Broken Heroes: the crisis of masculinity in post-2000 Hollywood film

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Abstract

This thesis examines representations of masculinity in post-2000 Hollowood film and critically reports what these films reveal about the current crisis of masculinity. The major domains for this analysis are representations of the body, technology and violence as they relate to masculinity. These representations are considered using social and psychological theories, as well as film and gender studies to make the findings relevant on a psycho-social level. This thesis explores a lack of intimacy between men and others, seen as a failure to secure satisfaction through traditional ideals of masculinity. This study also considers the commodification of the body which creates a malaise that fails to solve related issues of personal happiness and social relations. Further analysis reveals representations that suggest technology steps in to provide a 21st century solution to a lack of intimacy, failing to recuperate the loss in personal relations. Lastly, violence is represented as another failed masculine solution. The focus is on the consequences of the violence, rather than the violence itself. These representations question and query hegemonic masculinity and reflect significant issues relating to the crisis of masculinity in the post-2000 era.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except when explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning

Signed:

Patrick Usmar

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Chapter 1: Overview of Research

1. The purpose and scope of this research

The purpose of this thesis is to examine post-2000 Hollywood film and discern how representations of masculinity reflect the crisis of masculinity. A range of issues have been explored as they relate to masculine identity, using the core research question:

> How do post-2000 Hollywood films represent heroic or dominant masculine figures in film and what questions or subversions do these representations raise about the crisis of masculinity?

This research investigates Hollywood film where heroes or male figures do not experience the same pay off that is the norm in traditional cinematic narratives. Three films are analysed: *Don Jon* (2013), *Drive* (2011) and *The Wrestler* (2008). Even in narratives that utilise traditional heroic tropes, post-2000 heroes are not rewarded as they were in previous decades. Cinematic satisfaction is therefore not reached. This research considers social narratives where neat endings are not forthcoming, as apparent in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or in the pervasiveness of consumerism for example, as being reflected in popular American film. As mainstream Hollywood film is still largely dominated by men, with an almost exclusively dominant masculine style, the potential for this to be related to masculine ideals, identity and crisis seemed logical. The scholarship highlighted in this thesis coheres with the idea that a "cultural crisis of confidence in masculinity [has] translated into open questioning of the social definitions of manliness" (Hatty, 2000, p. 139). The crisis of masculinity may be reliably located in representations of masculinity in film, and if this is the case, there will be rich connections to social climate. These issues range from global financial instability, increased difficulty in justifying patriarchal power and US foreign policy at war. These issues will be

examined through a thematic analysis of three films which feature dominant or heroic masculine figures. It is this thesis' hypothesis that as certain social issues reach potentially irrecuperable heights, representations of masculinity will reflect this in the relative failure of heroes or male figures.

In 21st century Western culture the media and its content have never been more ubiquitous. This analysis studies popular American film with its almost infinite distribution options. Reflections that the films provide about social currents and the lived experience of men are more pronounced and pervasive than at any point in history. It is vital therefore to continue to take the temperature of social climate and reveal what popular culture—in this case Hollywood film— suggests or reflects about these currents. The crisis of masculinity is not a new phenomenon, but social causes and the ways in which it manifests are always changing. As Western culture has moved further towards the right in global ideological terms, more tension arises about how to perform masculine values in a culture that demands so much from its members in order for the commercial and financial systems of capitalism to profit. Not only in financial terms but a right-leaning ideology leaves less space for new and more flexible versions of masculinity to develop. The crisis of masculinity can manifest in everything from confusion about a man's place in the workplace and at home, to the formation of aggressive anti-feminist men's rights groups. This thesis also argues that these films represent difficulties in reconciling the persistent ideals of traditional masculinity. Rather than there being a threat to the patriarchy, it is the increased transparency of the illegitimacy of patriarchal power, which may be reflected in the failure of traditional masculine values to redeem the men in the films of this study. Upholding traditional values, and aligned associated behaviours, may result in contradictory or negative outcomes for men and wider society.

1.1 Situating the researcher in the study

I was a teenager for most of the 1990s, these were formative years. My favourite film of that decade was *Heat* (1995) starring Robert De Niro and Al Pacino and I am still drawn to the alternative or anti-hero versions of masculinity in film. *Heat* (1995) ends with De Niro's disciplined criminal mastermind, a violent, stoic and clever anti-hero is shot dead by Pacino's hot-headed but single-minded police detective. They are presented as equals in the film, just on different sides of the law. To this day I still switch the film off before De Niro's character (Neil) is killed. In my mind, this solemn and convincing anti-hero should somehow be allowed to sail off into the sunset. However, to my academic mind, this represents some part of me that craves reassurance that 'everything will be ok', and that sometimes we look at mythic heroic structures in our culture just to check that everything *is* ok.

The recuperation of order is present in *Heat* (1995); the bad guy does not prevail, and in general terms redemption comes. In some ways growing up, this was reassuring. As an adult, the formation and shaping of my male identity is a continual work in progress, assimilating new information to adapt and improve. Recently I have observed many mainstream films reflect the unsatisfactory resolution of the hero's journey. Early on in the study I watched Martin Scorsese's *The Departed* (2006), a slick gangster outing with interwoven plots and gritty dominant masculine performances interspersed with graphic and brutal violence, not unlike the same director's earlier work in *Goodfellas* (1990). There is however, one key difference—in *The Departed* (2006) almost all of the characters are dead by the close of the film, no single male character is convincingly portrayed as the hero, regardless of their adherence to hegemonic masculine tropes of dominance over women, other men or acts of violent behaviour. All the male characters, on whichever side of the law, are portrayed as broken, corrupt and lost. Film representations that subvert dominant ideas of masculinity, may signal the possibility that

monolithic structures of masculinity—that are perpetuated by the systems that benefit from them— will not 'save the day'. It is these growing themes of loss and confusion, as it relates to masculinity, that I increasingly noticed in post-2000 films and decided to explore.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

This thesis will firstly highlight and summarise the relevant social climate in the post-2000 era in order to contextualise masculinity in contemporary American culture. This is not only in order to situate the production context of the films themselves, but also to locate social currents that may be reflected or impact on the examination of representations of the crisis of masculinity. The literature review then examines social, psychological and film theories as well as gender studies concepts as they relate to film and masculinity. The methodology chapter will outline the means and methodological framework through which the analysis will be conducted. The first analysis chapter investigates representations of masculinity through images of the body. It pays attention to the destruction of the male body and how constructs of masculinity are reflected through modes of hypermasculinity and commodification. The second analysis chapter examines the relationship between technology and masculinity. It places emphasis on the displacement of intimate relations with others onto internet-connected technologies. The third analysis chapter looks at the enactment of violence by and on male characters, and the repercussions for male identity and intimacy. In the conclusion section, intersecting themes from all analysis chapters are summarised. An assessment is then made of the original purpose of this study, as well as the potential for future research.

Chapter 2: Context

2. Introduction

This chapter will present the relevant socio-political context in which the films examined in this thesis were produced. Focus will be given to those social issues and conditions that have had a significant impact on the study of masculinity, but also on the lived experience of men in American culture. Attention will be given to issues mostly relating to a US context, with relevant material from a global context referenced where appropriate.

2.1 American families

The family is a critical area to contextualise masculinity studies because it is often the first place men are socialised, learning from their fathers as their most influential role model. Families are "unities formed by groups of persons connected by blood or affinity" (Aitken, 2007, p. 182) and as such there are more recognised divergent structures than ever before, such as blended families and cohabiting parents (Cherlin, 2010). In terms of married families, divorce has actually declined since its peak of approximately 50% in 1980, to somewhere now between 40-50% (Cherlin, 2010). People are generally getting married later, the exception being the less educated. This is notable because if at least one spouse has a college degree, the marriage is significantly less likely to end in divorce (McLanahan, 2004). Roughly half a century ago, families tended to have two parents regardless of their level of income, yet in the post-2000s era the economic and educational status of a family has a marked effect on the longevity of their marriage (McLanahan, 2004). Less educated people on lower incomes are more likely to get married at a young age, but are more likely to divorce (Cherlin, 2010). This is significant because it begins to contextualise the family in terms of the labour market and education levels.

Ellwood & Jencks (2004) argue that since the automation of production, ostensibly brought about by the trend in globalisation beginning in the 1970s, opportunities have decreased, especially for men who do not have college degrees. By 1996 "the average 30-year-old man with a high school degree earned 20% less than a comparable man in 1979" (Levy, 1998, p. 35). Scholarship argues that if the criteria for a prospective partner were, in part, a stable income, this might make prospective husbands less appealing as a result of changes in the labour market (Cherlin, 2010; Levy, 1998). Research reveals that tensions are further created as well-educated and high earning men and women consolidate their position, by increasingly marrying within their educational and income demographics (Cherlin, 2010). Scholarship positions these tensions of masculinity and the family within the framework of the patriarchal bargain that was struck, and was still in a precarious position by the end of the 20th century (Aitken, 2007; Faludi, 1999). The patriarchal bargain stemmed from an oppressive social system in America that placed emphasis on the man as the breadwinner and provider of shelter. In return, the woman provided domestic services and subordination (Aitken, 2007). Women and men are largely unable to uphold both sides of the bargain which creates tensions as "[a]wkward spaces and uneasy fits are created as men grapple with contradictions" (Aitken, 2007, p. 184). Men's position in the broader blue collar labour market is diminishing (Cherlin, 2010), whereas women are increasingly balancing the struggle between earning money for the family and domestic care. There are contradictions in the push and pull between the struggle to maintain the patriarchal bargain, and the re-negotiation of new terms. In these shifting tides there are those that argue that men have evolved from "distant breadwinner" (Aitken, 2007, p. 184) to an emotionally giving role model. This contextualises tensions and frustrations that reverberate across masculinity in terms of the role of men in the family and their representation in American culture.

There is also a growing issue with an aging population. As men grow older they tend not to have the same support structures in place to take care of them (Lin, 2008). In many cases, older men do not have the same bonds with their children that older women do, and so they struggle. In Newman's (2003) ethnographic study of men in their 50s and 60s in poor health, it revealed at times they "showed up at the doors of ex-girlfriends or ex-wives and asked to be taken in" (Cherlin, 2010, p. 414; Newman K. , 2003). American women are experiencing greater financial independence in the post-2000 era and are therefore more able to decide if the father stays. Issues with men bonding with their family can also be brought about by the defence of dominant hegemonies, for example, when fathers react badly to their sons coming out as gay (Skelton & Valentine, 2005). Scholars argue that "fatherhoods built upon caring and nurturing masculinities create the space for negotiation, acceptance and rewarding relationships" (Aitken, 2007, p. 184). Faludi (1999) argues that many men find domestic work harder than paid work. So even when growing literature lauds the changing domesticated father, there remains a disparity that creates tension between what men 'do' and their position in the family (Aitken, 2007; Skelton & Valentine, 2005).

2.2 Culture wars

It is useful to highlight wider cultural tensions when moving away from the family context. The culture wars, for example, can be defined as the political, social and cultural division in contemporary US society, played out in the democratic machinations of debate, lobbying, legislation, protest and the expression of these social issues through cultural product (Chapman, 2010; Chomsky, 2003). The culture wars allow for fronts of ideological divides between, broadly speaking, progressive and conservative thinking. In many senses culture wars allow for divisions not reliant on class, gender or religion, but encompass cultural divides across issues including abortion, homosexual rights, the

environment, gun laws or family values (Chapman, 2010). There are myriad grey areas, political affiliations and variations, and any individual may vary in their views across the spectrum between Conservative and Progressive (Woolfolk, 2004). Whilst a spectrum exists, this polarisation is evident in tensions across key issues including taxation, gender equality or healthcare.

The idea remains that over the last 20 years at least, conservatism has slowly taken hold. Corporations have infiltrated corridors of power and their influence, through financial might and technological sophistication, has had an undue influence on social and political policy. This therefore serves the needs of 'The Market' (Chomsky, 2003) and facilitated rampant consumerism (Jameson, 2003). Woolfolk (2004) also argues that these culture wars are not set out across such obvious divisions. For example, anti-libertarians neo-conservatives, the religious right and environmentalists might be "characterized as united in their opposition to the excesses of the libertarians" (Woolfolk, 2004, p. 42). These divisions relate to power structures still largely dominated by men as part of a patriarchal Western socio-political framework (Jeffords, 1994).

2.3 Commodification of counterculture

A seam of social and political history that runs through this cultural divide lies in the counter-culture movement which was influential in the mid to late 20th century (Lawler, 2002). From counterculture's roots in the 1950's and into the late 1970's, it "created a powerful trend toward a liberation ethic of individual self-expression, anti-establishment sentiment, emotional atunement to the world, and the personal pursuit of pleasure" (Rutherford, 2008, p. 9). This was in response to the growing conformity and materialism following World War II (Chapman, 2010). Scholars argue that many tenets of counterculture have been subsumed and commodified by capitalist culture, and that this has created vast social tensions (Hijiya, 2003; Lawler, 2002; Rutherford, 2008; Woolfolk,

2003). In 2002 Woolfolk argued that late-capitalist society has become "dominated by self-obsessions" (p. 42). Postmodern Western society has become infinitely more narcissistic in the pursuit of "therapeutic" (p. 42) self-fulfilment. Stemming from the commodification of values from the counterculture movement, being spiritually and emotionally fulfilled has ultimately created a more restless and demanding society, where producers (the labour force) became pre-occupied with consumption and primarily whose role has become that of consumer (Rutherford, 2008). Rutherford cites the UK survey *Changing Lives,* conducted by the Future Foundation, which shows the number one wish for interviewees was for "personal fulfilment" (as cited in Rutherford, 2008, p. 12).

2.4 Objectification of men

The collision of market forces such as mass consumption as mandatory to the proliferation and survival of capitalism and the trend towards narcissistic, self-fulfilment and self-aggrandisement, can be seen in the cultural trends towards body-image and seeking physical perfection (Craine & Aitken, 2004; Gauntlett, 2002). Rosin (2012) argues the coagulation of these forces results in "ornamental masculinity" (p. 9); a phenomenon which emerged in the late 1990s. As men lost some of their territory in the traditionally masculine dominated area of the workplace, they were left with the "mancessories" (p. 9) of 'manliness', such as the role of playing the thug, and the acquisition of pick-up trucks and power tools (Rosin, 2012).

In the 2000s the male body came under far greater scrutiny (Craine & Aitken, 2004). It became a focus, something that men were now culturally mandated to control, manipulate and constantly improve, not only for the subjective sake but also to satisfy the wider cultural gaze (Gauntlett, 2002). This followed a period in 1990s popular culture where emphasis shifted to sensitivity, emotions and the "new man" (Jeffords, 1994). The male body became something to be worshipped, particularly following the events of 9/11 and

the subsequent wars. There was a resurgence in the male body as a symbol of US military might (Kaplan, 2005). It became increasingly necessary that all men achieved perfection and it was deemed physical perfection was attainable by all (Gauntlett, 2002). This is reflected in cultural product, especially in advertising and film.

The pursuit of perfection in appearance is evident in the increase of plastic surgery in men; particularly men in their middle-years as they "line up for face-lifts, Botox and liposuction" (Rosin, 2012, p. 30). Rosin (2012) compares the 1986 *People* magazine's 'Sexiest Man Alive', Mark Harmon, "who had so much back hair it was visible from the front" (p.31), with today's sensitive 'hunks' who sport well-defined abdominal muscles and hairless bodies. Ross (2010) argues that these impossible "bodily tyrannies" (p. 52) are a major feature of advertising grooming products, the "largely mythical six-pack" (p. 52) and the ubiquity of semi-naked male bodies, which have spread through advertising into most facets of popular culture. The contemporary male attributes of "strong jaw, soft eyes, and skin, which conveys both strength and tenderness" (Ross, 2010, p.53) have set a standard in 21st century popular culture. The assumption, as perpetuated in cultural product, is "we assume that anyone these days can adopt a regime that will make them look more slim, athletic, or muscular" (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 114). Whilst the pursuit of bodily regimes as a condition of contemporary Western culture is not a recent phenomenon, the pervasive obsession with their pursuit, is.

The sexual objectification of men through bodily regimes for consumption by women and other men is not new. In some ways at least "men's bodies are as colonised and marketed as are women's" (Miller, 2001a, p. 281). The idea that men's bodies might be moving towards being as objectified as women's, is valuable context for this analysis. Indeed "the giddy proliferation of homoerotic, idealized male images in advertising, TV, and film is triumphant in the complete objectification of all men's bodies, straight or gay, as

something to be bought, taken home, eaten, and fucked" (Miller, 2001a, p. 281). Gianatasio (2013) calls the proliferation of such images in the advertising industry "hunkertising" (p. 26). Gianatasio characterises this as the "disproportionate number of buff, often-shirtless studs [are] lately popping up in ads from salad dressing to air freshener" (p. 26). Another characteristic of this evolution is the departure from more conventional brand associations. Hunkvertising, or male sexual imagery, is now more widely associated with consumer products not normally promoted in this way. Cooper (2013) argues that, "it would appear the better-looking men segment of the gender is still good for something" (p. 4). This air of flippancy prevails in the campaigns themselves, and in much of the advertising industries' comments about them, including copywriter Rebecca Cullers' statement, "don't overthink it" (as cited in Gianatasio, 2013, p. 28). She claims that we should not be surprised women (and some men) like to look at attractive men. In a Renuzit (a type of air freshener sold in the US) print advertisment, there is a good looking, six-packed, sensitive looking hunk who takes up the majority of the shot (the product is hardly visible), accompanied by the tagline, "Look at this gorgeous air freshener, next to this gorgeous man" (Gianatasio, 2013, p. 29). Rohliger (2002) argues that in simple market force terms, women have spending power too now and "in response to this economic shift, advertisers adapted commercial imagery to appeal to a generation of 'liberated' women, who made and spent their own earnings" (p. 61). Whatever the scholarly argument for "pecvertising" (Cooper, 2013, p. 35), it creates tensions within representations of masculinity and the commodification of the body, as these physiques are largely unobtainable (Ross, 2010).

2.5 Pornography

In terms of commodification of the body, the sexual objectification of women is a major context in the study of masculinity, particularly in relation to dominant ideas of

heterosexual masculinity, because at some point in the history of pornography, it "passed from obscurity into a contemporary mainstream phenomenon" (Gubar & Hoff, 1989, p. 17). Karen Boyle partially sums up the feminist objections to pornography, stating it reduces women to commodified objects and provides men with "the use of the female body for their arousal or amusement" (Boyle, 2010, p. 1). Perhaps part of the causality here is also that research shows the content in pornography has intensified with images of sexism and racism to "heighten the sexual charge" (Jensen, 2012, p. 111). These tensions intersect in the argument put forward by Jensen (2012) when he imagines a society where finally "empathy, compassion and solidarity–the things that make decent human society possible–are finally and completely overwhelmed by a self-centred, emotionally detached pleasure-seeking" (p. 106). There is no doubt that the increasing availability of the internet, and associated Internet Connected Technologies (ICTs) such as laptops, mobile phones, tablets and so on, have set a course for the "explosion of sexually explicit materials" (Williams, 2004, p. 2). Access to, and familiarity with, pornography is wider than in any point in history (Boyle, 2010). Pornography has adopted the production values more readily associated with Hollywood movies and producers are "becoming more extreme in their offerings" (Neely, 2010, p. 91). Jensen (2012) argues that the extremes that pornography is reaching, still predominantly but not exclusively created for the heterosexual male, is "what the end of the world looks like" (p. 105). Pornography is so tightly focused on self-centred gratification of the heterosexual western male, it provides a useful context in studying masculinity. Rosin (2013) argues that young boys moving into manhood from their late teens are so enamoured, so entrenched with the digital worlds of porn (ever on call by laptop or cell phone), video games and 'hooking up culture' that synaptic paths are being set that preclude them from the ability to form meaningful or lasting face-to-face relationships. They are beginning to lack the capacity to engage in romantic relationships, particularly where women are of equal status.

2.6 Men's rights groups

Shifts in the status of women have ripple effects across social and political organisations in society. One way of revealing this is to look at the rhetoric and discourse of tensions that surround men's rights groups. There are crucial distinctions between various men's movements. Mythopoetic men, (popular in the US in the late 1970s and 1980s) were remembered for their wildman retreats and sweat lodges, and claim to be pro-feminist. These characteristics overlap more with feminist and gay movements than with their anti-feminist cousins (Fox, 2004). Critics argue, however, that these groups are a "means of taming men" with patriarchal bargains (Hogan, 2000; Messner, 1997) There is further criticism of the mythopoetic movement that it is homophobic and racist (Brown, 1992, Connell, 1995). Representatives of the pro-feminist men's rights groups support these criticisms, yet mythopoetics themselves argue they are more moderate and try to support the growth of men, rather than the fall of women (Fox, 2004). Pro-feminist groups largely acknowledge both male privilege and how men have disproportionate power in a male-dominated society (Kaufman, 1994). Of greatest contention, are the men's rights groups who largely believe that feminism and pro-feminism have gone too far, having eroded men's rights and what it is to be masculine. Whilst views vary across these groups, by taking a barometer of their rhetoric and discourse, evidence of disconcerting trends are presented (Dragiewicz, 2010; Fox, 2004; Mann, 2008).

In Canada in 2010 'Sexual Assault Voices of Edmonton' ran a campaign discouraging sexual assault against women, entitled "Don't Be That Guy". It targeted 18-25 year old men, emphasising their responsibility not to sexually assault women. The ads featured tag lines including, "Just because she's drunk, doesn't mean she wants to f**k" and "just because she isn't saying no…doesn't mean she is saying yes" (Daro, 2014). Tensions were raised when the Mens Rights Activism (MRA) group 'Men's Rights Canada', aped the campaign and stated, through spokesperson Alison Tieman that it was "explicitly

intended to be offensive to draw attention to the offensiveness of the originals" (Daro, 2014). The overall sense of these types of men's rights groups, with their obvious misogynist tone is comparable to the Holocaust deniers of gender inequality (Dragiewicz, 2010; Maddison, 1999). This is particularly evident in men's rights groups' rhetoric on domestic violence, where they argue that men are much greater victims of domestic violence than is publicly acknowledged and that there is an 'anti-man' conspiracy campaign to deny female-on-male domestic violence (Maddison, 1999).

In Mann's 2008 study she highlights the "prominent influence of men's rights" (p.45). Critically, she concludes that "government support for women's services has diminished in a context of intensified antifeminist lobbying" (Mann, 2008, p. 68) and that these groups have had some success in "efforts to disqualify and disband domestic violence services and strategies that protect women and children in the name of gender inequality" (Mann, 2008, p. 68). Men's rights groups virtually endorse violence against women by contesting legislation that supports anti-violence against women and domestic abuse services (Maddison, 1999, Mann, 2008). They are explicit in their language of sexual violence against women.

