has successfully circumvented the

need for long term consequence or resolution.[103] The films which narrativise the

damaged man on the other hand are characterised by their uncompromising

interventions into the psychosomatic consequences of social and economic alienation.

Films such as *Nil By Mouth* present male characters that are emotionally inarticulate

and psychologically unstable; these men can fluctuate between the depths of

despondency and violent outbursts with very little provocation.

'Damaged' men are, like the men in so many of the other social realist films of the

nineties, marginalised and disempowered by the processes of post-industrialisation

and the economic and social poverty that this has wrought on them as individuals and

their communities as a whole. They are predominantly situated in an urban or

suburban landscape and on the whole are living a hand-to-mouth existence, frequently

engaging in low level crime, drug and alcohol abuse, they have become totally

alienated from the aspirational consumer culture that surrounds them. In many ways

these men are descendent from those found in the post-war tenements and slums and

depicted in films such as *Cathy Come Home* (Ken Loach, 1966), their culture and their

lives are situated at the very bottom of the socio-cultural hierarchy and the men

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[103] Spicer, A. (2001). p.190.

themselves are often represented as compensating for their apparent lack of social power by exerting physical domination and violence over their wives, dependents and any other individual who has even less power than themselves. It is these men that I focus on in chapter five and explore the nuances and complexities that are brought to bear through the paradoxical interplay between agent and victim.

The films that I interrogate in chapter five reject the ironic comedies of disempowerment offered by films such as *Human Traffic* or *Twin Town* and instead present images of masculinity that explicitly politicise the social context of post-industrialisation and the socio-somatic damage that these economic shifts have caused to white working class men. Social realism is, historically, a politically motivated genre which seeks to posit direct links between cinematic narratives and the cultural context; as a cinematic form British social realism is traditionally driven by an openly socialist agenda. Framing narratives of male disempowerment within a comedic framework is largely incompatible with the political critique that informs social realist film making. Stylistically then, the social realist portrayals of men in crisis are at odds with laddish films such as *Twin Town* which insist on appropriating the terms of male dispossession and framing the economic and social problems through an ironic lens for comic effect. This chapter has outlined some of the links between the textual and contextual aspects of my thesis and has established some of the basic connections between the various chapters and outlined some of the central thematic concerns of this research. Key among these is establishing the changing contours of Britain and British national

identities during the nineties; as I have shown much was in flux both internally and with regards to the role of the nation within the wider global hierarchy. Domestically the cultural and economic changes of post-industrialisation / deindustrialisation appeared to combine with a surge in neo-liberal ideologies which served to devalue and destabilise the meanings and social functions of masculinity. Furthermore this chapter explains the ways in which discourses of masculinity and crisis are refracted in a nationally specific context. Foregrounding the links between national identity and discourses of masculinity explicates the political, social and cultural context of Britain in the nineties. Moreover this establishes the specificity of gender discourses and the discursive construction of male identities or characters as being 'in crisis.' In outlining the idiomatic construction of mediated forms of masculinity this chapter establishes the broad parameters in which the following chapters must be understood as rehearsing and reconstructing ideas about masculinity.