2.7 Disparate groups unite for peace

Cultural divisions can sometimes, however, link seemingly disparate groups behind a unified cause, for example, in examining peace protests of the early 2000s. In response to conditions where there was a sense that "emotionally, like in the months after 9/11 when America executed a sharp turn to the right, all hell breaks loose" (Swirski, 2011, p. 180), the American public then marched for peace. On 26th January 2003, two months before war was declared, 200,000 Americans marched through Washington. Indications of sentiment amongst American citizens were telling, where an illustration of the cultural unity of conservatives and progressives was evident in the handmade placards which read:

Small Business Owner for Peace, Citizens with Portfolios for Peace, Quakers for Peace, Deaf say Peace, Knitters for Peace make Socks not War, Patriots for Peace, Laid-off Workers Against the War (Pasquini, 2003, p. 1).

In the run up to the invasion of Iraq, more than 10 million demonstrators across some 800 cities worldwide engaged in protest; two million people marched in London alone (Hil, 2008). Tensions are evident of the confusion in cultural divides, there were criticisms of how the Bush administration proceeded to war, suspicion of the President's motivations, and the public mood of the futility of war (Rosin, 2012).

2.8 The wars post 9/11

The major event that triggered the US government's decision to invade Afghanistan and subsequently Iraq happened on the morning of 11th September 2001. Two planes hijacked by religious terrorist fanatics, crashed into New York's Twin Towers. At about the same time, two other hijacked planes were also in mid-air; one crashed into the Pentagon and the other came down in a field in Pennsylvania, its intended target unknown (Batchelor, 2009). The buildings targeted by the three crashed planes were potent symbols of the US's military (intelligence) and financial might. The fourth plane was speculated to be heading for Capitol Hill, but its target was never fully verified. Approximately 3000 people died in the attacks, including the terrorists. This carefully planned and co-ordinated attack sent waves through the US's social, political and economic landscapes (Batchelor, 2009; Makinen, 2002) and is the most spectacular single mass murder event on US soil. The national trauma of such a publicly catastrophic event is hard to fathom, but tensions are evident in a number of areas following 9/11.

President Bush took the US to war in Afghanistan to eliminate the terrorist group held responsible, and more controversially into Iraq in 2003. It was not until almost a decade later that the main target Osama Bin Laden was killed (Batchelor, 2009). In a poll

conducted over the first five years of the Iraq war, Pew Research found that by March 2003, 72% agreed that it was the right decision to go to war; reducing to only 38% in 2008 who still thought it was the right thing to do (Public attitudes toward the war in Iraq: 2003-2008, 2008). In the same period Pew Research found that opinion also reversed on the return of troops; by 2008 the majority of the US public agreed that American troops should be pulled out. As much as 9/11 had initially united Americans, subsequent divisions became evident, especially as Bush took the US to war in both Afghanistan and then under questionable evidence of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and accusations that Bush was chasing oil reserves in Iraq (Rich, 2006). This disparity in leadership versus public opinion created obvious tensions. Violence and war are more generally associated with men (Boyle & Brayton, 2012), and so disparity of public opinion and the potential failure of masculinity to secure victory has socio-political implications and relevance to analysis of Hollywood film produced during these times, especially in relation to the crisis of masculinity.

Contradictions lie in the media's sanitised portrayal of 9/11, the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts, the 'them and us' style propaganda of the 'war on terror' and the lived experience of those sent to war (Batchelor, 2009). Footage from the wars in the US media avoided graphic images of blood or corpses, under the auspice of shielding viewers from harm; all the while upping the patriotic ante (Rich, 2006). Furthermore, former Marine and writer of the bestselling novel *Jarhead* (subsequently a Hollywood motion picture), Anthony Swofford argues that "the actual experience of combat doesn't make it to the other side of the screen" (as cited in Batchelor, 2009, p. 77). A deep contradiction lies, therefore, in the lived experience of the troops at war in Afghanistan and Iraq and the media representation of troop activity at war. Sannet (2014) argues that many soldiers did feel disenchanted with their actions and the point of the war. The media-rally around the 'American hero' shows how media representations maintained a vigil over the

propaganda of the conflict, belying much of the disconnect between lived experience, trauma and the futility of war (Chomsky, 2012; Sannet, 2014). In real terms, the early days of the Iraq war saw great contradictions in lived experience. One example involved President Bush standing on an aircraft carrier, in a flight suit, having arrived theatrically by jet fighter, making the extraordinarily hollow claim of "Mission Accomplished" when the conflict was far from over (Batchelor, 2009, Chomsky, 2012). Early missions in Iraq saw troops underequipped, lacking vital body armour or at times appropriate military vehicles. Baudrillard's (1991) *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* exemplifies the first Gulf War as entirely mediated by the media culture of even the early 1990's, and the reality of war is still entirely mediated in postmodern society.

Tensions were also high around the treatment of veterans as they returned home. Critics argue that the lesson would be learnt from Vietnam where returning soldiers were treated with disdain and that soldiers returning from Iraq could expect to be well treated (Batchelor, 2009). This was not the case. In 2007, an investigation by journalists for the *Washington Post,* Dana Priest and Anne Hull, found veterans being cared for under gruesome conditions at the Walter Reed Army Medical centre in Washington. Details in the report included "black mould, cockroaches, mouse droppings, rotten ceilings and other horrible conditions" (Batchelor, 2009, p. 16). In more extreme cases, veterans attempted suicide or were given incorrect doses of prescription drugs because of mismanagement. A class-action lawsuit has been filed against the Department of Veteran Affairs, criticising the medical care provided to veterans and inadequate efforts to prevent suicide rates amongst returning soldiers (Batchelor, 2009). Statistics revealed in 2008 that 18 veterans a day on average were committing suicide, five of those under the care of Veteran Affairs (Veteran Medical Malpractice, 2014). By 2008 a RAND Corp study revealed that 20 percent of returning veterans from Iraq or Afghanistan, most of them

men, suffered from some mental ill-health from their experience at war; PTSD or depression were the most common difficulties (Veteran Medical Malpractice, 2014).

2.9 Conclusion

Social tensions exist on a number of fronts relating to masculinity. Family structures continue to evolve with insecurity and confusion of gender roles within the family unit. The position of men in the public sphere continues to be less stable post-2000 which interconnects with changes to family dynamic as their position in the family is also less stable. Ideological shifts to the right in global terms, across politics, economics and social policy, have created greater confusions about the negotiation of masculine identity with competing demands from market driven economies. In terms of war and US foreign policy, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were often without clear goals or with accusations that there were ulterior motives for this great human tragedy. Tension exists as troops were not supported on their return by the government that demanded their commitment in the first place (Batchelor, 2009; McAvan, 2009). Masculine identity is in contention, played out in contradictions of expressions of public sentiment opposing patriarchal acts of war. This idea of social tensions is useful in the context of examining cultural product, its reflections and potential emphasis of societal divisions, tensions and cohesions. It is vital because it says much of the social pool from which cultural product is made, influenced and informed.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3. Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature that will provide academic context as well as a theoretical framework in order to answer the research question: how do post-2000 Hollywood films represent the crisis of masculinity in relation to socio-cultural contexts? This question will be related to theories on psychoanalysis, the collective unconscious and how they relate to film analysis and theory. Commentary is made on cultural perspectives of masculine hegemony, its relation to social theories, social and economic power, consumerism and homosocial bonding, as they are reflected through representations of masculinity in Hollywood film.

3.1 Masculinity and film

The study of popular cinema exists within a world of paradoxes. It would be easy to assume that because the principles of patriarchal power and hegemonic masculinity (explored in depth in this review) dominate, that popular film would exclusively portray masculinity as 'macho' (Horrocks, 1995; Lehman, 1993). It is the case that film is "filled with contradictory images that reflect the tensions and ambivalences of masculinity" (Horrocks, 1995, p. 1). Cinema audiences can be simultaneously horrified and thrilled; they may laugh or re-live something that relates to personal or social issues which partially explains why representations are not linear (Horrocks, 1995; Lehman, 1993; Narine, 2010). The study of film is vital in contemporary Western culture, not least because cultural values are increasingly transmitted through cultural product. It is in this climate that we live:

> [i]n a society which has all but lost contact with earlier religious, oral or spectacle traditions (with the exception, perhaps, of spectator sport), cultural values are transmitted almost exclusively by textual means— whether printed (fiction,

popular magazines, newspapers), visual (advertising, television, film), or digital and electronic (popular music, the Internet). (West, 2000, p. 16)

Film studies scholarship takes its approach from multiple angles. These can be entirely interdisciplinary or occupy singular spaces, such as those that look at audience responses, the political economy of media ownership and production, or the representation of social narrative within film. This thesis focuses particularly on portrayals of social narrative within film.

3.2 Consumption, commodities and popular culture

One such useful framework is the idea that the consumption of commodities is not limited to those that people can touch or taste, but an individual's consumption includes the films they watch, the radio shows they listen to, the clothes they wear or the way they augment or treat their body (Lupton, 1996). Lupton's 1996 work supports the idea that culture defines society. Lupton (1996) goes on to say that in an effort to create identity, or a person's own taste and opinions, they will often define themselves by the culture they reflect, such as the movies they watch and the ways they identify with them. Narine (2010) argues:

cinema, including the variety brimming with violent imagery, remains a fantasmatic experience that has been arranged meticulously by cinematographers, sound designers, directors and performers. Spectators never bear direct witness, then, but there is nonetheless a nuanced role for cinema to play in the global mediascape. (p. 4)

As in Buerkle (2011), this study is interested in the "social organisations- the history, the politics, economies, and ethics-that both create and sustain cultural notions" (p.10). Buerkle's essay was more focused on sexuality however this study uses his idea as a guiding principle.

3.3 Psychological frameworks

Jung argued that a society's collective unconscious gathers and passes on cultural notions using archetypes and myths in order that we might learn from our cultural and social history. Scholarship posits that these ideas can be expressed through music, art, film and other cultural product (Tacey, 2012). The idea of a collective unconscious in a cultural studies context is as if society's shared knowledge and experience can pool together in a safe space where anxieties and fantasies can be played out (Horrocks, 1995; Swirski, 2011; Tacey, 2012). Jung's work is also distinguished by the fact that he argues 'good' and 'bad' are less useful terms, and that they cause much of our difficulties in understanding as we persistently hide from the dark side of ourselves, and actually need to learn to live with it (Tacey, 2012; Usmar, 2014). This is useful because it provides space for this thesis to be occupied with the consequences of actions or social climate subsequently as they arise in film narrative. This also provides a necessary place for collective social issues to surface, because there operates in Jungian theory a useful embracing of the grey areas between good and bad. Swirski (2011) comments that cultural product can act:

> as a social barometer and a cultural diagnostic tool. It identifies social trends and cultural patterns and weaves elaborate counterfactuals- literary fictions- that hang human faces on large-scale human abstractions such as society and culture (p. 1)

The characteristic of film to act as a 'social barometer' is vital context which provides fertile ground to make connections between narrative patterns in film, and other social currents or events. Film has multiple inputs or authors, from screenwriters to directors, as well as the collective unconscious of wider culture and society itself (Swirski, 2011). Many film scholars subscribe to this notion, but very few subscribe to it in isolation of other disciplines. Scholarship in film studies often takes an interdisciplinary approach,

considering gender and film theory, political and psychological, as well as sociological frameworks (Brandt, 2000; Grant, 1999; Gronstad, 2003; Lehman, 1993; Piatti-Farnell, 2014).

There is also scholarship that attempts to integrate the psychoanalytic theory of Freud, in terms of film analysis, as well as ideas presented by Jung's collective unconscious (Arthur, 2001; Bick, 1999; Horrocks, 1995; Lehman, 1993; Mulvey, 2009; Piatti-Farnell, 2014). Lehman (1993) argues, very much as Freud saw the importance of dream analysis, that:

> just as dreams can be used to gain insight into areas of the psyche we are unwilling or unable to penetrate consciously, so popular images can be used to investigate collective unconscious attitudes and feelings (p. 1)

In Narine's 2010 *Global trauma and narrative cinema,* he makes links between the representation of social currents in film and how they engage with their audience, because they link with characters to form a "symbiotic-bond" (Narine, 2010, p. 3). He argues that Hollywood cinema is re-staging a sense of global anxieties and that everyone is touched by this "psychic and cultural trauma" (Bainbridge & Yates, 2005, p.4). Further scholarship coheres with this argument and makes useful links between social currents and their representations in film (Deren & Moffatt, 2005; Kaplan, 2005; Watson & Shaw, 2011). This is a helpful context following the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2011, then moving into the Afghanistan and the Iraq Wars and the collapse of the financial markets in 2009 (Watson & Shaw, 2011). This allows links to be made from these major events to representations of masculinity within film. Scholarship argues that audiences are invited to witness these traumas through the vicarious experience of media texts where they can be represented metaphorically or as allegories and not as literal references to war or financial hardship (Deren & Moffatt, 2005; Narine, 2010). This allows fertile space for

interpretations to be made in relation to current social issues. Contemporary traumas (the social impact of war and financial hardship) and anxieties are re-presented, re-purposed and reflected in popular cultural products of the time. The combined forces of global economic collapse and global terrorism (and their cultural reverberations) are said to be inescapable in this cinematic context (Kaplan, 2005; Watson & Shaw, 2011). This feeds into this research's exploratory theme of the broken nature of masculinity as a driving force for 'success', in relation to war and finance, yet limited scholarship makes clear links between the potentially broken nature of representations of masculinity in film, and these broken moments in social history.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud (1955) recounted the case of the game 'fort/da'—translated as 'there/gone'. A toddler throws a cotton reel over his cot and then pulls it back. Freud theorised that the boy was re-living the trauma of the departure and re-appearance of his mother; later theorists argued it could be either parent (Charney, 2001). Re-living or re-playing a trauma can be the traumatised ego's unconscious attempt to take control of the event, or an attempt to dissociate or distract from it. This is enabled "by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was as a game, he took an active part" (Freud, 1955, p. 16). In Freud's theory the person re-staging the trauma goes from being passive in the event, to active, as they re-stage it, rather than being a victim to it. This re-presenting of the situation can help self-soothe, but also links to the activity of grief and mourning as an active process, rather than a passive one (Charney, 2001; Piatti-Farnell, 2014). This re-presenting in itself is an act of violence, the throwing of the reel, the dragging it back, is all "[p]redicated on an effort to conquer loss, whose violence reiterates the force of the generative loss and the force of the futile effort to bridge it" (Charney, 2001, p. 50). The adoption of this trauma theory and its application to textual narratives (Bick, 1999; Grant, 1999; Kaplan, 2005; Piatti-Farnell, 2014) will be useful in exploring themes relating to

loss or absence which this thesis will examine. These themes of loss, absence, trauma or anxiety could be related to wider social themes in terms of major events—such as the global financial crisis, and the terrorist attacks of 9th September 2001. Or potentially may be closely related to specific anxieties around challenges or difficulties in masculinity.

Scholarship links the concept of re-staged trauma as something reflected in popular culture narratives (Bick, 1999; Charney, 2001; Kaplan, 2005; Piatti-Farnell, 2014). Charney (2001) argues that the representation of, for example, violence in film, and its relation to collective social trauma is commonplace. Its enactment in film is an attempt to stay in the present, rather than mourning the past because:

> [t]he narrative deployment of violence marks the gesture of trying to make the present present; but it does so with an emphasis, an affective excess, that is the by-product of the impossibility of its generative desire for presence, a desire that can only be met at the moment of death (Charney, 2001, p. 51)

The idea of oscillating between the present and the possibility of death are useful ideas, yet this and further scholarship does not go far enough in exploring the consequences of social currents as they relate to masculinity expressed in film texts. This thesis will explore the possibility that traumas and anxieties are not just well expressed in film, but are becoming an intrinsic part of the narrative through the consequences of characters' actions. With these combined theoretical elements, the re-staging of trauma and the opportunities to do so through cultural product creates a useful theoretical framework. This suggests that trauma or social anxieties relating to masculine identity can be sought out in representations of masculinity in film, especially in relation to expressions of violence, lack in intimacy or other breakdowns in social or personal security as it relates to masculinity.

3.4 Hegemonic masculinity

In order to contextualise this study of masculinity, it is important to examine scholarship as it relates to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. This concept has been appropriated across a broad range of scholarship since its inception and subsequent modifications by Connell (Connell, 1987; Connell, 1995) and later reformulated in Connell and Messerschmidt's 2005 article *Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept*. In the period 2006-2010 the term 'hegemonic masculinity' had been cited 540 times in scholarly refereed academic journals (Messerschmidt, 2012). The term hegemonic masculinity has largely appeared in sociological journals including *Gender and Society, Men and Masculinities, Theory and Society* as well as varied disciplines outside of sociology, including the *Journal of Electronic Broadcasting and Electronic Media* (Messerschmidt, 2012). Messershmidt's (2012) survey of the scholarship where hegemonic masculinity is a key concept, reveals the ongoing search and collective attempt to define and engender the concept. Its knowledge can be used across multiple disciplines, largely because "no social science concept is ever fixed and no social science scholar has a monopoly over its correct use" (Messerschmidt, 2012, p. 63). This kind of ambiguity in a concept may at once be frustrating and intolerable for many, yet allows space for the kind of intuitive social and cultural research required to examine and relate such a volatile and shifting concept. In turn we are able to relate it to the continuously shifting tides of social interaction and cultural values. The concept remains one, therefore, of continuous debate, and "unceasing ambiguity and open-endedness" (Messerschmidt, 2012, p. 57). The ambiguity is useful for this thesis because it provides a framework to examine masculinity without the rigid constraints of a singular concept, because masculinity is a construction of pluralistic behaviours and not a singular 'behaviour' or practice (Cheng, 1999; Connell, 1995; Horrocks, 1995).

The concept of masculine hegemony allows space for a collective set of behaviours or practices to define the gender performance of men on a local, regional and global scale (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). These distinctions are important to acknowledge for this thesis. This work examines hegemonic masculinity within a US context, which analyses films produced primarily for an American audience, using American settings, culture and language. It is outside the scope of this thesis to examine local hegemonic behaviours; that of family and other local organisations on a face to face level. Nor is it able to look at regional examples (Cheng, 1999; Heartfield, 2002). This thesis will take a broad approach using the global construction of Western American hegemonic masculinity, on the basis that American globalised culture, such as film, is part of a "transnational…media" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 849) that is instrumental in constructing these globalised masculine ideals. American film is ubiquitous, and is commonly studied in social sciences and enables the examination of Euro-American males (Cheng, 1999; Kimmel, 1996).

The global approach also allows traits of the Western filmic hegemony to be analysed and 'named'. Even though this thesis narrows its focus to American culture, we can still refer to hegemonic 'masculinities'—the plural 'masculinities' here refers to the fact that the hegemony has many variables across region and culture that will permeate American cultural product (Kimmel, 1996). There are varying degrees, therefore, that can be used to define hegemonic masculinity. Cheng (1999) argues that hegemonic masculinity, in Western culture, is broadly characterised by "domination, aggressiveness, competitiveness, athletic prowess, stoicism and control" (p. 298). These male ideals include "stoic emotional display" (Cheng, 1999, p. 299), where the insistence that outbursts or displays of emotion, whether love, pain or grief, means that a man 'fails' his masculinity (Goffman, 1976). Scholarship largely agrees with these ideas (Gronstad, 2003; Horrocks, 1995; West, 2000). The dominant and violent characteristics, however,

would only be solely representative of masculine hegemony if those were the only characteristics the dominant groups exhibited (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Masculine hegemony may also have positive characteristics, such as a man being able to provide for his family and maintain social and sexual relations with others (Collier, 1998). This could potentially be confusing, because it makes the differences between the dominant hegemony, and other subordinate or alternative hegemonies, harder to categorise. On the contrary, these shifts and polarities allow space for subversion and the interpretation of male character behaviour in filmic texts to be assessed across a spectrum of behaviours and actions, rather than just against a binary framework. This is a critical point in the literature and vital for the framework of this thesis. Masculine hegemony will not be viewed in binary terms of 'good vs. bad', but rather it attempts to represent, subvert or otherwise hold up different contextually specific hegemonic masculinities which will be examined.

3.4.1 Scholarly criticism of hegemonic theory

The emphasis across much of the contemporary scholarship is that the hegemony is a current ideal, and that hegemonic masculinity is defined at a particular moment in time or moment in history. This was not, however, always the case. The ambiguities presented by the concept of hegemonic masculinity have been criticised, especially early after the concept was first developed, in large part because critics saw that the hegemony could not be 'fixed' at a certain point. Donaldson (1993) argues that "the concept of hegemony, (is) a notion as slippery and difficult as the idea of masculinity itself" (p. 644). Donaldson (1993) argues that what can be considered masculine hegemonic behaviour in one setting, can restrict the behaviour of men in an entirely different context, with a differing set of hegemonic values. Donaldson (1993) therefore queries the value of hegemonic masculinity as a concept. It could also be inconsistent in its application and often refer

to whatever the dominant ideal was at the time (Martin P., 1998). Others argue that it is not clear what hegemonic masculinity looks like in practice (Wetherell & Edley, 1999), or indeed, overall it can be very confusing to understand who exactly represents hegemonic masculine (Whitehead, 2002). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that these ambiguities provide intrinsic validity for the concept; they help the application of the hegemony as an idea because it should not be used as a "fixed, transhistorical model" (p. 838). Inherent in this understanding is the sense that for the hegemony to be maintained, for it to shift and adapt, it must retain this pervasive ambiguity. It must be culturally, socially and regionally contextual. Rather than complicating its use for this thesis, the ambiguities are imperative for the examination of masculinity within film. If the hegemony was an entirely fixed notion, then it would be useless in keeping up with continuing trends and changes in the potential social climates as reflected in cultural product. The aforementioned scholarship does not make this link; it is too concerned with whether the hegemonic concept is a fixed one (Donaldson, 1993; Martin P. , 1998; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), however, make the explicit link of shifting hegemony to film as they argue in favour of Cavender's 1999 study comparing male heroes in films of the 1940s to those of the 1980s. There is further scholarship to substantiate this flexible outlook and build on the idea that "[t]his suggests that popular culture has a contradictory nature—it contains 'dominant', 'negotiated' and 'oppositional' meanings, often blended in the same text" (Horrocks, 1995, p. 27). The flexibility in identifying hegemonic masculinity across different contextual paths is "the secret to its chronicled success" (Messerschmidt, 2012, p. 57). It is the linking of the contextual relevance of a maleable concept of masculine hegemony in film that is so valuable to this thesis.

The concept of hegemony strongly challenges essentialist views of binary gender standpoint theories (Cheng, 1999) which follow the idea that the simple biology of men

and women determines gender-based behaviours, performance and roles. These essentialist binary codes dictate that gender and sex are equivalent and deterministic, whereas the hegemony provides a landscape where gender is a social construction (Lorber, 1994). One such critic of the hegemony as a concept condemns associated academic work, arguing it suffers a "[lack] in any positive concept of masculinity and [deal] in oversimplifications of Marxist-Feminist doctrine" (August, 1994, p. 371). August goes on to argue that men should be treated as human beings and their "triumphs and failures should be given equitable treatment" (August, 1994, p. xiii). West (2000) counters that this approach "elides the social processes and collective mechanisms characterised by the interlocking of culture, power and economics, and reduces heterogeneity and tension to the level of personal idiosyncrasy" (West, 2000, p. 17). If we consider the maintenance of the hegemony in its relation to privilege and power, then such reactions are inevitable because men's studies will at times question "the strategic privilege of invisibility—one of the most effective forms of hegemony" (West, 2000, p. 17). And so it becomes a threat that "representational tactics which legitimise and thus contribute to the perpetuation of masculine privilege" (West, 2000, p. 17) are laid bare by their examination in film. Binary views of gender are therefore argued to be too simplistic for this thesis and their determinism does not take into account the grey areas of human behaviour, irrespective of gender identity (Coltrane, 1994). It is hoped that by examining the grey areas rather than adopting polarised ideas of gender, it will be helpful in answering this thesis' research question: how do post-2000 Hollywood films represent heroic or dominant masculine figures in film and what questions or subversions do these representations raise about the crisis of masculinity?

Buerkle (2011) defines hegemonic masculinity as "both sexes receive training over the course of their lives to comply with cultural ideals that maintain strict, dichotomous distinctions between men and women" (p. 10). Buerkle's essay refers to US culture which

aids the framework for this research. However, much of Buerkle's subject matter is about sexuality, sexual practices and behaviour, which is less useful for this project. It also deals exclusively with television, and whilst this project will deal with film, representations of a hegemonic script or training is applicable here. Further advancing this position, King (2009) in her analysis of *Fight Club,* subscribes to the same notion of analysing the subversion of adherence to a hegemonic script. King (2009) builds on this premise in her argument, that for hegemonic (or accepted Western practice) masculinity to perpetuate, it must bend back on itself, shift and change, and is often subverted in popular culture to become a paradox of hegemonic masculinity. As scholars argue (King, 2009; Buerkle, 2011; Watson and Shaw, 2011), masculinity is in flux; it is stable yet unstable. Instability is required not only for change to take place, but also to retain order. As themes of masculinity within cinema itself have the potential not to be founded in dogmatic representation, Bainbridge and Yates (2005) highlight this realm of ambiguous possibility by arguing that:

> cinematic representations of masculinity are often highly complex, ambiguous and transitional, and, as such, may lie somewhere in between overly defensive narcissistic modes of masculinity and those which are more fluid and open to change. In the end, we settle on the importance of seeing representations of masculinities as forming a continuum between these positions. While foregrounding that ambiguity, we explore (p. 1)

Crucially, Craine & Aitken, 2004 argue, in reference to *Fight Club* (1999), that in some cinematic narratives, either masculinity or culture will perish, and ultimately both need to transform, so that change should not have to come from the destruction of the other. They carry on to posit that the crisis of masculinity can only be redeemed, through transformation. These contradicting themes of change and order, restraint and purge, are pertinent to this research because they examine the possibilities of redemption within cinematic narrative. Narine (2010) examines the idea of purge, but concludes that

Hollywood film texts more or less, cathartically purge, redeeming and restoring order through the narrative. A gap remains in which these scholars (King, 2009; Buerkle, 2011; Narine, 2010; Watson and Shaw, 2011) have not taken the themes far enough, in the possibility that order may be represented and not maintained. This study will look at the potential for texts not to have a cathartic narrative denoument, and will also examine the implications on masculinity when representations of men are not brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

3.5 Homosocial bonding

One way in which ideals of masculine behaviour are maintained is through homosocial bonding (Sedgwick, 1985). Scholarship emphasises that men's lives are strongly organised around their relationships to men, and that masculinity is therefore tightly woven to homosocial relations (Brady, 2012; Butler, 1997; Connell, 2000; Flood, 2008; Hammaren & Johansson, 2014; Sedgwick, 1985). Flood (2008) categorises certain practices and behaviours that help define hegemonic masculine enactments of bonding:

> male-male friendships take priority over male-female relations, and platonic friendships with women are dangerously feminizing. Sexual activity is a key path to masculine status, and other men are the audience, always imagined and sometimes real, for one's sexual activities. Heterosexual sex itself can be the medium through which male bonding is enacted. Last, men's sexual storytelling is shaped by homosocial masculine cultures (p. 1)

Homosocial hegemonic bonding is not simply competition and exclusion based. Even under a traditionally male setting, for example, as in the 'stag-do' in Thurnell-Read's 2012 study, the encouragement of group intimacy, togetherness and the bonds of friendship indicate a more sensitive form of masculinity, within a dominant hegemonic context (Thurnell-Read, 2012). Portrayals of these behaviours and their markers in film provide a useful context to analyse representations of masculinity in film, and more

critically, the different interpretations of these behaviours and how they might be applied to a social or psychological context (Craine & Aitken, 2004). For the study of masculinity, in all its nuances, homosocial bonding and its representation in film is therefore vital context.

Film scholarship demonstrates that in certain narratives masculine figures are recuperated to a hegemonic masculine or otherwise cinematically satisfactory position, through the restoration of homosocial bonding (Boyle & Brayton, 2012). *Fight Club* (1999) is one such film that draws much scholarly attention, with particular focus on the relationships of men to each other and the way in which the characters are made to play with hegemonic forms of bonding. Scholarship argues that the men in the film are simultaneously alienated by the hegemony, yet at times they embrace it (Barker, 2008; Clark, 2001; Craine & Aitken, 2004; Gronstad, 2003; Yeo, 2014). Craine and Aitken (2001) argue that *Fight Club* (1999) represents the fracture or dissociation of men from each other as a symptom of the isolation of consumerism. The fight clubs in the film are "intended to obliterate the agonizingly mundane trappings of contemporary urban life" (Craine & Aitken, 2004, p. 1). Buerkle (2011) argues that the emphasis in discourse of much of the 20th century has been on capitalist restraint in order for resources to go into productive goals, echoing the modern/industrialist society of 20th century Western society. Coming into view since the 1990s is a more neoliberal aesthetic that "has produced images of masculinity that emphasise consumption and gratification as their only rewards" (p. 9). In fiercely capitalist societies like the US, "we organise and understand all aspects of life in terms of our economic system" (Buerkle, 2011, p.12). Buerkle's arguments are in part similar to those made by Craine and Aitken (2004), in reference to *Fight Club* (1999), state that discourse has shifted into "consumer-driven post-Fordist landscapes" (p. 1). As an aid to setting a context to the examination of shifting links within the dominant Western free-market economics and cultural product, this work is strong. Complicating

matters further, Baker (2008) argues that film texts can seemingly present liberal antidotes to consumerist peril. This is in stark contrast, to the socialism that scholars argue is reflected in film as Craine and Aitken (2004) and King (2009) claim. The cautionary argument is to avoid the temptation to assume the liberal agenda of certain Hollywood films. In itself this argument is useful for this thesis as masculinity and its relation to consumerism, bonding and intimacy are explored as threads throughout the analysis.

The representations in *Fight Club* (1999) are positioned within the narrative as helping men re-connect through the dawning of an apparently revolutionary form of masculine camaraderie. Critics agree that this text presents subversions of hegemonic masculinity but with a vital twist; the subversion or critique of hegemonic masculinity is negated by an ultimate return to dominant hegemonic tropes. This is further revealed in Brandt's (2000) work on *The Fifth Element* (1997) and Barker's (2008) writing on *Gladiator* (2000). Furthermore, whilst these texts can present revolution and contain signifiers of non-conformity, in the final reading they form a circuit from subversion to hegemony that collapses back on itself (Brandt, 2000). Ultimately, the characters conform to an obedience predicated on homosocial bonding, with redemption ensuing after a loss of identity, as represented in *Gladiator* (2000) and *Fight Club* (1999). This is more characteristic of fascism than the liberating freedom so compellingly put forward by Tyler Durden's monologues in *Fight Club* (1999) (Barker, 2008; Craine & Aitken, 2004). By contrast, in the case of the movie *Star Wars* (1977)—"Star Wars engaged with fear of fascism from the inside–the anxiety that a capitalist democracy has more in common with fascism and totalitarianism than can be acknowledged" (Baker, 2008, p. 173). Balance needs to be struck then, with the idea that some films may represent neo-liberal arguments for the status quo (as opposed to appearing liberal-left wing) and the possible engagement with their support of socialism (in opposition to capitalism). The gap in this area of film

scholarship that this thesis will address, is the possibility where filmic narratives do not restore an equilibrium that conforms or restores dominant hegemonic masculine values.

3.6 Defence of privilege and patriarchal power

One of the major roles of homosocial behaviour in men is the maintenance of patriarchal power (Sedgwick, 1985). Clare (2001) argues that homosocial bonding is under threat from shifts in patriarchal power because, in fear, men have begun to move away from each other "like colonists seeing their empire crumble [and] don't like what is happening" (p. 4). Film scholarship examines representations that are visible in the ways in which "men tend to bond, build closed teams, and defend their privileges and positions". (Hammaren & Johansson, 2014, p. 1). This idea of defending male privilege and the potentially frustrating position of staving off the reduction in patriarchal power is evident in Boyle & Brayton's 2012 study of *The Expendables* (2010). It is claimed that men will go to almost any lengths to retain power, at the exclusion of women, and at all costs avoid realising or expressing their fears. Represented is a deep-seated collective unconscious fear of losing their patriarchal power (Butler, 1997; Clare, 2001; Tacey, 2012). These interests are in part maintained through homosocial bonding because they are based on hierarchical systems with economic gains at heart, that have enabled dominance over women and solidarity amongst men (Sedgwick, 1985). Homosocial bonding is, however, either breaking down or failing to restore normal patriarchal balance. The representation of masculinity as it relates to these power structures is examined in film scholarship (Aronson & Kimmel, 2001; Boyle & Brayton, 2012; Franco, 2008; West, 2000). However, a gap remains that this thesis explores: the link between the dual failures in socio-political climates of both war and economics, with the securing or restoring of masculine hegemony within film narratives.

Boyle and Brayton (2012) make links between work, privilege and power and their

representations in film. They bring together ideas relating to the global financial crisis of 2009 and argue that "film offers an unorthodox commentary on men at work even though it is not specifically concerned with the fallout of the 'Great Recession'" (p. 5). This guides this study to see that texts do not have to be explicitly about the subject matter, in discourse the latent meaning is explored (Piatti-Farnell, 2014). Boyle and Brayton (2012) examine *The Expendables* (2010) not a war film per se, but a gathered team of war 'experts' or mercenaries, being hired for 'one last job'. This perspective is useful in its relation to the economic recession and how this can be represented in Hollywood film. Much of their reflection is on the US labour market and on how characters in the film fulfil certain blue collar stereotypes (and further discourse and analysis on the impact of this). In *The Expendables* (2010) the muscle-bound heroes use their hypermasculinity, skills and homosocial solidarity to triumph. They are not lost or destroyed, as the film's title might suggest.

Patriarchal power is further conveyed through cultural practice and transmitted through cultural product, "[i]t is these cultural modes which transmit, legitimise, reinforce, perpetuate or conversely, inflect, question, or contest the material practices of masculinity and the reproduction of patriarchal power" (West, 2000, p. 6). Patriarchal power is argued to be the pursuit of control and accumulation of capital within the capitalist system that dominates western economics (Connell, 1987; New, 2001). The patriarchy also seeks to maintain forms of social and familial control that puts the needs of small numbers of elite men, over the needs of women and other men (Faludi, 1992; West, 2000). This can be performed by a minority in an effort to transmit the values and authority of this smaller group over others (West, 2000). The continuous attempts to dominate through masculine hegemony explain in part its shifts and ambiguities, it must perpetually respond to different attempts to change as "masculine domination is open to challenge and requires

considerable effort to maintain" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 844). These challenges come in the form of subordinate or alternative masculinities: those that do not conform to the heterosexual hegemony such as those acting or performing homosexuality, but also by the actions of women (Bird, 1996; Martin P. , 2001). These tensions offer critical spaces for this thesis to explore, as shifts in gender roles and behaviours will continually be reflected in popular culture. There is a limit, however, to the scope of this research. The scholarship in this respect conducts major examinations of gender roles in relation to each other, as the concept of hegemony is vitally a relational one (Connell, 1987). This thesis does not have the space to examine all performances of masculinity with immediate reference to 'others' within the film texts, to do so would expand de project well beyond its existing parameters.

The concept of masculine hegemony has long been argued as a system to maintain dominance over women, and other men (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2012). Domination via male physicality—violence or size— is becoming an increasingly "old fashioned" (Cheng, 1999, p. 300) notion and scholarship argues that the expression of masculine "hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Further scholarship argues that patriarchal power is maintained through these other or additional means, sometimes in conjunction— institutionalised, hierarchical and managerial power systems (Bird, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Wajcman, 1999; West, 2000).

These systems operate at a social, familial and vocational level. They also transgress boundaries between the public sphere and the private sphere, any threat to the hegemony in each system, is a threat to the hegemony overall (Clare, 2001; Connell, 1995). The idea that this inequity is a feature of the hegemony and remains prejudicial to others who do

not perform or conform to the hegemony, is contested. Increased equality of women, public awareness of feminist issues and the greater presence of women in the workplace, has led some scholars to argue the lived experience of many men can be one of emasculation and oppression (August, 1994; Farrell, 1993; Stanley, 2006; Yudice, 1995). Unless they (men) are part of the few who dictate the dominant hegemony, they have "little power, and even less money" (Stanley, 2006, p. 239). Stanley (2006) goes on to argue that this post patriarchal condition leaves men "oppressed and disconnected from society as a whole" (p. 239). Farrell (1993) goes as far to say that male power and domination is a 'myth' and that equality is not only largely at hand, but that men are beginning to be oppressed. Scholarship argues that representations of a 'backlash' against feminism and the supposed erosion of patriarchal power are visible attempts to 'reclaim' masculine power, and this is a feature of films of the late 1990s and early 2000s including *Fight Club* (1999), *Gladiator* (2000) and *American Psycho* (2000) (Clark, 2001; Barker, 2008; Gronstad, 2003; West, 2000).

Stanley (2006) contests—in his work examining the Adam Sandler film *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002)— that in contemporary culture men must navigate a 'post patriarchal' society where their role is confusing and emasculated. In Stanley's 2006 analysis he argues that the represented solution to this confusion and emasculation is the redemption provided by the cathartic love offered by a 'good' woman, rather than the potential for change of the hegemony. Essentially, the subjugation of women into a maternal and loving role will solve the man's emasculation issues (Aronson & Kimmel, 2001). Scholarship contradicts this idea and argues that the representation of women's love being the 'saviour' of men is a well-worn and tired trope—perhaps belonging to an earlier less equitable era— that helps maintain the dominant position of the masculine hegemony (Aronson & Kimmel, 2001). The 'solution' of cathartic love of a good woman to remedy or redeem the male figure is not favoured as a satisfactory framework for this thesis. Essentially, a viewpoint

that relates male and female genders in a binary type equation is problematic when examining an amorphous concept such as hegemonic masculinity. It is too simplistic—ignoring vast possibilities in social practice and relations— and borders on an essentialist ideal to recuperate masculinity only by virtue of its romantic relation to the female gender (Aronson & Kimmel, 2001; Cheng, 1999).

The interconnected gender politics of men's performance of gender and patriarchy in relation to women—contested or otherwise— is valuable context for the representation of masculinity for this thesis. Not least because it offers the potential to explore themes of men's 'power' and scholarly positions on the patriarchy, so that these positions might be further revealed or examined. This thesis will still consider the vital context that, "[t]o sustain a given pattern of hegemony requires the policing of men as well as the exclusion or discrediting of women" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 844) This thesis will, however, attempt to stay focused on the representations of men's behaviour in terms of their immediate actions and activities, but consider how they might be 'policed' in the conforming or subversions of the hegemony as relates to the body (their own), technology and violence.

3.7 Crisis of masculinity

The broader context explored in this review sets the scene for exploration of the literature concerned with the crisis of masculinity. Firmly fixed in the 21st Century Watson & Shaw (2011) examine masculinity in development and crisis from the mid-1990s, which is critical for understanding the continuity of masculinity in the new millennium. They look broadly at popular culture as a process for gender creation and contestation and that gender or masculinity is a, Craine & Aitken (2004) argue, "constantly changing political form" (p.1). They go as far to say that "[m]asculinity is not a solid, immovable construction" (p. 1) and "from moment to moment, forces redictate, replace, and

reimagine its reconstructing." (p.1). Masculinity then, must be seen as a moveable feast, shifting with cultural practices, action and the influence and reflection of cultural product (Craine & Aitken, 2004).

Doubt and uncertainty are not new in film studies of masculinity. Indeed in a historical context a crisis in masculinity was reported at the transition from the industrialised 'hard body' to a 'soft body' at the turn of the century of the late 1800s and early 1900s (Forth, 2007). In Western culture, luxury and consumerism were said to be softening men's bodies. This caused an apparent crisis in masculinity because it purportedly made men "unfit, thus weakening the nation as a whole" (Forth, 2007, p. 293). It is perhaps prosaic that similar patterns are visible in gender studies close to the fin de siècle of the 20th century, leading to the sense that there is a "historical recurrence of 'crisis'" (Forth, 2007, p. 294). The war-torn hard bodies of "Reagan's Heroes" (Jeffords, 1994, p. 24) are film representations of the reclamation of masculinity from its symbolic emasculation and violent failure in Vietnam. Moving into the 1990s cinema saw the softer 'new men' who were more able to express themselves and care for others (Barker, 2008; Gronstad, 2003), exemplified with Arnold Schwarzenegger putting down his guns to become a *Kindergarten Cop* (1990). Situating this thesis within the historical context of this nature is significant because it will help make patterns easier to spot, and will also help contextualise change or stability within a framework that *expects* change, rather than an ahistorical framework that might fear it.

Scholarship is less concerned about whether there is a crisis; more debate rages about the causes for the current crisis (Aronson & Kimmel, 2001; Cheng, 1999; Clare, 2001; Faludi, 1992; King, 2009). There are others who argue that there is no such thing as a crisis in masculinity. They claim that it is more a crisis related to class and economics (Heartfield, 2002) and is not located in gender. The main fronts of debate for the crisis are class,

economics, relationships with women and other men, and the interrelation of men's place in private and public spheres. This thesis will be mindful of considering the relevance of each area and their potential interrelation.

With the advance of feminism in the 1980s and moving into the 1990s, women increasingly took their place amongst the workforce on more equal terms than in previous decades (Faludi, 1992). Critics argue that women's position in the workplace was further accelerated by positive discrimination practices favouring women, which further usurps men's power and displaces their sense of place in the public sphere (August, 1994; Yudice, 1995). Another point of view locates a crisis of masculinity in changes in employment of men, rather than in opposition to women (Heartfield, 2002). In the context of changes in Western economics, these "appear to have produced a widespread crisis of masculine identity with the onset of high unemployment in previously male-dominated industrial sectors" (West, 2000, p. 13). It may be, therefore, that a crisis of masculinity relating to men's employment and their feeling of place, would have happened regardless of women's position in the workforce because of shifts in economics rather than gender roles (Brandt, 2000; Heartfield, 2002; West, 2000). Scholars argue that the very presence of this debate is represented in film examples such as *Disclosure* (1994), *Jerry Maquire* (1996) and *The Next Best Thing* (2000) (Aronson & Kimmel, 2001). The potential for visibility or reflection of this debate in popular culture, through the films being examined, sets the scene for different opportunities and interpretations of the material.

Scholarship further argues that with the increased social and professional power of women, capitalism is making maximum use of both genders in order to generate capital, which conforms to the logic of capitalist theory (Heartfield, 2002; Marx, 1967). Heartfield (2002) argues the there is a mythologising of the differences in gender which leads to the idea that "[t]he story of the change becomes one in which men are the clinging

to the past, the recidivists and losers. At the same time women are magically transformed into the winners in the New Economy, the vanguard of positive social change" (Heartfield, 2002, p. 12). This mythologising of gender differences in Western economies, which have increasingly moved away from industry and towards service, pathologises men within that system and situates them as the victim of a system of economics rather than that of gender (Heartfield, 2002). In actuality, women do suffer a 'glass ceiling' in the New Economy described by Heartfield (2002) and this is manifested in their limited positions in power, not only in state and in the private sector, but also in a dramatic wage gap between the genders (Rosin, 2012). Furthermore, women have not gained equality in the workplace, and this is a myth (Heartfield, 2002) perpetuated in part by vested interests wishing to defend the masculine hegemony (Barker, 2008). Whatever the reason, there is acknowledgment across the scholarship that the crisis of masculinity in part represents a "deep anxiety about the capacity of men to fulfil their traditional bread-winner role" (West, 2000, p. 20). How this might come about will not be answered here, but the different perspectives prepare useful grounding for the examination of masculine representation in film.

Further context is provided by the representational implications of the confusion, in general terms, about men's place within the capitalist economy, when, for example, male-dominated job security is less clear. Connell's work (1987, 1995, 1995a) counters the argument of oppressed or emasculated men with one key facet of the masculine hegemony; the idea of complicit masculinity. Many men may not be part of the dominant hegemony, but they may still be complicit in its maintenance. This not only gives this thesis the space to explore complicit, subordinate and alternative forms of hegemony, but also grounds to explore the represented consequences of the subversion of masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2012). The idea that men are being repressed and emasculated by the capitalist neo-liberal culture that the dominant hegemony has created, is a complex and

contradictory argument. It is also not one that will be solved in this literature review. Useful vectors intersect in New's (2001) argument that appropriates Connell's conceptions of power and masculine hegemony. The system of patriarchy and masculine domination through hegemonic structures is a system that in varying parts excludes some, yet includes others. It is possible that not all men benefit from such a system and at various times there may be a sense that men's place in this system is less clear (West, 2000). Once again, themes of confusion and instability arise that run as a seam through issues of masculine power, patriarchy and a gender in crisis, and are relevant to how they might be represented.

There have been social as well as economic shifts, that some consider part of a "new perplexity" (Habermas, 1996, p. 46) in relation to studies of masculinity (West, 2000). The 'backlash' against women's new found economic and social independence manifests in numerous ways (Faludi, 1992; West, 2000; Rosin, 2012). This includes the formation of men's rights groups, including softer groups who adopt New Age philosophies to help men understand their place in society, and the harder, more strident groups who use scholarship as well as anti-feminist rhetoric to further their cause (August, 1994; Bird, 1996; Clare, 2001; Faludi, 1992; West, 2000). Confusingly, there are also those that dispute whether men had this power in the first place (Farrell, 1993). This idea is met with comprehensive scholarship outlining the domination of masculine power through the maintenance of the masculine hegemony, in a historical as well as contemporary context, across both social and economic schemas (Bird, 1996; Buerkle, 2011; Cheng, 1999; Connell, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2012). There is an argument, however, that at the intersections between ideas of men's emasculation and their persistence with patriarchal power, there lies the crisis of masculinity (Robinson, 2001).

In 1996 Kimmel argued that men in contemporary Western culture have been pressured "to achieve, to demonstrate, to prove [their] masculinity" (Kimmel, 1996, p. 3) in ways that conform to a constantly changing script written by a minority 'hegemonic' group. This has resulted in a "chronically anxious, temperamentally restless masculinity" (Kimmel, 1996, p. x). With this script continually shifting and the repetitive defence of the hegemony seeming to stunt the potential for mature spiritual and emotional growth of men, a crisis in masculinity is unsurprising that "[t]he man in modern-day America is a cultural hermaphrodite" (Brandt, 2000, p. 67). Hobbs (2013) further argues that following the Reagan and Thatcher years of capitalist imperialism in the 1980s, the 1990s lead to a softening of masculinity in a period of general abundance. There followed a backlash against harder masculinities, which enabled men to more freely express their emotions and exhibit 'softer masculinities' (Robinson, 2001). There is the possibility that these new masculinities might be integrated into the dominant hegemony, but alas, moving into the 2000s scholarship, it is argued they are not integrated (Barker, 2008; Gronstad, 2003; Messerschmidt, 2012). Hence, the dominant hegemony became increasingly isolated in its singular pursuit of conformity in relation to economic and social power (Barker, 2008; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gronstad, 2003). The history of the softening in masculinities and the subsequent hardening in the post-2000s sets significant temporal and social context for this thesis.

This chapter has introduced the critical frameworks through which the crisis of masculinity will be examined. Film scholarship plentifully covers the relevant topics of consumerism and associated economic pressures and representations of the masculine hegemony. It also covers the relation to social theories, social and economic power, consumerism and homosocial bonding as it is reflected in Hollywood film. The clearest gap this thesis explores is one that brings these issues together with the possibility that

the failure of men in their lived experience to conform or live up to hegemonic ideals and

the consequences of these 'failures', is represented in the broken men of Hollywood films.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Research Design

4. Introduction

The literature highlights masculinity as a social construct, its composition affected by complex interplay between social, psychological, political and economic factors. This thesis will use an interdisciplinary approach, with an awareness of perspectives from social, psychological and film theories, as well as gender studies, in order to critically assess representations of masculinity in this context. This is based on the proposition that film can reflect ideologies of contemporary culture and so theories about those ideologies are a required approach for understanding representations in film (Horrocks, 1995). This thesis therefore also requires a method of analysis that has the flexibility to encompass these differing perspectives yet remain robust across a range of data collected from the films. Thematic analysis has also been chosen, therefore, because it allows for the kind of qualitative discussion of the material presented by existing media content (Berelson, 1952). This is in order that expressions of masculinity as they appear in film can be considered as thoroughly as possible in whichever social, psychological or political context is applicable.

4.1 Research design

The parameters of which texts to consider were initially very broad. In order for as fair an assessment as possible within common sense constraints of time and resource, this required a wide search of popular Western contemporary cinema. Films were sought under a number of criteria, including (but not exclusively):

a) Films produced post-2000 and after 2005 to locate them within ten years of the study itself

b) The main protagonist is male and heterosexual, in order that dominant hegemonic masculinity be examined

c) The representation of men was superficially categorised as dominant hegemonic or heroic in some way. This was determined via the films' trailers, synopses or prior knowledge

d) The films needed to adhere to some level of mainstream distribution, largely excluding more art house or festival films on the basis that films with a broader audience are more likely a constituent of the wider discourse in social structures

e) The films needed to suggest or gesture towards a heroic or 'journey' type narrative

I watched approximately twenty films during the research phase, and chose films on the basis of those that resonated with me in some way in relation to the research questions. This was directly in respect of the research question and as a man living in contemporary Western culture, seeking out or looking for answers with regards to male identity and masculinity. The films chosen are *Don Jon* (2013) *The Wrestler* (2008) and *Drive* (2011).

Eventually, after careful consideration, it was decided to examine each film under specific topics as they relate to social constructs of masculinity, with the intention of bringing together intersecting themes in the conclusion to the thesis. *The Wrestler* (2008) analysed for portrayals of the body, *Don Jon* (2013) for technology and *Drive* (2011) for violent content. This was decided after it was found that the texts provide much rich material in the specified analysis areas, and that the study would benefit from a focused and concentrated effort on the individual texts as they related to these areas. The study would have grown beyond the realms of a Master's project if this decision had not been taken. It is anticipated that links are possible between these texts, in the conclusion to this thesis, through thematic links relating to masculine identity. It is important to note the subjectivity of these choices, as Horrocks (1995) states— "I have naturally chosen genre

and texts which mean something to me" (p. 2). This subjectivity is an inevitable part of this type of research, and must be considered carefully as the study moves into the analysis phase—especially as many of the themes that arose from the literature review relate to those of power, specifically male power. The discussions or arguments on patriarchy that relate to this, as West (2000) points out, that "the crucial element of auto-reflexivity in men's studies, for such reflection about masculine power involves speaking against one's own interests as a man" (p. 15). Regardless of the potential for inherent subjectivity within this type of research, West (2000) argues this is no reason for it not to go ahead, and that it remains vital to the contribution of new knowledge in studies of masculinity.

The creation of codes to manage the data gathered by watching and making notes during the films, was created using the main themes of masculine representation to be analysed (Rilling, 2000; Rosenbaum, 1997). The codes are presented in Table 1 opposite and give an explanation of their function and connected ideas. Codes were created according to the core analysis chapter headings: the body, technology and violence. These codes were carefully assessed to ensure robust examination of the films because even though "[w]e all tend to assume that no matter how imprecise or impure our language may be, it enables us to tell the truth if we use it carefully" (Rosenbaum, 1997, p. 13). That is to say, our use of language or codes can often be assumed to be telling a subjective truth rather than an objective one.

4.1 TABLE 1: Representational codes

CODE	DEFINITION	CONNECTED IDEAS	EXAMPLE FROM TEXT
Body	Physical, exercise, work, sexual activity	Site of body to locate identity. Relations to others, society and work	Fighting, working, financial status, relations to others
Hypermasculinity	Exaggerated hegemonic masculinity	'Ideal' body shapes, degradation of body through excess	Working out, showing off muscles
Consumption/ commodification	Consumption of the body by others / by self	Objectification, consumer culture, health, subjective happiness through bodily adaptation	Performance of physical strength or other attributes, sexual activity
Heroism	Heroic behaviour or performance using the body	The function of traditional narrative structures, subversion	Rescuing, protecting using physical strength, skills, intelligence over others
Symbolism	Allegories for social climate	War, financial crisis or crisis of masculinity Reflecting of social climates using representations of masculinity.	American flags, patriarchal slogans, narrative structures and their association with masculinity Clothing, eg. army camouflage, other symbolism related to war, finance or other successes or failures
Technology	How the male character/s interact with technology How the male characters use technology	Incorporated into lifestyle, helpful, displacement, distraction, conditioning, access information, music, pornography or to spy on others Technology's part in characters' intimate	Revving car engine, staring at TV screen, use of computers, mobile phones, us of non-ICT related technology Male figure 'reacts' to sound of computer starting up

		relations, eg. family, friends, romance Shortening or lengthening space between others,	
Temporality	How use of technology affects or plays a part in time	Masculine relationship with technology, shortening of time	Expectations of the male characters to understand, perform or integrate with technology
Intimacy	Characters' intimate relations, eg. family, friends, romance	Commodification of masculine or other identities	Male character/s relationship to technology, over human relations
Homosocial bonding	Men's relations with other men	Intimacy centred around violence, expressions of frustration	Close/intimate conversations before or after violence
Genre references	Adapting genre aesthetics to critique masculinity	Hegemonic masculinity as a shifting concept, relate to social climates	Loneliness of male characters as a feature of subverted masculinity
Consequences	Representations of the consequences of violent activity, issues relating to the body or technology	Moves away from traditional narrative of 'spectacle'	Juxtaposition of masculine strength perpetuating violence, with the horror and consequences of violence

4.2 Analysis methodology

In order to fully make an assessment of representations of masculinity in film, this study uses thematic analysis. The use of thematic analysis enables the capturing and processing of inherently qualitative data—that is, the kind of data presented by media texts. The importance lies in the gathering and interpreting of latent as well as manifest elements, to analyse symbolism and extrapolate meaning holistically across the text as a whole, not just from singular moments. There is extensive precedence of thematic analysis being

endorsed and used as a method for analysing film texts (Horrocks, 1995; Krippendorff, 2004; Larsen, 2012; Rosenbaum, 1997). This method is favoured for its qualitative nature, over a more quantitative method, because of the nuanced presentation of gender in film. Thematic analysis allows for the systematic processing of flexibly interpreted material. Krippendorf (2012) argues for its use across a range of media texts, as it helps find meaning amongst the data. The key search is for the emergence of themes and patterns that arise not just from one text, but also from thematic analysis which allows for the correlation of connections made between texts. This could ultimately lead to revealing a bigger picture in terms of representations of the crisis of masculinity.

One of the key strengths in using thematic analysis is its unstructured nature. It allows for almost anything from the texts to be gathered and presented for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is gratifying, in the sense that the analysis of representations in film are based on a wide range of signs or signifiers. These benefit from rich descriptions that can be visually metaphorical, or as a collection of visual and auditory clues that can lead to the realising of a theme or pattern amongst the texts. This coheres with the choice of thematic analysis as it is well suited to a data set that is large, descriptive and detailed (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The seemingly unstructured approach provides useful breathing space to apply an interdisciplinary framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Larsen, 2012).

The flexible nature of thematic analysis allows for the possibility of new codes or levels of analysis, which were not previously considered, to arise from the data itself (Saldana, 2009). This is a significant advantage over more quantitative methods of research, because it allows for exploration of the data without the bounds of strong predictions of what that data may provide. This advantage also provides a simultaneous disadvantage, however, because the study is entirely reliant on the subjectivity of the researcher's

descriptions (Krippendorff, 2004). This can affect the reliability and replicability of studies that use thematic analysis. However, this can be remedied in film studies through the convincing and thorough arguments and analysis presented in the analysis reports (or chapters) themselves (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; West, 2000). It is also possible that themes and codes can suffer by being merged together (Charmaz, 1988). The solution to most of these issues, incorporated into this study, is to continually monitor and review the codes applied to the data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

It is vital to approach the multi-faceted construction of masculinity by synthesising ideas from several theoretical frameworks across a range of social, psychological as well as gender and film theories. These include the use of Freudian psychoanalytic theory to examine representations of masculinity and their bearing on a more subjective level within the narratives (Freud, Beyond the pleasure principle, 1955; Jones, 1910; Rilling, 2000). Jungian theory of the collective unconscious will aid the relating of representations of masculinity to the social climate, as well as allegories and metaphors as presented by the texts (Rosenzweig, 1992; Tacey, 2012; Usmar, 2014). Various social and gender theories will be employed to enable the relation of masculinity across a range of social constructs and ideals, including Connell's (1987, 1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity and its modifications since its inception (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2012), as well as theory related to the performance of gender roles, ideals and norms (Butler, 1997; Jeffords, 1993). Social, psychological, gender and film theory will be integrated where analytically appropriate in the analysis and conclusion chapters. It must be acknowledged, however, that these theories and concepts often oppose and contradict each other, drawn as they are from differing disciplines and perspectives. This thesis will therefore maintain an awareness of the appropriate strengths of these concepts, in relation to the research, and synthesise arguments based on the intersections of theoretical perspectives.

In order for the efficient, coherent and correct application of theory, this thesis will maintain an understanding of the difficulties encountered in studies that rely on thematic analysis and interdisciplinary approaches (Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2003). Obstacles may include the unsatisfactory or repetitive summarising and rephrasing of frameworks or theory without critical application. They may also suffer through over-quotation or rephrasing of the discourse, which result in losing unbiased views through taking sides, ending in circular referencing or identification of constructs (Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2003). The initiating of a meta-critical approach ensures that the framework or critique itself is continually assessed in its relevance and application to the material in question; meta-critical analysis enables— "[a] criticism of criticism, the goal of which is to scrutinize systematically the terminology, logic, and structure that undergird critical and theoretical discourse in general or any particular mode of such discourse" (Henderson & Brown, 1997, p. 35). In order to answer the research questions this approach will be considered at all points during this analysis to strengthen arguments and build coherent discourse.

Chapter 5: The Body and Masculinity

5. Introduction

This chapter will examine masculinity through representations of the body, focusing on the film *The Wrestler* (2008). The thesis will argue that representations of masculinity in filmic texts may critique or expose aspects of cultural pressure points, doing this through a number of narrative elements, signifiers and coded structures. Highlighted will be those coded moments or signifiers where the character arc fails to restore the male figure to a satisfying cinematic climax (Brandt, 2000). These examples will be related to the expression of a subverted hegemonic masculinity—a questioning or interrogation of traditional masculine codes in contemporary Western culture. It may be that these traits do not redeem the character and do not deliver him to a satisfactory equilibrium, in emotional, spiritual or financial terms. A connection will be drawn where applicable, to social currents relating to masculine identity. In this case, it is the potential failure of the body that may signpost or suggest a non-redemptive type narrative.

In the 2000s the body became a "battleground" (Craine & Aitken, 2004), an outward expression of the self, something reflexive to be controlled and shaped, where it was "thrown into the expanding sphere of personal attributes which we are required to think about and control" (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 95). The male body increasingly became a space located in popular culture for the masculine hegemonic concept of exemplars or physical examples of dominant masculine identity (Connell, 2000). Greater emphasis on achieving masculine hegemony through the body became more prevalent in representations in popular culture, even if "[h]egemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative." (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Physical exemplars of hegemonic masculinity are demonstrated in popular culture through male physical strength, endurance, health

and long life (Craine & Aitken, 2004). Also, through the sense that by improving the body the mind must follow, and that 'success' is attainable by all. These are some of the values that mirror hegemonic masculinity, the subversions of which are revealed through the expression in film of confusion or isolation, potentially shedding light on the state of masculinity in crisis.

Contradictions and tension lie at the intersections between the male body as an increased space of self-reflexivity—where the dominant hegemony is located—and the idea that although the minority of men may enact it, the hegemony is considered 'normal' (Connell, 2000). At these contradictory moments the growing acceptance of different types of masculine identities appeared to negotiate a space for subordinate masculinities to exist alongside or even to integrate with, the dominant hegemony. In the 1990s era, moving into the early 2000s, "the invention of new character types is endemic (the alpha male, the sensitive new-age guy, the hairy man, the new lad)" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840). This can be seen in the depictions of masculinities in films of the mid-to-late 1990s including: *American Beauty* (1999), *The Matrix* (1999), *The Green Mile* (1999), *Seven* (1995) and *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999) (Barker, 2008; Gronstad, 2003). Moving into the 2000s, the disparity of these distinctions holds up the dominant hegemony as being isolated— an idea further explored in this chapter. Masculine hegemony, therefore, "can become a scientific-sounding synonym for a type of rigid, domineering, sexist, "macho" man" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840), yet the hegemony remains a way to spread certain ideals and fantasies about what it is to be male in 21st century Western culture. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that these contradictions are partially located:

> [a]t a society-wide level…[ ] there is a circulation of models of admired masculine
> conduct, which may be exalted by churches, narrated by mass media, or celebrated

by the state. Such models refer to, but also in various ways distort, the everyday realities of social practice. (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 838)

One way in which these distortions occur is in the society-wide model that insists the body is something to be modified and controlled. The human limits of these controls and modifications and their links to the self allows anxieties to be reflected in representations of the body. The body is a space for colliding social challenges to be represented, mainly because of how far it has moved into the space of self-reflexivity in modern culture.

The Wrestler (2008) will be examined for representations of the state of confusion in relation to contemporary masculine identity and how these indications might relate to social structures or interactions. These challenges might include commodification of the body—that is, the male body as a commodity both to the subjective self as a site of personal and emotional 'improvement,' but also as a commodity to market forces. The body may also be used for marketing and to be marketed (Lash & Lury, 2007) so therefore links may be made to consumerism as it relates to the masculine body. Representations of the body may also provide signposts of the personal or subjective failures of the masculine hegemony to allow men space to express or helpfully define their emotional landscape.

This chapter will also examine how socio-political conditions may be represented in film through the body. This includes social issues such as how US war propaganda can function to represent the body as the war 'machine'. In effect this commodifies the US army or military as a representation of a masculine bodily force to tackle or solve foreign policy challenges and conflicts overseas (Kaplan, 2005; Slotkin, 1992). There may be links by allegory or metaphor, to representations of the male body in film post the tragedy of the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and the plane hijackings that took place on 9th September 2001.

The Wrestler (2008) depicts the character called The Ram—or Robin Ramzinski—played by the actor Mickey Rourke as a wrestler, who, now a shadow of his former glory, still performs on the circuit. It is clear from the outset that The Ram's heyday was in the 1980s. This timeframe is reinforced by the 1980s soft-rock soundtrack that accompanies the opening montage, and the effusive wrestling commentary that re-affirms The Ram's former success. In this montage, images are visible from various flyers, magazines and newspaper cuttings of The Ram at his peak. The Ram is depicted as a very muscular and highly successful wrestler. Featured are all the trappings, including spandex wrestling outfits and theatrically complex wrestling moves, including his signature "Ram Jam" finishing move. The initial representation of The Ram is reminiscent of Jeffords' (1994) reflections on the 'hard bodied' muscular hegemonic male iconography of the 1980s; such as Sylvestor Stallone's exaggerated musculature in *First Blood* (1982), or Arnold Schwarznegger's bulk in *The Terminator* (1984).

The Ram's early career is representative of what might be expected from certain fluctuating values of hegemonic masculinity; that is muscular strength which enables success and victory over his opponents. Jeffords (1993) argues that "while eighties action-adventure films glorified in spectacular scenes of destruction, nineties films are telling audiences that these men were actually being self-destructive" (p. 200). In conversation as they drink in a bar, The Ram and his unrequited love and stripper friend Cassidy (Marisa Tomei), highlight the denial of this destructiveness and their incredulity at the 'softness' of the nineties. As they dance and revel in the 1980s music playing in the bar, The Ram criticises Kurt Cobain of the 1990s grunge band Nirvana, "…for coming and ruining it all" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008). This is as if Kurt Cobain himself is symbolic of the shift in 1980s hard masculinity to the relative softness and self-destructive self-awareness of masculinity in the 1990s. Emphasising the shift, The Ram and Cassidy agree further:

Cassidy: Like there's something wrong with wanting to have a good time?

The Ram: I tell you something, I fucking hate the nineties (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008)

In this moment, the characters make full reference to their hedonistic heyday of the 1980s, whilst despising the 1990s for its apparent attitude to their lifestyles. As the narrative indicates, this seems to have changed very little. In these moments *The Wrestler* (2008) examines the consequences of the hard-bodied trope of the 1990s to the neglect of the body in the present day context of the film. In these and other moments in the text, *The Wrestler* (2008) elicits a meta-reference to Jeffords' (1994) hard body trope. The film is not an 'action adventure', yet the 1980s hard bodied representations and references are clear. The film situates its own in-text comparison with the 1980s and the present day of the film (circa 2008). The montage images of The Ram at his peak cut to the present day of 2008 (20 years later); a far cry from the heady glamour of his 1980's heyday. The Ram performs for a pittance to baying crowds (shown in the cash payments he receives from fight promoters) in grim backwater social clubs, high school halls and run down sports facilities. The Ram is shown post-fight, groaning and injured, coughing and wheezing. It is clear these fights take a severe toll and his body is not nearly what it used to be. His hearing aids squeak as he removes them, he needs pain killers and has to sleep in his van overnight because he has not paid rent and has been locked out of his trailer. The Ram lives alone in a desolate trailer park, living out a hand to mouth existence. Destruction of the body is shown, in this case long past Jeffords' early nineties reference, in The Ram's present reality. An early context is set within the film which represents the potentially self-destructive results of relying on the body as a site to locate this type of hard-bodied one-dimensional hegemonic masculine identity. The composite moments of the destruction of the body foreground subversions of dominant masculine ideals.

Emphasis is placed on the male body from these opening shots, and is reinforced throughout the film in scenes of bodybuilding, wrestling and the large amount of screen time given to The Ram's body. This emphasis provides fertile opportunity to examine representations of masculinity within the film because the "male body is inevitably inscribed with masculinities" (Whitehead, 2007, p. 374). The Ram is depicted as somehow trying to live out the fantasy of his former life and therefore, "chooses the fantasy space of the ring as his primary site of personal identification" (Morris, 2012, p. 3). The link can therefore be made between the male body and its position as a locater of male identity. From these early moments the body is shown to be failing the man and his identity. This gives credit to the sense that these representations of masculinity make suggestions about the potential for a type of failure of the masculine hegemony to provide a stable space for masculine identity. Indications of the destruction of the body, its potential deterioration and the absence of recuperation, signpost the possibility of a non-redemptive narrative within *The Wrestler* (2008).

5.1 Hypermasculinity

There are key displays in the text representing hypermasculinity, or "an inflated and hyperbolic representation of the (Western) male ideal" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 90). These are coded in such a way that they represent a subversion of hegemonic masculine ideals in reference to the localised wrestling context: these are the ability to overpower an opponent, show strength and courage and by 'putting on a good show' (Connell, 2000). The Ram's body is ascribed with hypermasculine values; taut, muscular and powerful. With his wrestling colleagues, he compares muscles and is hyped up for the wrestling matches, but ultimately the hypermasculinity is for appearance's sake. This is where subversion begins to be signified. Some strength is required for the fights, to throw opponents around the ring and perform some of the moves, yet the displays of brawn and

hypermasculinity are largely for the crowd. These values are further subverted, in part, through the signs of The Ram's faltering body; his skin is leathery from sunbed use, he has many scars, is often visibly in pain outside of the ring and does not recover convincingly after each wrestling bout. Visual language also shrinks the power and physical size of this hypermasculine figure. In locations during the film, The Ram's hypermasculine 'body' (in stark contrast to the powerful moments he is in the ring) is often shown alone and looking small in shot, for example in his trailer and outside the hospital. This severing of links with, and challenges to, the physical or hyperbolic masculine, are also presented in The Ram's exchanges with others in the film. As he makes his way home post-fight, wearing scruffy jeans and untidy work boots, two fans stop him to ask for an autograph. The Ram mutters and mumbles, not because he's overwhelmed by fandom, but because he is genuinely fatigued. They enthusiastically say that in the 1980s "you were the best" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008); the emphasis here is that he *was*. This encounter revisits his days of former glory whilst holding up the failure of his current faltering hypermasculinity to give him success or happiness. The critique plays out with an over-emphasis on certain physical traits consistent with the dominant hegemonic 'man'. The focus on the body in this fashion reflects that:

> '[h]ypermasculinity' (the exaggerated display of what are culturally taken to be macho traits)…exposes, rather than allays, anxiety about masculinity…The more he resorts to his body as proof of his virility, the more he 'unmans' himself, in effect admitting that his only asset is his body (McKinnon, 2003, p. 5)

The Ram, therefore, becomes just a *body* (Annesley, 1996). This serves to separate The Ram from his masculinity, or by compartmentalising what makes him manly in a hypermasculine sense. The Ram loses touch with any real sense of other shades of masculinity. Closed to him is the potential to indulge in other possibilities masculinity

has to offer, such as relating to others through bonding, companionship and social engagement (Clare, 2001; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Sedgwick, 1985). It is a performance that is encoded with failure and loss in the dominant hegemony, to redeem men through a once reliable trope of hypermasculinity, or male physical strength and the surety of the body represented in film to be a dependable and reliable place to secure masculine identity. Representations of hypermasculinity are therefore used in the film to reflect non-redemptive narrative structures and to further critique instabilities or confusions in masculine identity, by subverting hegemonic values.

The fantasy or mediated hypermasculine identity represented in *The Wrestler* is easily relatable to the social fabric that commodifies the body, through the media and production systems that govern these mediations (Debord, 1968; Jameson, 1991). In *The Wrestler* (2008), the commodification of the body to both audience and fellow wrestlers becomes a "Frankenstein procedure" (Hoberman, 1992, p. 29) and is pervasive amongst The Ram's colleagues. The athletes in this context subject their bodies to a multitude of attempts to dramatically improve their bodies. This is achieved through hard work-outs at the gym using large weights, steroids and various illegal drugs to enhance performance. In The Ram's words this will "make me big and strong" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008). Naturally, the irony is that all of these attempts continue to weaken his body and shorten his life—the antithesis of contemporary values of long life and health (Drummond, 2007). The text serves to simultaneously present exaggerated forms of hegemonic masculinity through the wrestlers' bodies, yet contradicts or exposes these exemplars to be broken or failing. *The Wrestler* (2008) signposts that the hegemony is under challenge and the non-redemptive seam presents representational evidence that:

> [e]xemplary masculinities in Western societies are typically defined by a specific
> body-reflexive practice: sport, violence, heterosexual performance, bodybuilding.

The commercial promotion of the exemplars is a striking feature of how hegemony is maintained in gender relations. Yet closer examination shows bodies repeatedly breaking the bounds or failing the uses proposed for them. (Connell, 2000, p. 86)

The body of The Ram in *The Wrestler* (2008) is shown to be failing these bounds, in his denial of age and the impossibility of it being safe for his body, when post-heart attack, his doctor says, "not a good idea" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008) to The Ram's insistence he wants to keep wrestling. If the body is objectified and further depicted as a broken machine, as it so often is in this film, then it can be viewed as an object (Craine & Aitken, 2004). It remains the kind of object, however, that is intimately involved in the intersections between the commodification of the body, the social practices in the pursuit of hypermasculinity and the failure to reify masculine hegemonic identity. It is critical that this "interweaving of embodiment and social context be addressed" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 851) and the connection between the body and social processes not be neglected. This begins to represent the non-redemptive possibilities in masculine identity that so desperately relies on exemplars mediated by commercial promotion or consumer culture (Jameson, 1991; Lash & Lury, 2007).

5.2 Consumerism and commodification

One way in which these exemplars can be conveyed through consumer culture is illustrated in a 1999 study of GI Joe action figures. Pope, Olivardia, Gruber, & Borowiecki (1999) found GI Joe's biceps swelling (when scaled to a life-size male) in circumference from 12.2 inches in 1964, by modest increments, until the period 1994-1998 when they exceeded the cartoonish proportions of 26.8 inches. These action figures "display the physiques of advanced body builders and some display levels of muscularity far exceeding the outer limits of actual human attainment" (Pope et al., 1999, p. 70).

Attempts to attain this type of unobtainable body are shown by the wrestlers in the film as they "build virility through diet and training to produce a body which is specifically coded as… powerful" (Osella & Osella, 2007, p. 579). This is shown in the gym scene when The Ram is strenuously lifting weights. He asks his drug-dealing companion to "show me what you got" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008). His muscles are comically large and The Ram declares to the dealer, "look at that, motherfucker" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008). Critique is provided here because rather than a celebration of the masculine, the wrestlers are presented as marginalised—it is in backwater and isolated spaces that they celebrate their muscles. Drummond (2007) argues that serious body builders "are often perceived (and labelled) by many as being narcissistic, self-indulgent individuals with a penchant for vanity" (p. 46). Their devotion to the creation of their bodies is a niche activity, and does not reflect the success of their gender either financially, socially or spiritually. The bodybuilding and the masculine displays do not seem to bring them happiness. This commercialised narcissism ultimately isolates the individual from others, and is reflective of the isolation felt in the experience of those trying to live up to masculine hegemonic exemplars in contemporary culture. The Ram's life inside the wrestling ring brings him a temporary and insubstantial safety, security and successful personal relations. Outside the ring, he lives a life of absence and loss. This represents a non-redemptive link between attempts to secure masculine identity through the mediation or control of the body. The drives in *The Wrestler* (2008) to perform masculine vectors of identity through physical exemplars are pervasive and lend parallels to social currents in contemporary culture. The consumerist imperative is that by changing the body, happiness can be sought. This text represents the flaw in this cultural 'unreality' (Debord, 1968).

Cultural unreality is therefore fixed within the space where capitalism as a system promotes, thrives on and propagates consumerism. Through consumer culture therefore,

capitalism can populate the body as a space to be commodified and exploited, simultaneously distorting vital sites to securely situate masculine identity (Lash & Lury, 2007). Pope et al (1999) err on the side of caution in assuming cause and effect between the media, consumerism and identity. Pope (1999) argues himself that we cannot state the impact of the 'media' of GI Joe's expanding muscles in isolation of other media, yet it signposts a current that 'ideals' had shifted to an emphasis on male muscles and the physique, with startling growth in the mid-to-late nineties. In 1994 alone male action figures earned the industry US$687 million. As Miller (2001a) argues, "if only these idealised male images stopped with G.I. Joe" (p. 281). Now it seems that commercial forces use "hyperidealised male bodies to sell everything from personal computers to dish soap" (Miller, 2001a, p. 281). These hyperidealised codes signify the impossible attainability of these body types and the saturated commodification of the body in consumer culture. The Ram's body is persistently represented as something to be consumed. In more subtle moments, these ideas are examined. The Ram says, to two younger wrestling colleagues, dismissing their pain or uncertainty at performance, "did they love you?" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008), or did the audience 'consume' you to their satisfaction, because that is all that matters. The Ram is also compelled to perform for the crowds, because "that's what I do" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008), and is further illustrated by his decision to continue wrestling when its action could prove fatal. This is a stark allegory for masculinity as something to be consumed, just as capitalism appropriates as many landscapes as possible in order to accumulate capital (Miller, 2001a). The Ram has produced a body with the sole purpose of it being destroyed for the gratification of others. It is his devotion to a role as a consumerist object, or a product consumed by the demands of an acutely market-driven economy, that may lead to his unhappiness. The text interrogates the idea endemic to advanced capitalism of staving off death, it breaks the mythic heroic spell of hegemonic masculinity and its partnership with

capitalism because "[t]he myth of 'forever young' is interpreted as a clear metaphor for capitalist accumulation" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 57). This parallels societal dissatisfaction amongst men that they can only be happy, as dictates representations of hegemonic masculinities, when the body is either consumed by others or adheres to certain stereotypes that secure men's masculine identity. The consequences of this destruction are emphasised here where no return to equilibrium or redemption of the masculine is represented.

Social critique is made possible in films such as *The Wrestler* (2008) through emphasis on the consequences of excessive or 'hyper' consumption through, and of, the body. This includes the depiction of physical pain, mental and physical degradation, dissatisfaction and the break down in social and personal relations—for example, as portrayed by The Ram's heart attack, his injuries and those of his colleagues and the presentation of how they are themselves consumed. This is somehow more dark and dead than the "blank fiction" (Annesley, 1998, p. 4) giddy hedonism and optimism for change in texts more characteristic of the late 1990's such as *Fight Club (1998).* In the second fight shown in the *The Wrestler* (2008) there is no grand entrance, no introduction, no build up, instead it cuts straight to an especially, violent and bloody fight, using various props including barbed wire, a staple gun, broken glass and metal chairs. Adding to the grim nature of this scene, there is no soundscore, no slow motion to build tension or drama as there might be in a Hollywood sports or boxing movie (Smith, 1989; White, 2001). The Ram is declared winner, and the camera follows behind as he almost limps to the dressing room, bleeding with pieces of glass stuck in his back. The hedonism of these moments is captured as the fight is violent, bloody and loud. It is fun for the audience, who are frenzied and screaming for more. In a telling sequence, a man offers his prosthetic leg and asks The Ram to hit his opponent with it – the crowd immediately chants, "…use his leg, use his leg!" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008). This sequence emphasises the consequences of the

rampant consumption of the body through violent performance. There is a link between the constantly hungry audience as a metaphor for contemporary Western economies as "the constant appeal of 'hungry' capitalism in popular forms remains persuasive" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 58). It is these representations of the consequences to the body of The Ram that constitute the post-2000 costs to masculine identity of consumption and advanced capitalist culture (Jameson, 1991).

The Wrestler (2008) shows the failure of the pre-occupation with consumerism; the expression of failure of The Ram's value as a man and as an object. The preoccupations with a consumerist lifestyle, as it manifests in the body, gain no spiritual or personal satisfaction. Through the expression of the broken and failed masculine body, the repetitive "bang your head" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008) of the opening soundtrack reflects attempts to 'gain' something through consumption of the body—both subjectively and by others—have taken a metaphorically fatal toll. Commodification has encroached so drastically onto human experience that conspicuous consumption, as depicted in Hollywood film, is a powerful driver of identity, yet is entirely ethereal, not real. This film moves into another space, representing more gravely the consequences of the consumerist experience through the masculine body.

Miller (2001a) argues that in the face of this commodification, at least straight white men are able to retreat to the "nuclear bomb-proof cement bunker of straight male privilege" (Miller, 2001a, p. 281). *The Wrestler* (2008) shows that, over seven years after Miller acknowledged the opportunity of retreat into male privilege, there are fewer places to hide. The Ram attempts to retreat at times and hide behind his anonymous worker identity at the supermarket, yet is shamed when a fan recognises him behind the delicatessen counter. He is shamed because his wrestling ring persona and body as commodity contradicts his life outside the ring. The objectification is more of an absolute, the light

shines brightly on the male body as a commodity and this draws a line closer to the perception that male privilege is not safe from the encroachment of market demands. This can be seen in the text where The Ram's identity, or his value, is secured purely by his bodily performance in the ring. As Clare (2001) argues, it is more likely that rather than male privilege being eroded, it is more that the patriarchy has become harder to justify. Subversions such as those made in films like *The Wrestler* (2008) help examine and signpost that increasingly the justification for patriarchy is "in disarray" (Clare, 2001, p. 2). *The Wrestler* (2008) relates these tensions to representations of masculinity and the commodification of the body, as these physiques are largely unobtainable (Ross, 2010). A parallel exists therefore as patriarchal domination and order is harder to maintain, at the same time the mediated powerful male body 'ideal' is also becoming impossible to maintain. Evident in *The Wrestler* (2008) through representations of the masculine body, is the harm done to masculine identity that the continued insistence on patriarchal order does.

5.3 Failure of the body

Representations of faltering redemption provided by masculine hegemony, as reflected in the failure of the body, render it symbolic of the role of male hegemony in maintaining social and political power. Representations in popular culture signpost that male dominance may be undergoing change (Bozzola, 2001; Butler, 1990; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It is in the autograph signing scene in particular that "The Ram appears to be on the verge of recognising what he has become: a pathetic has-been holding on to a broken dream" (Morris, 2012, p. 10). As the male body in this text is clearly demarcated as relating to male hegemony, this speaks volumes for the broken dream of male hegemony. Represented is the sense that masculine hegemony, in some parts, is attempting to hold onto some older ideas of power, privilege and position, yet slowly

realising as The Ram does, that male privilege and power is changing. Parallels are provided, therefore, for the beginning of change in the domination of the patriarchy. If the patriarchal order could be represented as changing, in one sense this could be the final stage because the man who is:

> authoritative, dominant, assertive - man in control not merely of himself but of woman - is starting to die, and now the question is whether a new man will emerge phoenix-like in his place or whether man himself will become largely redundant. (Clare, 2001, p. 4)

If the dominant hegemony is persistently seen to keep men in filmic texts from being redeemed (as shall be examined in the chapters to follow) it may keep them from achieving financial, social or relational success. This chapter presents evidence of the social trends this can channel: pressures of consumerism, capitalism and the commodification of the body are represented by its failure and lack of redemption in this masculine storyline. The potential for the restructuring of patriarchal power in its current state is non-redemptive, that is, there is no provision in masculine identity for the easing of these tensions.

The narrative of the *The Wrestler* (2008) signifies the absolute logical result of the continued pressures of the pull between attempts to maintain the patriarchal order through hegemonic or ideal values and changes to this order. For example, early in the film The Ram can evidently afford to have his hair bleached by a hair dresser. Later in the post-heart attack period, as his physical condition deteriorates and the value of him as a commodity or object diminishes, he has to dye his hair himself. Aspects of masculinity are portrayed as failing, shown ultimately by the body that begins to break down. It cannot live up to these onerous standards, and in parallel, masculine identity is held up as

wanting. This scene underlines The Ram's decline simultaneously subverting his masculinity, portraying it as somehow deficient.

In *The Wrestler* (2008), The Ram is one "whose excessive parody of mainstream beauty and power signify his lack of these traits" (Morris, 2012, p. 5). *The Wrestler* reflects a symbolic loss of strength and power and represents changes in patriarchal power. If the muscles The Ram and his colleagues have are "deemed as a clear signalling of their masculinity" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 86) then how very impactful that the cost of these muscles, of this type of physical masculinity is so high. The muscles serve their function in terms of battle and fight, but the costs to The Ram's body are high— his heart, hearing and brain, as The Ram says, "Now I don't hear as good as I used to and I forget stuff and I ain't as pretty as I used to" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008). This high cost is emphasised throughout the text, rather than being shrugged off as an unfortunate bi-product of the wrestling activity, it has a more far reaching and dramatic effect on The Ram's identity, that is, his private identity rather than his public identity. The degradation of his private identity, his body, is the price he pays to maintain his public identity. This reflects Clare's (2001) argument that the patriarchal order places higher value on the public sphere—the male dominated world of business or commercial pressures, in The Ram's case the wrestling ring. In *The Wrestler* (2008) however, the price being paid for this public sphere has fatally high consequences for the body. Presenting a non-redemptive storyline that is allegorical for the failure of the male dominated public sphere to acknowledge the importance of the private and the high price paid for the financial pressures of Western capitalist culture.

Further degradation of the private sphere is emphasised in how The Ram's muscles, so vital in his public sphere, do not literally (narratively) translate to victory over opponents in the ring; the muscles are largely for show. As the fights are rehearsed and then acted

out, the brute strength of the muscles is largely subordinate to their performance as objects. In a revealing moment with his daughter, The Ram says, "I'm the one whose supposed to make it ok for everyone" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008), or the masculine is all powerful, in control and 'should' be able to fix the world's problems, "but it didn't work out that way, I'm a broken down piece of meat" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008). This collapse in meaning between the objectified male body, with The Ram and his washed up, addled, leathery but beefed up, muscular and tanned body and his vulnerability, presents a powerful destabilisation in Hollywood conventional gender values and norms. It does this by showing The Ram's body front and centre throughout, but as a canvas for degradation and breakdown (Bozzola, 2001). *The Wrestler* (2008) links the physical representation of the male body powerfully with ideas of a failure or crisis of masculinity and a critique of related hegemonic ideals.

5.4 Subversion of genre conventions as a mode for critique

The Wrestler (2008) does not sit comfortably within the genre of sports film. It largely escapes this paradigm by not following the usual traditional sports narrative trajectory of failure and ultimate redemption. Social commentary and critique become more convincing in *The Wrestler* (2008) as it challenges the conventions of this genre. The film's position on the periphery of the genre connects to ideas put forward by (Robinson, 2001)*.* Consider any of the *Rocky* (1976-2006) films for this model. This can be seen in straightforward fashion as *The Wrestler's* (2008) narrative opens with, and sustains, the broken nature of The Ram; in fact his bodily condition continues to deteriorate and he does not recover, he does not prevail. The atmosphere of the text never shifts from the dark and fractured sense that The Ram's life is over, even as he moves through the motions of living. The mood of darkness and foreboding is carried through in subtle but pointed moments in the soundtrack. Silence is used for key sequences, where The Ram is

cowering in pain or looking glum, drawing attention to his broken and lonely life. Discordant and atmospheric strings are used to eerie effect as punctuation to these poignant scenes. He has a heart attack a third into the film which is made all the more alarming through its aural accompaniment by a piercing whine a little like the sound when one experiences tinnitus or other acoustic trauma. Following his heart attack The Ram says to his only friend in the film, Cassidy, "I don't feel like Hercules", the archetypal hero, to which she shrugs him off saying, "you should be with your family now" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008). The heart attack becomes the catalyst for a failed redemptive journey, rather than the beginning of a resolution, and is the precursor to his demise at the closing of the film. These elements which situate the film outside the traditional genre with the physical failure of the hero, combines to provide fertile ground for social critique, representing the sense that masculine identity and its hegemonic markers are subverted.

The Wrestler (2008) stands out in the ways in which it dares to show the male body failing the anti-hero. The attempts of The Ram to live out his formerly heroic existence, through using his body, enables the linkages of male heroism and the masculine body to be made. The male hero is so often the symbolic centre of Hollywood filmic narrative, and guides us safely through the plot (Brandt, 2000; Campbell, 1949), often enabling the "satisfying cinematic experience" (Brandt, 2000, p. 72). If the culturally significant heroic masculine symbol were portrayed to be failing in some way, this may represent a destabilising or shifting masculine hegemony and offer a darker trajectory. In specific relation to the journey of the male body in filmic texts, Smith (1989) frames the narrative mode in Hollywood hero movies in a three act structure. Films may take their leave of this structure, and portray the hero as "shattered" (Horrocks, 1995, p. 27) in some way but that ultimately the expectation is that they will recuperate, as Brandt (2000) argues "[i]t seems almost a cliché today to claim that the modern hero is a composite figure" (p. 77).

Smith (1989) argues, however, that Hollywood films featuring a dominant male protagonist will generally adhere to this mode. Smith's structure therefore provides a useful framework from which to assess the bodily heroism of The Ram. If *The Wrestler* (2008) is shown to follow this three act trope, then it may enable the redemption of the main protagonist, and represent stability in representations of masculine hegemony.

Examining Smith's first stage, the objectification or eroticising of the male body occurs in a number of moments in the text, however it does not offer a secure site for masculine male identity, nor does it redeem The Ram. In one example The Ram's boss, the store manager Wayne, sarcastically declares delicatessen counter work to be "a parade of horny housewives after your meat" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008), a direct comment on his potential as a sex object. The sexual object persona is, however, undermined by Wayne's sarcasm; he is sneering and derisive in his tone. Furthermore, The Ram walks in on Wayne watching porn in his office, sexualising the context of the following conversation. Wayne riffs off The Ram's secondary persona when he asks him for more work. Wayne asks, "What's the matter, they raise the price of tights?" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008). This statement draws attention to The Ram's subservient position to Wayne, regardless of his sexual object persona in or out of the ring. In this scenario Wayne is in the dominant masculine position by virtue of his managerial position. The Ram's masculine sexual body, with all its attempts at staying big and strong, are powerless. The eroticising of the male body in *The Wrestler* (2008) is subverted and contributes to a non-redemptive pattern in the performance of hegemonic masculinity.

Additionally, when The Ram has sex with a fan in the toilet of a bar, she desires *The Ram* and not Robin Ramzinski, which is The Ram's real name. The subversion occurs when he wakes up in her bed the next day, wearing fireman's boots surrounded by posters of muscly fireman. The implication is during their night together, he was distinctly

objectified as an erotic object. This apes or repeats a pattern of desire that *she* had for The Ram as a wrestler and as a substitute muscle-bound fireman fantasy. The fan makes a comment on a poster of The Ram that her brother has, that it's a "pretty hot picture" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008). Crucially he and his body *are* objectified by her, rather than her wanting seduction or love from the hero (Miller, 2001; Robinson, 2001).

In contravention of Smith's (1989) three act redemptive heroic journey, The Ram is not deemed a hero for his sexual conquest or dominant hegemonic success with a woman; there is nothing heroic or conquest-like about this moment. This is evident as he wakes up in the small and untidy apartment, revealing a pet ferret or stoat, the mise-en-scene implying a distinct lack of romanticism or sensuality, nor the Hollywood trope of edginess and hedonistic fun of a one night stand. He wakes up uncertain about the situation and leaves before she gets out of the shower. In a clear subversion of the redemption the hero may receive from the first stage of Smith's (1989) process, this erotic distraction presents The Ram with a dramatic non-redemptive consequence; he was supposed to be having dinner with his estranged daughter Stephanie (Evan Rachel Wood). In the final reckoning with her she says:

> Stephanie**:** You know what I don't care. I don't hate you. I don't love you. I don't even like you. And I was stupid to think that you could change. There is no more fixing this. It's broke. Permanently. And I'm ok with that. It's better.
>
> Ram**:** I'm sorry, I'm sorry
>
> Stephanie**:** I don't ever want to see you again. Look at me. I don't wanna see you, I don't wanna hear you. I am done. Do you understand? I am done. Get out. (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008)

The statements that it—the father and daughter relationship—is "broke" and "there is no more fixing this" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008) are damning statements, and present powerful destabilisations in the heroic journey of the male protagonist. The Ram's masculinity is not enhanced, nor is his place as a dominant hegemonic male secured, by the eroticising or the sexual objectification of his body. What these types of currents begin to suggest is that the dominant hegemony previously represented in Smith's three acts, that the male body structure is failing in popular culture and in places providing an ominous reflection of a gender in crisis.

The second stage Smith (1989) argues of hero movies, is the partial or temporary destruction or wounding (often represented as masochistic) of the body. The Ram's body is certainly temporarily destroyed—in wrestling bouts he sustains various injuries from wrestling moves and from props including broken glass, barbed wire and blunt instruments. Masochistic wounding is also well represented when The Ram hides a razor under his wrist bandages. He uses this to deliberately cut his head so he bleeds more profusely to entertain the crowd. The subversion of Smith's heroic bodily journey as presented is that The Ram does not recover his heroic status from his 1980s heyday. For all these injuries The Ram is not satisfactorily rewarded, in relational, spiritual or financial terms. This represents the societal parallel that by committing so much of the body in the pursuit of an elusive hegemony, redemption or satisfaction may not follow.

The Ram's heart attack and poor recovery provides deeper symbolism of the failure of the masculine body to be 'hero'. The heart attack is vital to generating meaning within the story because "the heart transmits the essence of any concept that it is related to contextually" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 63). It acts as a blunt metaphor relating his physical frailty to the character's broken heart; in this case his estranged daughter in the course of the text re-affirms that she wants nothing to do with him. It is evident that through all of

these struggles "there is no sense that Ram is growing spiritually or emotionally or interpersonally" (Morris, 2012, p. 9). The failure of his restoration to physical heroism mirrors the failure in his personal life to have a healthy relationship with his daughter. This failure extends to his romantic relationships, as the unrequited love for his stripper friend Cassidy also breaks his heart when she makes it clear that he is just a "customer" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008). This analysis of the degradation of The Ram's body paralleling the degradation of his ability to form relationships with others, represents a destabilised hegemonic masculine narrative, and contributes to the discourse in the crisis of masculinity in a Western contemporary context.

If a film were to follow Smith's (1989) third and final stage, the male body should re-emerge through regeneration and allow for dramatic redemption. For The Ram this is not the case. The narrative of *The Wrestler* (2008) presents a flimsy 'holy grail' for The Ram to reach, a re-match fight with his 1980s wrestling nemesis the Ayatollah (Ernest Miller). The Ram and Ayatollah, now a successful car dealer, plan the fight before it happens, what moves they will perform and who will win, which in all the fights in *The Wrestler* (2008), rather ironically, is The Ram. The zenith of The Ram's journey is made unreal or superficial because, whilst the wrestlers do get badly injured, the fight is staged, and therefore the possibility that the body can redeem or bring success, is metaphorically limited. Even the possibility for redemption, or victory, as presented by this opportunity is illusory and entirely mediated within the narrative itself. The text does not take The Ram as far as regeneration, ending in his death. Critically, all three of Smith's stages are subverted in *The Wrestler* (2008) and represent challenges to hegemonic masculinity. Heroism is a trope of the dominant hegemony in film, and if it is shown to be subverted there are implications for the representation of the crisis of masculinity. If "being male is, then, more than a biological identification based on physique, appearance, body" (Whitehead, 2007, p. 373), for the man whose masculine identity relies solely on these

bodily attributes, the failure of the body is devastating. This shows the failure of the protagonist or hero redeeming himself through bodily success, or in other words, to triumph using the male body. The text examines representations of masculinity, not just through the inherent mediated fakery of the wrestling, but by undermining and subverting more traditional narrative structures of masculine heroic success through the physical might of the body. These currents begin to suggest the dominant hegemony previously represented in Smith's three act heroic male body structure is in places in popular culture being eroded—at least in this text. The representation of the "fracture or weakness" (Horrocks, 1995, p. 46) of the masculine is not new in Hollywood filmic texts, but the pervasive failure of the body to redeem the male figure, is.

The representation of these broken hegemonic moments, where the body fails to provide redemption of the male figure, become a sites for loss or absence. This is amplified by the film's juxtaposition of symbolic broken masculinity with continued attempts at practicing exaggerated forms of hegemonic masculinity. The film further depicts The Ram's wrestling colleagues, or his kinsman, as athletes of a certain type training and wrestling; they are bulky with exaggerated muscles. In this case, sports research presents useful vectors; two in particular—"treating opponents as enemies" and "viewing the body as a machine" (Mckay, 2007, p. 584). These enemy and machine allegories position the masculine as a powerful unit, ready to fight or to retain power in some way. These themes are juxtaposed with the failure of male *bodies* and the demise of the once indestructible male body. This presents a further reflection of broken or shattered masculinity. The Ram straddles both of these camps with both his failing and hard body, producing one that is "both the weapon and the target to be destroyed" (Wacquant, 1995, p. 67). The Ram trains hard—in a solitary moment he grimaces in pain, in an attempt to retain his formerly hard body, yet his place is increasingly amongst the older, more washed up wrestlers of his generation. This represents a seeming crossroads in the failure of the hard-bodied

hegemonic male, with destructive attempts to retain or re-visit a form of masculine hegemony.

5.5 Body as weapon

Intersections are present in representations between the failure of the hero and the body as a machine or weapon. Jeffords (1994) asserts that the hard-bodied cinematic era of the 1980s used this type of hero as a representational response to the confusion and emasculating experience of the post-Vietnam war, which served as an attempt to re-claim masculinity in this period. This was echoed in the "body-as-weapon" (Messner, 2007, p. 464) mantra of hero films of that era. By the 1990s these representations, for example, in *Rambo* (1985) and *The Terminator* (1984) had become "laughable" (Messner, 2007, p. 469) as a response to the binary idea of the muscular hero and the soft male (Jeffords, 1994; Messner, 2007). In *The Wrestler* (2008) the male body, hard or otherwise, is not represented as laughable, nor is it parodied. Rather, there is a tragedy and sadness that follows The Ram throughout the whole story. This can be seen in the documentary feel of the film—the shaky handheld camera work, the minimalist soundtrack and gritty contrast in the lowlight of his trailer and the harsh overhead lights of the wrestling venues. It is also reflected in the general solitude of The Ram alone in his trailer, the lack of a support network or friends that he sees outside of the wrestling ring, the rejection by his daughter and his lack of partner or love interest. Portrayals of the male body represent a failed attempt to return to or re-visit the concept of a muscular hero. It is represented as the target which is being destroyed and contributes to representations of a contemporary crisis of masculinity.

The destruction of the male body, as a symbolic weapon and target, has further potentially historicised implications. In large part because masculinity "is ultimately a performance rather than an imminent psychic structure, it follows that any analysis of this performance

as it manifests itself in popular texts must historicise rather than universalise the narration of men in crisis" (Gronstad, 2003, p. 7). In the text, The Ram's stripper friend Cassidy names him "the sacrificial ram" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008) as he shows her some of his wounds and battle scars. The sacrifices he has made and the simultaneous atmosphere of a history of battle is further reinforced in the autograph signing scene, where The Ram looks around a dilapidated room at his broken wrestling compatriots. The wrestlers of his era are mostly disabled in some way. Onscreen is a collection of walking sticks, a wheelchair, a urinary catheter bag is strapped to one wrestler's leg and one wrestler is so tired he falls asleep in his chair. The soundscore enhances the maudlin undercurrent of this moment, whilst it is mostly quiet with a discordant and grating violin sound. Their costume is rough and cheap. One aging wrestler wears a full camouflage hat and military type jacket, enhancing the idea that the whole scene could be likened to a gathering of war veterans. They are unified by a history of battling in the ring, and a history of their bodies occupying the representative weapon or target space. They themselves are the targets that have been destroyed. There is no joy in these moments as The Ram looks on as an eerie, dark soundscore continues to underpin the sadness of the moment (Chion, 1994). The emphasis is on the consequences of their collective history and the resonance to a context of war; war as a broken masculine solution. Within the film's production context post-9/11 and during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the performance of masculinity in *The Wrestler* (2008) provides an allegory as war propaganda for the body. Relating to the idea that the US military acts as the masculine violent bodily solution, symbolically, the body that goes to war as the weapon and simultaneously as the target, must be sacrificed for a 'greater good' (Kaplan, 2005; Slotkin, 1992). The scene has a broken tone, as wrestling or war veterans, washed up and abandoned, offer representational echoes of the returning soldiers from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars who made their sacrifice but were ill-treated on their return (Batchelor, 2009).

The brawn of the masculine hard body is also represented as being less useful, something that increasingly could be shelved in the contemporary era. The bodily solution to war is becoming less reliable as way to redeem conflict. In a tender scene between The Ram and a boy (Adam) he has befriended in the trailer park, they play a 1980s Nintendo wrestling game featuring The Ram. It is dated by modern standards. During the game, which sees The Ram's pixelated body take on the Ayotollah, Adam mentions the modern war video game, *Call of Duty 4* (2007). The failure of The Ram's body is highlighted—he cannot hear what Adam is saying and repeats the name of the game back to him incorrectly. Adam describes the war game based in Iraq. In and of itself, this mention of war does not explicitly mean the text critiques these wars, nor relate to masculinity (Piatti-Farnell, 2014), but what comes next links the notions of body, war and masculine identity. Adam gets up to leave and The Ram says, "do push ups, brother" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008)––Adam rolls his eyes uncertainly at The Ram's suggestion. This juxtaposes the dilapidated hegemonic masculine call to be tough, to 'get muscular' faltering and broken world that The Ram comes from. It is evident that The Ram and the boy live in very different worlds. Situated, as they are, in the dingy darkness of The Ram's trailer, the plea is hollow, as if brute force now seems archaic, something that masculine identity had reserved but now seems alien to Adam's more contemporary world. In the *Call of Duty 4* (2007*)* drone-strike, electronic world of modern warfare (Chomsky, 2003) Adam does not need to do push-ups, there is no place for the brutish hegemonic man, nor his war solution.

These moments alone do not stand *The Wrestler* (2008) in firm stead to be a war text; further exploration is required. Spectacle plays a further crucial role in representations of masculinity that are revealed in *The Wrestler* (2008) and its imagery of the male body. In 1968 Debord argued that "[t]he spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (Debord, 1968, p. 12). This

connection to a social relationship between imagery and culture is illustrated in *The Wrestler* (2008). The text stands out from traditional heroic narratives in its varying and sometimes subverted portrayal or use of spectacle. In many senses the male body can act as the "ultimate spectacle and locus of masculine regeneration" (Messner, 2007, p. 464), especially in relation to the social context of war. The male body in *The Wrestler* (2008) however, fails to regenerate or redeem through spectacle. Spectacle should serve to interrupt the narrative, in this context, to provide heroic redemption and the opportunity to look at the male body (Mulvey, 2009; Sandell, 1996).

Spectacle is present in the wrestling scenes—loud music playing over the wrestlers' entrances, theatrical wrestling moves, bright lights, crowds of shouting fans and Robin Ramzinski (The Ram's real name) plays his wrestling character 'The Ram' with convincing aplomb. Spectacle is, however, subverted by the focus on its consequences. The Ram's bloody injuries and deteriorating health—and the lack of glory in the fighting moments. The spectacle is in effect interrupted by the downward trajectory of its main character, rather than the spectacle itself doing the interrupting. Spectacle is present but is disappointing in its behind the scenes revelation of the toll it has taken on the male body. The moment where The Ram has his heart attack is preceded by his unceremonious vomiting on the changing room floor.

There is also a sense of absence shown in the contrast between the celebrated spectacle, of the wrestling matches and the mundane existence of The Ram's life. This is shown in the banality of The Ram's day job working in the supermarket—the hairnet and name tag he has to wear, and the handheld shaky camera work that trails him through "dimly lit hallways, supermarket stock rooms, cheap dressing rooms, strip clubs, and Dollar general stores" (Morris, 2012, p. 3). Even the wrestling matches themselves have the spectacle drained from them by showing the quiet discussions where the wrestlers decide on their

moves. These aspects combine with the overarching non-redemptive storyline itself as an inherent absence of spectacle; it is the very antithesis of the allegorical spectacle of war found in masculine heroic texts (Eberwein, 2001; Miller, 2001; Piatti-Farnell, 2014; Smith, 1989). War in real life is itself a great public spectacle, mediated through images in the media. If the male body's performance of spectacle is represented as faltering or subverted, and this is related allegorically back to war through the suggestions here, then by implication this subverts or critiques the spectacle of war. It holds up for examination the idea of the "very heart of society's real unreality" (Debord, 1968, p. 13) of wars that are mediated through the media. Rather than being a direct or literal critique, these combined narrative elements present metaphorical suggestions—the more obvious moments the text refers to war, the futility of physical sacrifices and resultant failures, and the more subtle loss of spectacle. These in turn raise questions about the futility of war post-9/11 and the lack of redemption played out using masculine vectors of identity— strength, courage and the very idea of what it is to be male.

5.6 Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter reveals that the representations of masculine identity are contested and interrogated across crucial grounds through themes represented by the body. This is made possible because in post-2000 Western culture the body has become "a site of discipline, mirroring, domination, and communication" (Miller, 2001, p. 253). In many senses discipline is applied to the objectification of the male body into an imperative that should be perfected and changed, engendering the fallacy that by improving the outside, or physical body, that one can improve or perfect the inside or inner emotional world. In contrast, this analysis reveals that representations in cultural products of the degradation of the body, also reflects the degradation of the mind or spiritual well-being (Piatti-Farnell, 2014; Tacey, 2012); this is 'mirrored' in *The Wrestler*

(2008). Additionally, the commodification of the body becomes a site for domination and like many other assets in a capitalist economy the body can be used to sell as well as be packaged and sold. Capitalism encompasses the body as part of the network of influence and accumulation of wealth, because "the refinement of human bodies as part of a rationalisation and utilitarianism, connects capital accumulation in a network of power dispersed across the conditioned and consuming body" (Miller, 2001, p. 244). This happens through consumption of the body by the audience and conditioning through exercise, beauty regimes and physical perfectionism. Space is also provided by these masculine representations to communicate social anxieties, not, this thesis argues, of the perceived reduction in male privilege, but rather that the justifications for patriarchal domination are becoming harder to sustain and this creates tensions for masculine identity (Clare, 2001). Clare (2001) also argues that "the patriarchy has not been overthrown" (Clare, 2001, p. 3) and that "[t]here is a sense, certainly in the outlying areas of the patriarchal empire, that the time for male authority, dominance and control is up" (Clare, 2001, p. 3). Furthermore, the current dominant masculine hegemony does not have the flexibility to communicate or create a new set of values more useful for these shifts in power and change. These are represented in film as non-redemptive narratives—that is, at its current trajectory, the masculine hegemony cannot redeem or remedy these challenges.

The non-redemptive narrative structures revealed in *The Wrestler* (2008) are structures that do not end in a satisfying denouement, do not redeem masculinity, and do not reinforce or restate positive aspects of the dominant hegemony. This reflects social and political non-redemptive patterns in the commodification of the body and the endless search for perfection and youth (Craine & Aitken, 2004; Gronstad, 2003; Piatti-Farnell, 2014). The masculine body is also represented as a declining site in which to solve problems and to secure masculine identity. The failure of the masculine body to be a

source of redemption in film storylines contravenes more traditional filmic narratives of the success of the male body to conquer all (Brandt, 2000; Jeffords, 1994; Smith, 1989). This chapter argues that the very presence of non-redemptive storylines in mainstream film reflects the potential for frightening non-redemptive patterns in both the social and personal spheres. This chapter shows how these portrayals represent a psychic overspill of the social politics of US foreign policy at war post-9/11 (Bragard, Dony, & Rosenberg, 2011). The treatment of soldiers on returning home was poor and the motivations for invading Iraq and Afghanistan are contested (Batchelor, 2009). These currents undermine the body as a representational motif of the army as a masculine solution. This metaphor is revealed in the non-redemptive failure of the male body in *The Wrestler* (2008), interconnecting social climates of the masculine body as a broken site to secure masculine identity—both in the pursuit of war and wealth.

Chapter 6: Technology and Masculinity

6. Introduction

The film *Don Jon* (2013) will be examined in this chapter, with critical links made between representations of masculinity and interactions with technology. In a 21st century Western context, it is suggested that men still have "a disproportionate influence in shaping new technologies" (Lohan & Faulkner, 2004, p. 319). Hence the relationship between technology and masculinity is a close one. Even though the connection is socially constructed, as is the ever shifting concept of masculine hegemony, examining representations of technology and masculinity in popular culture is important because "science and technology are widely acknowledged as powerful motifs of hegemonic masculinity" (Lohan & Faulkner, 2004, p. 319). Representational links can be made between technology and masculine identity because there remain "enduring connections between hegemonic forms of masculinity (both blue and white collar) and technology in terms of symbols, practices, identities, and structures" (Lohan & Faulkner, 2004, p. 325). With consideration to these symbols and practices, this chapter will analyse *Don Jon* (2013) to see how they may reflect broad ideas about dominant masculine hegemonic identity, how the hegemonic 'script' functions within the text and whether they offer a redemptive or recuperable place to secure masculine identity (Buerkle, 2011; Connell, 2000). Hegemonic masculine identity can include both positive and negative traits, and is often closely associated with a bundle of aspects that may be considered toxic—for example, the way that violence and domination are often exerted (or used) to show patriarchal power (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Theories of hegemony also include more positive traits such as the possibility of fatherhood—where men can be good role models, by passing on useful knowledge and being supportive and caring. Other positive traits can include providing by earning a living and sustaining relationships (Collier,

1998; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) both socially and sexually. These traits must be considered a broad brush approach, but allow for a useful guiding framework, where the hegemony either lives up to the promise, for example, of the father being a good role model to the son, or it is left wanting.

This chapter will therefore examine and analyse the ways in which representations of masculinity in the film *Don Jon* (2013) may mediate, subvert, maintain or reflect social trends of masculine identity, and to what extent the text contributes to a discourse on the crisis in masculinity. The main hypothesis for this chapter is that there is no single cause anticipated for the crisis in masculinity. Representations of technology are not, of themselves, likely to reflect the cause of a crisis of masculinity; "[t]he concept of hegemonic masculinity is not intended as a catchall nor as a prime cause; it is a means of grasping a certain dynamic within the social process." (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 841). The interrelation of masculinity and technology, however, may reveal faults or subversions in hegemonic traits. The dominant hegemony represents a set of actions, process and attitudes that change and are moulded by social practice (Buerkle, 2011; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The examination of the crisis in masculinity will be explored by how traits of the subordinate masculine in the film's narrative either engage or renegotiate with the dominant hegemony. The potential reasons for a crisis of masculinity are multiple and include, as numerous studies highlight: changes in patriarchal order, changes in social structures, effects of recession in the masculine domain of the workplace and political and social shifts to the right (Butler, 1997; Chomsky, 2003; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Holland, Weeks, & Gillies, 2003). The demands from these different aspects of social change put their own strain on masculinity.

To contextualise this analysis further, *Don Jon* (2013) will be examined within the framework of a late or advanced capitalist culture (Jameson, 1991). Characteristic of

advanced capitalism in contemporary Western culture is that it places great emphasis on consumption, manifesting in the commodification of time, space, sex and bodies (Adams, 2007; Heine & Thakur, 2011). Increasingly sophisticated internet connected technologies (ICTs) accelerate and enable this commodification. The social context, therefore, is that technology, in a late-capitalist society, is in part a pervasive and ubiquitous agent to "persuade people to consume above their 'biological needs'" (Sklair, 1999, p. 437). Consumerism in today's culture forms a vicious circle that demands that we perpetually demand. Heine & Thakur (2011) argue that globalisation is "the soft underbelly of corporate imperialism that plunders and profiteers on the basis of unrestrained consumerism" (p. 2); technology therefore helps foster an environment where unrestrained consumerism is represented as the norm. With this consumer culture comes an increased personal autonomy which Holland, Weeks and Gillies (2003) argue puts a strain on intimate personal relations by taking the emphasis away from them and therefore making it harder for masculine identity to be secure. With consumerism as the norm, it acts as a distraction from issues of personal and social intimacy within contemporary culture. *Don Jon* (2013) will be examined for signs that its main character is situated at intersections of these competing vectors—consumerism, personal intimacy and technology.

The film *Don Jon* (2013) introduces the character Jon Martello (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), known as the 'Don' by his friends for his prolific ability to pick up women. Contextually, the narrative positions Jon as a stereotype of the dominant hegemony—certain objects or attitudes in his life define his identity. He objectifies women and they are perpetually subject to his sexual demands. This is evident in the nightclub scenes where Jon and his friends verbally score all the women they see out of ten, and decide whether they would sleep with them or not. The emphasis he places on physicality and his overall toughness

are further symbolised by his surname Martello which in Italian translates as "hammer" (Collins Italian English dictionary, 2015). Jon narrates early on that his major preoccupations are, "My body, my pad, my ride, my family, my church, my boys, my girls, my porn" (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013). The stressing of these qualities—the objectification of women, the possession of technology or machinery, an emphasis on strength, physicality and sexuality, are all presented as 'the' values of the Western hegemonic male.

Visual cues in the text show repetition of his habits relating to these values, and the ritualised way he carries these out. The repetition of habits and behaviours is a vital consideration for this analysis, as "performance and insecurity-driven repetition have also been identified as one of the mechanisms underlying aggressive contemporary defences of hegemonic masculinities" (West, 2000, p. 15). These habits may be shown to be both symptoms of insecurity and of a type of aggressive defence of hegemonic masculinties. For example, it is a consistent habit that when Jon drives, he does so aggressively, revving his engine and shouting at other drivers. The text repeatedly shows Jon's habit of visiting the gym where he pumps iron in a repetitive fashion. Jon is shown using technology to diligently clean his "pad", illustrated by the precise and careful use of a vacuum cleaner. The setting of Jon's masculine identity within the dominant hegemony is tightly bound to the representations of these values and how they are expressed through the use of technology. And yet this use of the vacuum cleaner to clean so early in the narrative, as an activity not ordinarily associated with the hegemonic Western male, indicates the potential for the subversion of masculine hegemony. These values are further subverted as the text proceeds, at the close of the opening credits the sentimental vaudeville style orchestral score becomes discordant and intensified, simultaneously as the graphic text 'Don Jon' is distorted, as if the light bulbs in a neon sign are failing. This gives the first

hint that all is not well in the domain of hegemonic man (Clark, 2001).

6.1 Family systems and intimacy

Jon's family gatherings, with the exception of one church scene, are exclusively at the parental dinner table. Here technology makes its pervasive presence felt as the television blares out, imposing on all the family interactions and is never switched off. Technological intrusion is accentuated as Jon's sister, Monica (Brie Larson), stays transfixed by her phone at all times, mesmerised as she is, holding it at eye level throughout all the meals and church visits in the storyline. Don Jon's father, Jon Senior (Tony Danza), aggressively shouts at, and never really looks back from, the huge television screen during these family meals. The atmosphere of hostility and lack of personal intimacy is highlighted as Jon Senior speaks to the television in much the same way he speaks to his family. He rounds on family members and talks in the same gruff and aggressive tone. The lack of distinction between the two worlds of family and technology, represents the collapsing of boundaries between the mediated world of technology and intimate personal relations. If these boundaries begin to fail, this aids in the representation of the erosion of familial intimacy, and signifies in part, the location of this collapse of boundaries at the male dominated door of technology (Wilson, 2012).

The mise-en-scene of the family meals sees Jon actually sitting with his back to the screen, attempting to look face to face with his sister, mother and father. This reflects attempts of the subordinate masculine to regain or reclaim personal intimacy; unfortunately it is shown here to be failing. The subordinate position is represented in key moments in the text. It is in deference to the dominant hegemonic in this scene, Jon's father, who is stereotyped into his position through his aggressive manner and his costume of a white singlet reminiscent of the colloquial 'wife beater' vest. His hostile indifference to his family also relates this negative representation of masculinity in a dominant

hegemonic position. Jon is at all times subordinate to his father, shown in his unwillingness to fully pursue their conflicts and aggressive arguments—these make for some poignant moments as Jon Senior makes cruel comments to Jon, his mother and his sister. Jon stands apart from this as he is unwilling to follow his father down the path of these insults. For example, at one of these dinners Jon attempts to talk about his love for Barbara (Scarlett Johansson) his new girlfriend— Jon Senior is dismissive and aggressive, calling them "kids" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008). Jon says, "I'm asking you nicely, don't call me a kid". Spitefully Jon Senior replies, "You're a fucking kid" (Aronofsky & Franklin, 2008). And while this positions Jon in a positive light, he is still relegated to a subordinate position. Furthermore, by showing a more sensitive Jon attempts, from his subordinate position, to navigate Jon Senior's aggression and negotiate some grounds for more intimate relations. These attempts are too easily derailed by the 'shiny' big screen. In an interesting metaphoric parallel, Jon Senior's aggression towards the technology mirrors Jon's attitude to real life where he does not get satisfaction, yet here Jon is trying to be intimate with real people. Jon Senior further perpetuates a distance between the father and son, and the failure of the subordinate masculine to navigate a peaceful outcome, when he argues that Jon "loves TiVo, he sure as shit don't love football". The text suggests Jon loves a piece of technology and because he does not love football, the father and son do not share an interest. It is as if the father revels in their distance—Jon Senior is *dismissive* of the need for intimacy with others, whereas Jon exhibits real *fear* of it in his interactions with others outside the family system. These moments represent a failure in the role-modelling of a traditional, stereotyped dominant hegemony as a place to successfully locate masculine identity in the father/son relationship. Jon Senior occupies a negative hegemonic position, exhibiting no positive traits associated with the dominant hegemony. Furthermore, as Jon remains in the

subordinate position, this represents the failure of a subordinate masculinity to navigate through these challenges and provide a redemptive outcome.

The positioning of Jon as troubled, with his identity at times still located within the patriarchal order through his exhibition of dominant hegemonic behaviours, shows the text to be subverting hegemonic masculinity. Rather than indicating a longing for the safety of traditional masculinity, it highlights the failure in traditional hegemonic values to be a stable location for emotional wellbeing. A desire or potential for change in the hegemony is suggested (Badmington, 2000) and this is reflected in Jon's internal conflict as he narrates, "What am I doing wrong?" (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013). The storyline re-affirms this by intimating that hegemonic masculinity does not allow much space for men to seek help for these issues—Jon's friends and family offer little pastoral support. Jon is given the opportunity to share or talk things over with someone more sympathetic, and perhaps wiser, in the character Esther (Julianne Moore). Jon befriends her at his evening class, but initially acts surlily towards this older woman. Jon follows the misogynist masculine trope of not giving a second look to an older woman.

These contradictory moments, where Jon needs help and is reluctant to ask or accept it, plays into traditional roles of masculine hegemony. The emphasis for Jon is to perform his masculinity, to 'do' it and not to talk about it. By exhibiting traits of either the dominant hegemony or attempts from a subordinate position to negotiate with dominant hegemonic practices or attitudes, Jon fails to be delivered from unhappiness. This suggests the crisis of masculinity is partially located on the unstable ground between the failure of hegemonic masculinity to provide worthy role models, and the resistance of the hegemony to negotiate or accept potentially progressive traits in subordinate masculine behaviour.

The film was produced within the social context of a pervasive ideological shift to the right—politically, economically and socially, leading to an increase in individualism and autonomy (Holland, Weeks, & Gillies, 2003). Representations in the film may therefore show the demands these shifts place on the family system, to provide intimacy in an increasingly important way, yet simultaneously undermining the possibilities of it providing for these needs. Even if more traditional hegemonic familial roles have been weakened, "love and intimacy become ever-more important to ease the isolation of this new autonomy" (Holland, Weeks, & Gillies, 2003, p. 343). Therefore, the consequences of any failure in intimacy via the family, are greatly amplified. Furthermore, if intimate and strong attachments are poorly formed with adult caregivers in early life, issues can arise with intimate social relations later on (Bartholomew, 1990). These difficulties can be characterised by style of intimate social or romantic engagement based on fear. This manifests in "a conscious desire for social contact which is inhibited by fear of its consequences" (Bartholomew, 1990, p. 147) and a dismissive attitude that denies the need for such contact and can exhibit various mechanisms in defence of this position. These positions are underlined in the family moments in *Don Jon* (2013) and help explain the genesis of Jon's issues. These reflect masculine issues with personal and social intimacy, and an increasing reliance on technology to fill the gap.

6.2 Displacement

Within the context of his familial hostility and breakdown of close relations, the text suggests Jon has developed a fear of intimacy, causing him to seek addictive solace through multiple anonymous sexual partners and in the world of digital pornography. The fear of intimacy develops into a pathological 'solving' of this psychic pain, through the confusing pursuits of both sex with others and masturbating to pornography, as Marshall (1989) argues:

the failure to achieve intimacy in relations with adults produces emotional loneliness, which leads to an aggressive disposition. And a tendency to pursue sex with diverse partners in the hope of finding intimacy through sexuality (p. 491).

In large part the loneliness and channelling of sexual behaviour are compellingly agitated, enabled and accelerated, in this instance by technology. The psychoanalytic explanation for Jon's fear of intimacy becomes the *displacement* of emotion through sexual energy into another part of his life—into digital porn. This recalls the Freudian idea of an "affective disturbance" when "[a] characteristic of the disturbance was that patients directed their emotions toward people and objects that might appear inappropriate" (Rilling, 2000, p. 306). Jon's addiction to porn reflects that in contemporary society it has narrowed and homogenised the male heterosexual gaze, to the degree that it can "channel all men's intimate needs into genital sexual activity" (Cowburn & Flood, 2007, p. 492). Effectively, this is the result of a lack of intimacy with his parents and core feelings of not being good enough by his abusive father and impassive mother (Freud, Beyond the pleasure principle, 1955; Rosenzweig, 1992). These ideas of unworthiness, essentially feelings of pain and fear, become displaced into sexual fixation, transferred onto less appropriate objects—these alluring objects he sees en masse in saturated television coverage, in films and on the internet (Kafka, 2009; Rosenzweig, 1992; Schwartz & Abramowitz, 2003). The idea that Jon's needs go unfulfilled as he channels them through technology enabled outlets, presents a representational space for the crisis of masculine identity to be held up. The lack in security of masculine identity through family socialisation, has led to the representation of a lonely and isolated masculine figure that will not be redeemed through technological solutions.

Arguments put forward by Freud's student Jones (1910) suggest that the capacity of people to transfer these difficult or painful ideas onto another object were broader than simply sexual. In Jon's case, we can take in his obsession with fixing himself at the gym

using technology to mediate his body into something likeable. Jon visits the gym with a ritualised fervour, he even recites prayers as he works out. The technology of the gym equipment, the machines used to mould and shape his body, allows him to workout hard, creating an exaggerated hypermasculine muscular physique. He is always shown as an isolated figure during these gym visits, and it is only in the closing moments of the film does he dare join a basketball game with other people. This rounds up the sense that his fear of intimacy was not limited to his relationships with women and family, but is also situated within the homosocial realm. The pursuit of physical likeability fails the masculine, because no matter how buff or fit Jon is, he is never happy. It is at the moment he turns his back on the gym equipment and chooses to play with others, that the text suggests redemption of the masculine might be in relations with others, and not through technological mediation of the body or experience. This reflects the social current of masculine identity persistently failing to match up to technologically mediated ideals. Social trends in masculine activity are further represented in how Jon's pain displacement develops behavioural symptoms in his addictive outlets, where he seeks habits or fixes for this pain, because when he masturbates to porn, he claims, "I just fucking lose myself" (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013). This represents the idea that technology can provide something that is lacking or absent from intimate human relations. So rather than internal psychic solutions, Jon develops the habit of promiscuity, and more energetically, porn addiction. Evident here is a cultural reflection of what Watson (1916) rejected as "Freud's central concept of the unconscious as incompatible with behaviourism" (Rilling, 2000, p. 301). Watson (1916) linked psychoanalysis and behaviourism even in the face of criticism, because "[b]ehind a mask of anti-Freudian bias, Watson surprisingly emerges as a psychologist who popularized Freud and pioneered the scientific appraisal of his ideas in the laboratory" (Rilling, 2000, p. 301)—the laboratory somewhat fittingly being a source of technological and scientific development. Essentially Jon's painful lack of

intimacy, in a Freudian sense, led him to behaviours that stimulated his pleasure centres, temporarily taking away his psychic pain. These habits became conditioned, in the behaviourist sense, and move into a pathological set of addictive behaviours (Jones, 1910; Rilling, 2000; Watson, 1916). In the narrative of *Don Jon* (2013), there is a compelling link shown between Jon's lack of familial intimacy, the displacement of these painful feelings, with technology at its heart, into frantic pathological behavioural activities. And because these external fixes are ultimately spiritually empty and provide no recourse for the original malaise, he eventually says to his friends, "time to try something different" (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013). In stark contrast to the other texts in this research, this is the first profound admission that there might be another way. Masculinity is persistently represented in crisis, while hegemonic masculinities are failing masculine identity. *Don Jon* (2013) at least asks the question if there is room for a "more liberal position that equality and justice in personal relationships can develop within the context of respect for difference and a more pluralistic and tolerant culture." (Holland, Weeks, & Gillies, 2003, p. 340). *Don Jon* (2013) therefore reflects the erosion in personal intimacy of masculine identity with others, as exacerbated by contemporary ICTs.

Representations in *Don Jon* (2013) show ICTs further becoming a channel of great distraction for the intimacy avoidant, emotionally displaced Jon. In a profound way this happens through the exaggeration and proliferation of the commodification of the female body for the heterosexual male gaze (Mulvey L, 2009). By examining the film *The Wrestler* (2008) this thesis' chapter on the body largely focused on how the male body is commodified, and its parallels with production and consumption within Western capitalism. In a similar fashion, *Don Jon* (2013) sets a powerful context as the opening montage bombards the viewer using an urgent visual language, cutting quickly with rhythmic intensity between media images of scantily dressed women, suggestive images highlighting certain body parts—generally breasts with an emphasis on cleavage, legs

and buttocks. These clips are from a large variety of mainstream music videos, TV shows, films and iconic pop cultural moments, all generally portraying women as sexual commodities widely available across a vast range of contemporary media sources. These are not by definition of their genre or context pornographic, but those boundaries are increasingly blurred, as evidenced in the progression in *Don Jon* (2013) from media imagery to pornography (Boyle K. , 2010). The imagery is overtly sexualised and lacking in eroticism, distinguished by the fact that it is very focused on male arousal, clearly coded as a 'buffet'-style sequence where the heterosexual male gaze is invited to 'feast' (Mulvey, 2009; Nathan, 2007). This sequence represents the notion that ICTs enable a saturated landscape of female eroticised imagery and position the masculine hegemony within that space.

The saturation of imagery via ICTs enables persistent scopophilia or "the pleasure in looking" (Mulvey, 2009, p. 16), by allowing the heterosexual male to consume or enjoy images of the female form virtually anywhere, at any time. The opening montage in *Don Jon* (2013) sets this ubiquitous context, coding the sensation of saturation, and the commodity of women's bodies as parts and the male "use of the female body for their arousal or amusement" (Boyle K. , 2010, p. 1). These hypersexualised type images are revisited in the text, and in another telling moment have Jon and his father Jon Senior literally transfixed to the television screen, while Jon's mother looks forlorn and sorrowful. They are watching a very hypersexualised Carls Junior advertisement, with a bikini clad, oil covered model. She moves into sexually provocative poses, and is topless by the end of the ad, save the careful positioning of her arms in a rather pathetic nod to making it safe for mainstream broadcast. The patronisingly ironic closing tagline for the ad chimes out "more than just a piece of meat" (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013). This moment is made all the less re-imagined or re-presented, all the more contemporary and

relevant by the fact that this is an intertextual moment. The advertisement they watch was televised in the real world, and is still viewable on YouTube as of January 2015. This was not, as might be possible, created as an exaggerated filmic device. This real world advertisement nullifies the sensation of parody or satire, but in a moment of social critique, subverts the masculine hegemony by reinforcing the representation that sexualised content is used to captivate men, at the cost of their own attention and intimacy with others, shown by the fact that all personal engagement stops, and the men just stare.

Capitalism, and the production and maintenance of a system that requires more: consumption, production, profit and has therefore become tightly intertwined with, sustained, strengthened and enabled by global digital communication. Technology continues to develop in this way, regardless of the price paid for the reduction in personal intimacy or the detriment to masculine identity. It has become a tool for globalised endemic capitalist exploitation, as "digitalization engendered a double relation between global capitalism and global communication" (Hope, 2009, p. 65). Capitalism, as shown in representations in the film, will always find the fastest route to consumers' income, and the fastest route to influence buying decisions through ICTs, because "[t]he working of contemporary capitalism—and the foundations of consumer cultures—are therefore intrinsically connected to the concept of technology" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 124).

The masculine figures in *Don Jon* (2013) (Jon Senior in his dominant hegemonic position, Jon in his subordinate) are nonetheless portrayed as helpless and hapless in the face of this continuous mainstream bombardment of hypersexualised images of women. Neither masculine position provides redemption for these characters. This is further reinforced in the banter between Jon and his friend Danny (Jeremy Luke), where Jon argues that "He likes that skinny shit, he likes that skinny, high fashion looks-like-a-boy shit" (Gordon-

Levitt & Bergman, 2013). This is another well-worn media representation of a bodily type, which is evidently an option for Danny to consume. If anything, their masculinity is partially defined by the appreciation and objectification of women, compellingly mediated through technology. To the point where Jon Senior exclaims, "Jesus Christ, are those tits real?" (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013) on meeting Jon's new girlfriend Barbara (Scarlett Johannson). Rather than expressing interest in his son's possible happiness, Jon Senior does not enquire after Barbara's interests or well-being, it is clear she is an object Jon has attained. Jon Senior's behaviour is reprehensible, subverting the dominant hegemony, because his behaviour is not easy to dismiss as 'boys will be boys'; there is something unnerving about his persistent misogyny and aggressive sexual behaviour. By these representations, the narrative holds up this extremely polarised version of masculine hegemony to be rather repulsive and of men being 'seduced', not simply by the images themselves, but by the sheer incessantness of the technology enabled and commercially defined commodified imagery. This interrogates the notion that technology can aid the separation of body and mind, because "technological advancements and new computer mediated communications seem to have marginalised the physical body as simply 'flesh or meat'" (Davison, 2007, p. 43). In this representation of the commodification of the female body, men may separate women's bodies from their minds, in such a pathologically, spiritually empty and organised fashion, because "unchallenged mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order" (Mulvey, 2009, p. 16). There are signposts in *Don Jon* (2013), of a pathology or a darkness, in the interweaving of technology, the commodification of the female body and its insistent hypersexualised presence in the masculine hegemonic landscape. More potently, it represents feelings of inadequacy of the male figure, and an absence in secure male identity.

There are complex interactions at play between technology and masculine identity elicited by *Don Jon* (2013). The text represents how a technology enabled mass media, and its consumption, have enabled Jon's caged hegemonic existence, in large part because contemporary technological advances allow representations of masculinity and femininity to be accessed in relative privacy (Aiken, 2007). This entrapment is visually expressed in at least one moment where the blinds in Jon's bedroom form the shadows of bars; his bedroom is represented as a cage or prison cell. Furthermore, this combines with visual language to illustrate his 'trapped-ness', through repetitive actions and activities including his use of pornography, the fast cut scenes of Jon cleaning his home, visiting the gym and driving his car. The idea is reflected therefore, that representations become mediated to such a degree that they override the possibilities for more personal interactions to better understand masculine identity. This strengthens the argument that whilst the space between people has digitally narrowed with the ubiquity of ICTs, its compression of space has led to the distancing of people from each other. It is in the rigorous repetitiveness of these failed attempts to maintain or defend the masculine hegemony, or Jon's *status quo,* which suggests the idea that the dominant masculine hegemony is not a stable site to locate masculine identity.

6.3 Pornography and sex addiction

ICTs, and in Jon's case, the commodification of women's bodies, link to displaced emotional energy and the poor value of insecurely established masculine identity. This leads to represented pathologies of masculine identity. Represented in *Don Jon* (2013) is the sense that "[w]hile the physical body does not disappear when engaged with computer-mediated communication, the distance between the physical body and social communication events is widened, which allows for a shift in the degree to which gender performances are body dependent" (Davison, 2007, p. 43). Jon is a full blown porn, and

quite possibly, sex addict (Kafka, 2009). Jon exhibits various symptoms which illustrate "disturbances in human sexual desire, motivation, and behaviour" (Kafka, 2009, p. 3). This is revealed in a montage in the text where Jon sleeps with a succession of anonymous women he meets at the same nightclub every week. The narrative names his condition, Jon stands apart neither as a loner, nor his addiction is because of his position as a subordinate masculine. The text positions this type of addiction as regular as drug or alcohol addiction, with similar withdrawal sensations and the feeling that the subject cannot go without (Schwartz & Abramowitz, 2003). This text serves to bring the pathology of sex addiction out of the recesses and shows just how easily the ordinary man can suffer.

Jon is not on the margins of society, he leads a very ordinary existence, he goes to work, he has friends, a social life and keeps house. Represented is the idea that Jon has an illness, a disease of the body and mind (Kafka, 2009; Kibby, 2007; Schwartz & Abramowitz, 2003). Pornography and technology are not to blame for this, but the combined tides of the ubiquity of pornography, its commodification of the body and its enabling through technology, make it easier for addictions to develop. Pornography, it is argued, can also have a socialising function as "[p]ornography has allowed men to learn about female and male bodies and sexual techniques, to feel less shame about ejaculation and semen, and to accept themselves as sexual beings" (Cowburn & Flood, 2007, p. 492). Nonetheless, whilst the benefits of this socialising function may be valid, the negative impact of ICT enabled pornography is reflected in *Don Jon* (2013), not its benefits. In fact, these pornographic 'scripts' are influenced by capitalist demands:

> [i]magine a world in which children's sex lives are being remotely programmed
> from [...] the San Fernando Valley. In the secrecy of their bedrooms, they are

being fed very specific scripts. At first they are repulsed as well as fascinated, but as they develop a taste for them, they are rewarded at their pleasure centres until they crave more, more, more (Goldsworthy, 2013, p. 45).

In Jon's case, "[t]his alternative reality might be as addictive as drugs, with similar effects" (Kibby, 2007, p. 125) and it is Esther who first calls him a "junkie" (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013), using the coded and powerful language referring more commonly to drug addicts. Jon then utters the immortal junkie phrase, "I could stop if I want to" (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013). He tries to stop, but then confesses to Esther that he cannot masturbate with his eyes closed or without porn. Jon suffers from a type of "[c]ybersexual addiction (compulsive use of online pornography)" (Kibby, 2007, p. 124) which is accessed through laptop, DVD and in casual sequences in *Don Jon* (2013), on his phone while driving and in an academic lecture. It is also characterised as being in response to stress or difficult emotions, such as the time at dinner Barbara is pressuring Jon to study and get a better job, flashes of porn keep cutting into Jon's consciousness, showing the addictive urge as a response and 'solution' to anxiety (Griffiths, 2000; Schwartz & Abramowitz, 2003). These representations suggest a disconnection between hegemonic masculine identity and personal intimacy, which is aggravated by the contemporary 'solution' that technology is supposed to represent.

The disconnections between male role models, hegemonic masculinity, personal intimacy and the false prophet solution technology offers these conditions, positions Jon in an addictive extreme, as a solution to the masculine identity crisis in Jon's life. Jon most certainly takes "a greater degree of sexual pleasure from performing compulsive behaviors" (Schwartz & Abramowitz, 2003, p. 372). He enjoys the commodified pornographic solo experience, over a physical interaction with another, because online he

can find "the perfect clip" (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013), giving representative weight to the fallacy that in a globalised ICT enabled capitalist society the ideal satisfaction can be found in technology, and in the traded commodities of body parts (Boyle K. , 2010; Jameson, 1991; Lash & Lury, 2007). Critically, Jon is not marginalised within the narrative, he is not stalking anyone, his addiction is text book and the character eventually develops a reasonable self-awareness of it, even admitting when confronted by Barbara who asks, "What's wrong with you?" He replies, "I don't know, I don't know" (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013), where he at least admits there is something wrong. This is part of a telling moment where technology serves his undoing, Barbara catches him out because she sees his viewing history, "You looked at 46 porno sites today, Jon". Jon expresses remorse— incredulous Barbara spits back sarcastically, "I'm sorry I have more sex with that thing than I do with my girlfriend?" (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013), and the naming of the troubling link of technology and body becomes fully explicit (Flood, Young men using pornography, 2010). Jon insists on still using porn to masturbate even under the circumstance where he has a lover in his bed. It is shown as a habit that Jon gets out of bed in the middle of the night, leaves his lover sleeping, to masturbate using porn, because:

> For the next few minutes all the bullshit fades away and the only thing in the world is those tits, that ass, the blow job, the cowboy, the doggy, the money shot, and that's it… (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013)

This dialogue is cut between Jon's face and fast cut images from various pornographic videos. It is hurried, intense and fetishised—we are shown his process for reaching orgasm powerfully linking technology, commodified bodies with psychic and biological processes (Marx, 1967; Rosenzweig, 1992). The fetishisation becomes double—the obsessive devotion to female body parts (commodification) and "the fetishisation of technology and the globalised lie of its vulgar materialism that entraps the subject in a

technological phantasia coordinated by the 'metaphysics' of technology" (Hourigan, 2009, p. 2). Because technology is an intrinsic part of culture, what we 'do' rather than something separate (Johnson, 1999; Piatti-Farnell, 2014), it is represented in *Don Jon* (2013) as being part of the "disease" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 117) of technological obsession. Male subjectivity therefore, falls foul of the converging tides of fetishised technology, commodified body parts and the "culturally induced schizophrenia" (Jameson, 1991) of a technology obsessed contemporary Western society. This brings together the interlinkages in non-redemptive patterns in masculine identity.   The disconnectedness of human contact through technology is emphasised during the night school lecture scenes in *Don Jon* (2013), where the teacher is never shown, but concludes the last lecture with "If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to e-mail me" (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013). His disembodied voice echoes the 21st century compulsion to connect, not with faces, but with screens.

6.4 Conditioning

The themes and modes discussed in this chapter "echo distinctive approaches to the crisis of masculinity in their portrayal of white men as pathological, deviant victims of circumstances beyond their control" (Franco, 2008, p. 45). This is not to rob men of their subjective agency, yet in *Don Jon* (2103) Jon represents the idea of the hapless male, within a capitalist driven technologically enabled system of commodities, as persistently socialised through these signs and symbols, demanding that we empathise and identify with Jon, or the male symbol, as underdog. The text places Jon as a working class male who is positioned in such a way that technology is just one of the affecting forces that creates a "coerced forgetfulness" (Kibbey, 2005, p. 17) about the value of these objects and commodities. These commodities, in Marx's terms, become a "social relation" (Marx, 1967, p. 72). That is, the objects or commodities, even if they are videos or images of

female body parts, transcend their own intrinsic value and become a social exchange, representing something more than themselves, as well as misrepresenting a solution to absence, loneliness, isolation and crisis in masculinity. This portrays male hegemony's loss of self, as these social relations or exchanges supersede true emotional or spiritual growth, because "exchange value is exchanged, so to speak, for spiritual value" (Kibbey, 2005, p. 19). The exchange value is replaced by the spiritual 'promise' that corporate capitalism provides, instead placing the emphasis on objects. The moments where Jon and his father are hypnotised by the female form, represents the commodification of female body parts as often used to market all forms of fast moving consumer goods, everything from cars to burgers, because of a culture influenced so much by an "increasing global integration of economies, information technology, the spread of global popular culture" (Lieber & Weisberg, 2002, p. 274). These combined influences have reached such a degree that the male psyche is represented in *Don Jon* (2013) as having undergone a form of 'programming'.

The concept that the human psyche can be programmed, as argued by Piatti-Farnell (2014), works in favour of the capitalist imperative to sell. Technology at varying points can subsume the roles of certain cognitive functions such as communication, memory and calculation, meaning that activity in the human conscience and "[l]ives merge into the digital" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 117). In the beginning of the film, like Pavlov's dogs at the ring of the bell (Tully, 2003) Jon gets "as hard as a fuckin' rock" (Gordon-Levitt & Bergman, 2013) at the distinctive chime of his Mac laptop booting up, and its association with pornographic satisfaction. Jon's consciousness has largely been bypassed as the technology provokes a physiological reaction, even if he has voluntarily switched on the laptop, the 'chime-effect' is profound. Herein lies a compelling device—a reciprocal metaphor of the literal in-text narrative as a representation of male experience in Western contemporary society, confirming Royle's assertion that "our loves, our experiences, the

comings and goings within and all around us are increasingly programmed" (Royle, 2003, p. 23). If technology were to be programming in just this kind of way, then these cultural fears can be fairly expressed within popular culture (Piatti-Farnell, 2014), as in this simple example in *Don Jon* (2013). Yet this moment when the chime rings, sets the context for a sequence of events in *Don Jon* (2013) which express the programmed integration of masculine subjectivity, of the male self with technology, so much so that there is evidence that people are simultaneously "animated and agitated by the power of the programme" (Johnson, 1999, p. 131). The agitation present in these moments represents a subversion of masculine identity by exaggerating the desires of male sexuality, re-packaging and re-selling them *back* to men at the most basic level—at the level of human desire. This conditioning as shown in *Don Jon* (2013) represents the pathologies in sexual and emotional behaviours—such as difficulties of intimacy with others that plague masculinity in contemporary culture. These pathologies are exacerbated by the the powerful currents of displacement of loneliness and isolation from intimacy with family, with the culture of consumption and market forces brought to bear through ICTs.

6.5 Temporality

In this thesis the idea is proposed that a link is represented in the film *Don Jon* (2013) between the complex and interconnected relationship between profit, technology, the human psyche and difficulties with securing male identity. When using a screen, phone or other device, people are in a state of waiting for the new, always alert, as the postmodern condition of the obsession with the new dictates (Jameson, 1991; Johnson, 1999). People are reacting constantly to their gadget with which they have formed a very close relationship (Piatti-Farnell, 2014). Studies have found that "regular users of digital technologies—aimed at information gathering and sharing—act as if they literally cannot function without them" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 120). This collapse between the real and

the mediated world, a world where instant gratification becomes the catch-all, results in a loss of self and a loss of time. In essence capitalism plays its part because "[p]rofit is a function of the drive towards internetworked instantaneity" (Hope, 2009, p. 63). Therefore, the market pushes for faster and faster connections, in some senses leaving behind what the human consciousness can actually deal with, consequently "[t]hese developments generate new experiences of time" (Hope, 2009, p. 65). Represented in *Don Jon* (2013) is the excess of stimulation provided at the touch of a button by ICT's, and at the heart of these intersections is the idea that an overloaded or over-stimulated brain becomes a "trusting brain" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 120), where "[t]he inability to distinguish and evaluate information properly puts individuals in danger of being manipulated and exploited" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 120). If the mode is present where the over-stimulated male brain is put into a trusting state, having already been primed to be insistently searching to fulfil displaced needs such as the absence of intimacy, then technology in its currently over-subscribed, excessively commodified landscape has a detrimental and potentially damaging impact on the emotional well-being and security of male identity.

Even the car, offering the age old social construction of masculine expression, provides little respite for the frustrated male figure. The only time Jon exhibits any real urgency in his frustration and rage is when he is in his American 'muscle car', "the object par excellence of American affection and affectation" (Wilson, 2012, p. 348). The car and the very action of driving, with its associated highways and tunnels, Baudrillard summarises as "nothing but the immense metaphor of life" (Baudrillard, Simulacra and simulation, 1995, p. 113). Jon drives aggressively, hurling frenzied abuse at other drivers. At the zenith of his frustration he gets out of the car, screams at a driver and smashes his fist through the rear window. Here the technology and spectacle of the car are "an

inimitably American phenomenon, a torrid romance with the figure of the automobile, the dynamics of which illustrate collective American desires, perversions, insecurities, bodies, and perceptions." (Wilson, 2012, p. 348). Jon finds the power to let loose his otherwise displaced emotions, sadly his only real opportunity to express himself is allowed at the wheel of something powerful to which he has control. Intimacy, in this case with the masculine self, is represented in these moments as entirely dependent on a relationship with a machine, and in continuation of the illustration of destabilisation in patriarchal order and hegemonic masculinity, it does not provide redemption.

6.6 Conclusion

Don Jon (2013) represents the idea that technology can exacerbate challenges in locating and securing masculine identity and it does this in large part by collapsing the spaces between people, through the speed with which information and communication can be shared (Hope, 2009). Difficulties arise however as the space between people is compressed—authentic communication in social relations is commodified and intimacy is lost in faster or more immediate modes of communication. In Jon's case, the inception of these difficulties, such as intimacy with others, with self, instability of masculine identity, addiction and the reliance on technology to fix the problem, is shown in his relationships with his family, the first space masculine identity is socialised (Bartholomew, 1990). It is this absence or lack in Jon's familial bonds, that lead to an unknowing of himself, and a dysfunctional seeking of his needs to be fulfilled in ways he could not at home. This provides a representation of masculinity partly in crisis because intimate connections with others are under strain. This can be traced to the idea that "satisfying intimate relationships are the most important source of most people's happiness and sense of meaning in life" (Bartholomew, 1990, p. 147). The argument is presented, therefore, that the masculine identity seeks validation from other sources such

as, romantic relationships, technology, and financial security, when none of these things alone, can fill the hole presented by the confusion and disruption in the solidity of hegemonic masculinity. In different ways technology, fuelled by a capitalist imperative to profit, steps in to fill the gap left by a lack of intimacy with self, with family and with others. This chapter has revealed a form of non-redemptive narrative in *Don Jon* (2013)*,* representing the idea that technology may not enable the re-connection of masculine identity with others; it does not sufficiently substitute these intimate connections, does not aid in satisfying expression of the masculine and serves to accentuate and aggravate these issues of masculine identity.

In *Don Jon* (2013) a lack or absence of intimacy in personal and social relations is shown to be interwoven with the location of masculine identity and technology's role within that. *Don Jon* (2013) re-presents how difficulty in expressing or realising challenging feelings, fears and emotions can be displaced and re-focused into technologically-enabled obsessive or inappropriate outlets or distractions. This includes representations in the film of housework (vacuum cleaners, cleaning equipment), cars, gym equipment and pornography addiction. Technology is still largely socially constructed as a masculine solution, and still remains strongly linked to hegemonic masculinity (Lohan & Faulkner, 2004; Nobbs, 2007). If technology fails to serve the redemption of the masculine, as represented in *Don Jon* (2013), this destabilises a trope that helped define masculine identity, because "Western masculinity was increasingly identified with the making of technological progress" (Nobbs, 2007, p. 304). If the social well-being of the masculine is eroded, as reflected in *Don Jon* (2013) then the social cost of technological progress is too high. These ideas intersect through channels of intimacy, where they are helped or hindered by technology, and where this leaves the values and norms of masculine identity in contemporary Western society. The interlinking of culture and technology are

entrenched in the performance of masculine identity, and "any notion of technological involvement in the narrative needs to be considered in relation to the cultural framework that generates it and, therefore, can act as a medium of critique for the framework itself" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 114). This chapter has considered technology outside of ICTs, or the digitality of communications technology such as computers, mobile phones and televisions. The context includes other machines such as cars, gym equipment and in the case of this film, domestic equipment including a vacuum cleaner—they all play their part and have, in their contextual use, bearing on masculine identity. These different technologies at points in the text serve as pivots around which the main character navigates his life, and in large part, his masculine identity and (un)happiness within it—creating frustrating relationships with family and partner, and a pathological addiction to pornography. The lasting difference presented by *Don Jon* (2013), in contrast to the other films analysed in this thesis—is the possibility of redemption. The redemptive opportunity available to Jon is not enabled by technology, it is strengthened by relying on it less. And rather than it being an anomaly or counterpoint to the other texts, this film reveals much that coheres with themes of consumption and masculine identity in crisis. The text is less concerned with issues of war or violence; its greater concern are anxieties of failing intimacy, reduction in patriarchal power bound to the beating drum of a technology and its incessant enabling of consumerism. When reviewing the cultural links of masculinity and its interconnection with masculinity "it is likely that any conception of each will unearth hopes and anxieties about the other" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 114).

Anxieties represented in *Don Jon* (2013) show that technology, with its emphasis on ICTs, is able to compress the space between men and intimate relations with others and themselves, making it harder for masculine identity to be securely fixed. Technology, in partnership with capitalist Western culture, does this by commodifying time and human

relations, mediating the direction of attentions and leading to "a close relationship to gadgets that, while seemingly intended to simplify modern life, has actually transformed it into a very precise organisation of methods and systems" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 117) This pressurises relations and builds further confusion. Technology, as represented in *Don Jon* (2013), has been shown in this chapter to be intertwined with the very fabric of personal identity, and simultaneously becomes the enabler and the tool for capitalist advancement through applied pressures of consumption and the inherent imbalance this creates in masculine identity. At the cost of personal intimacy, technology offers multiple opportunities to displace uncomfortable feelings, brought about by a lack in intimate familial or social relationships. A confusing circle is formed where personal intimacy is destabilised, in part located in a failing hegemony, technology then offers a fix. This fix further destabilises masculine identity and erodes personal relationships, bringing us back to the start of the circle. The crisis of masculinity in *Don Jon* (2013) is located in destabilisations in masculine hegemonies, representing the pain of displacement (Badmington, 2000), manifesting in pathologies of addiction, issues with personal relations and personal dissatisfaction as they intersect through technology.

Chapter 7: Violence and Masculinity

7. Introduction

This chapter focuses on how masculine identity is represented and contested in post-2000 film, through the expression, threat or depiction of violence, by analysing the film *Drive* (2011). This thesis has so far highlighted spaces for masculinity to be contested; through the body, through technology and the confusion arising from these issues as they relate to masculine identity. Representationally, through the perpetuation of the dominant masculine hegemony, violence is traditionally upheld as *the* masculine solution, as a way to resolve a crisis in film (Grist, 2007). If this text reveals that violence can aggravate, express and further deepen crises, then hegemonic masculinity is undergoing further subversion. This is critical to studies of masculinity because "[t]he vast majority of violent acts across the world, past and present, are committed by men" (Edwards, 2006, p. 44). Masculinity is inherently associated with violence in part because "[v]iolence is integral to masculinity" (Hatty, 2000, p. 120). Taking this further Connell (1987) argues that "[w]hat it means to be masculine, is to embody force" (p.27). This force can result in violence, which in film has often been examined in combination with masculinity as "film viewers have never lived in a world without violence (Schwartz, 2008, p. 464). Violence is such accepted cinematic shorthand for masculine performance that its associations with masculinity seem obvious, yet deconstructing the various depictions, codes, contexts and symbolism in film violence can reveal less obvious representational cues that may reflect social trends. Films featuring violence enacted by men provide a space for social issues to be played out within a creative framework (Piatti-Farnell, 2014).

The pursuit of representational links between masculinity and violence will be grounded by the idea that "dominant constructions of masculinity—that is hegemonic

masculinity—are grounded in notions of (self) control." (Hatty, 2000, p. 207). Furthermore, there is a deep connection between the idea of violence in film as an expression of loss of control, and the regaining of 'something' that follows—power, status, financial gain, vengeance and other coded or symbolic signifiers of the recuperation of masculinity (Newman, 1998). This regaining of control or reward is the cinematic 'satisfaction' of redemption provided by traditional cinematic narratives. Where violence is found not to redeem, to restore some kind of equilibrium, or to initiate a satisfactory new equilibrium, the dominant hegemony may symbolically be shown to have lost control; of itself, of its own power and of its power over others. Themes of control are important when it comes to relating the crisis of masculinity (Cheng, 1999; Connell, 1987), failures in of intimate relations with other men (homosocial bonding), with women and social anxiety as related to the post-9/11 war context of the post-2000 era. This filmic text may act as commentary and show that "a collective crisis of these issues in early 21st century Western culture is exposed" (Usmar, 2014, para 2).

As the signifiers and coded masculine violence is analysed, if applicable, it will be related back to issues in a social context. Issues that have the potential to be represented include; the futility of violence in wartime of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars post-9/11, the re-staging or expression of anxiety and the consequences of violence as it relates to men at war. Other issues include the potential failures in intimacy between men or others and how this might be represented through violence. In combination this thesis may reveal that these factors can have a devastating impact on masculine gender identity (Connell, 1995; Jameson, 2000; Rosin, 2012). This chapter will take particular interest in how masculine hegemonic values are represented to be upheld or subverted, and highlights how *Drive* (2011) may challenge the value of the dominant hegemony. An understanding of the relationship of represented violence to masculinity is therefore vital because "we

live in an era in which violation is one of our primary cultural metaphors. We live in a culture in which violence is spectacular, immediate, and entertaining" (Hatty, 2000, p. 192). The indication is that these films represent non-redemptive narratives in social issues. This may suggest that social changes or problems have occurred that cannot be remedied without major political or social change, and the current social climate may exacerbate these problems further where the dominant hegemony prevails.

7.1 Decoding violence

In order for the violence within *Drive* (2011) to be usefully decoded, it needs to be defined as much as possible, and the types of violence must be categorised. Firstly, violence can be argued as "a series of events, the course of which or the outcomes of which, cause injury or damage to persons or property" (Newman, G., 1998, p. 42). Ambiguity remains with this definition however, as it could be argued that the pulling of the trigger of a gun is less violent than beating someone with a blunt weapon. The results, however, can often be as bloody, and suffering eventuates. Violence causes harm that can be, "physical, psychological, or even sociological (countering bonds of community or state)" (Slocum, 2001, p. 2). It is important therefore, to consider the *consequences* of violent acts, as they relate to codes or signifiers to generate meaning as it relates to masculinity (Grist, 2007; Hatty, 2000). It is also important to have a fairly broad view in order to interpret these acts. Newman (1998) argues that categorising violence can drift between categories and these shifts are inevitably presented in film violence. There are myriad ways to encode violence within film, but for the purpose of this chapter, two ideas will be central to decoding violence: instrumental and expressive violence. 'Instrumental' violence assumes a level of cognition, that the perpetrator had an intended goal or aim, something they wish to achieve, which they have decided the best or only way to do so is through violence, such as an armed bank robbery. The useful view of instrumental violence is that

in certain contexts it can be considered 'good' violence, that is, it benefits the greater good, or the protagonist in some way, such as acting in self-defence. If this thesis is to reasonably consider the possibilities of the subversion of dominant masculine values, then it is important to consider the potential for the more blurred line use of good or bad violence, at the very least, violence as it functions contextually, in the story and for the characters. Newman (1998) argues for example, that the violence meted out in the *Godfather* (1972) is in the name of protecting the family, and therefore by being encoded in the enshrined values of the mafia, it is good violence.

The second concept is 'expressive' violence and is generally considered an "explosive phenomenon" (Newman, 1998, p. 43) and can "erupt as an expression of deep emotional forces and feelings, such as rage or frustration. The assumption is that it is not his conscious intention to kill" (Newman, 1998, p. 43)—therefore in most cases perpetrators are held less accountable. Crucially, expressive violence is, therefore, more strongly linked with the idea of loss of control, and characters can be encoded to have 'lost it' and in some cases to be considered inadequate or a 'hot head' because of this loss of composure. Within these definitions exist grey areas, and at times violent action may swing between the two; it is possible that within the grey areas of ambiguity there exist representations of the shadows of loss and social anxieties.

Masculinity and violence in *Drive* (2011) are aided in the grimness of their representations through sensations of isolation; for example, the lonely masculine figure of Driver. *Drive* (2011) is grounded in the isolation of its main character by focusing on the lone(r) stunt driver and mechanic referred to only as 'Driver' or 'Kid', as played by Ryan Gosling. At night Driver works for the criminal underworld as a wheelman for hire, where his "preternaturally deft driving skills and quick wits suggest that his ability to

handle the car as if it were an extension of his own body is both an extraordinary power and valuable commodity" (de Jesus, 2012, p. 1). This positions Driver within some aspect of the dominant hegemony—he is a skilled driver, with mastery of machine and technology (Baudrillard, The vital illusion, 2000). Driver's mode is to keep his work strictly professional. He makes it clear that he does not help his clients carry out their deeds, nor does he carry a gun–he states "I drive". His private life is one of quiet isolation, punctuated by moments of graphic violence. He cannot sleep at night and drives around alone—this is shown from the outset and is indicated in conversation when garage boss Shannon asks, "Getting any sleep kid?" (Winding Refn, Palermo, Platt, & Pritzker, 2011).

7.2 Contemporary noir

The sensations of isolation oscillating between moments of violence are enhanced by the noir-like styling the film solicits. Arthur (2001) argues that recent examples of noir, in a more flexibly applied context, "continue to be underwritten by relations between outlaw activity and anxious masculine codes of performance" (p. 154). Scholarship argues that masculine failures are consistently and persistently recycled in noir-like films after the original time period of noir following the Second World War (Arthur, 2001; Hirsch, 1999; Martin R. , 1997). Yet these themes prove hard to link convincingly to the earlier classical setting of noir cinema. Arthur (2001) argues that what is more useful, for what could currently be considered 'neo-noir', would be to see thematic links to the classical period noir. These links are represented through "enacted violence, in the situations, protocols, moral ambiguities, and consequences of how bloodshed is inscribed within narrative, formal and symbolic textual operations" (p. 154). Driver, from the initial set up, lives a life that in part subscribes to the dominant hegemony through his mastery of machine, his skill and his uncanny ability to fix cars. If the text were to elicit moments of anxious masculine performance in combination with violence and moral ambiguity, this would

offer grounding for social reflection and a critique of contemporary American masculinity in relation to noir film codes.

The inscription of violence into the narrative remains ambiguous and provokes an unnerving sensation of masculine violence. This is well represented when Driver assaults Cook. Cook is a menacing character and violent thug, who violently beat up Driver's neighbour Standard and threatened Standard's wife Irene and their son Benicio. Driver tracks Cook down to a strip club. He walks down a corridor taking a hammer out of the back of his trousers. Without hesitation he bangs Cook's hand hard with the hammer— Cook is then on the floor screaming in pain. The topless dancers/strippers, mostly sitting or getting changed, freeze in a grim tableau, juxtaposing the overt female sexuality with the brutal and grisly masculine violence in their midst, as Driver stands with his foot on Cook's prostrate body. This dark freeze frame moment, with its saturated colours and suggestions of shadowy dark corners, adds a claustrophobic humidity to the film and reinforces the nightmarish noir-like qualities. The music during this scene is orchestral, dark, and bleak, with low notes which elicit a sensation that is more of an alarm than music. It represents distress rather than the redemptive moment Driver's revenge on this character could be. These moments elicit an ambiguity which is in part encoded in the combination of instrumental and expressive violence that Driver metes out. It is instrumental violence in that he wants, logically, to protect his neighbour and remove the threat caused by Cook, but the action is enriched with expressive indications of violence. Driver is sweating profusely, he is visibly shaking, he is scared and angry—effectively, he has 'lost it', and so the subversion of the hegemony as something in control, is partially represented.

Driver takes the bullet Cook gave to Standard's son and force feeds it to Cook by pinning his mouth open with a hammer. Arthur (2001) argues that neo-noir often uses "novel

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deployment of noir violence in nonritualised, frequently nightmarish patterns" (Arthur, 2001, p. 157). The dangerous or threatening force feeding of another character is a familiar motif in cinema violence—see *Seven* (1995)*, Get Carter* (1971) or *Salt* (2010) for example. It remains a violently eccentric action, and therefore more noir-like in *Drive* (2011), not least because it operates at that moment like a strange threat—Driver is standing over Cook with a hammer, perhaps ready to nail the bullet into Cook. Arthur (2001) argues that noir has been transformed from "a contentious yet relatively coherent film-historical category into a promiscuous marketing tool and signifier of eccentric criminality" (p. 153). Marketing tool or not, the eccentric male characters of *Drive* (2011) have a tendency to never be far away from either perpetrating or suffering violence. These eccentricities can be seen in a number of moments in the film and aid the representations of masculinity and its intersection with violence. For example, Driver, at various points, chews toothpicks in the same way others might smoke cigarettes—echoing the prodigious smoking of post WWII noir films (Arthur, 2001). Driver is introverted and hardly speaks during the film. In one tense exchange Cook, a violent hoodlum, writes "Fuck off" (Winding Refn, Palermo, Platt, & Pritzker, 2011) on his hand and shows it to Driver. Bernie, the lead gangster played by Albert Brooks, has eyebrows that have been shaved to the point where they have almost disappeared, rendering his appearance to be simultaneously eccentric and menacing. Albert Brooks is said to have shaved his eyebrows to enhance his menace (IMDb, n.d.). Nino (Bernie's Jewish gangster partner) indicates a certain eccentric irony when he says to Driver on the phone, "You're not very good at this are you?" (Winding Refn, Palermo, Platt, & Pritzker, 2011). Eccentricities are not specific to noir as a genre alone, but in *Drive* (2011) they combine with the propensity and closeness to violence of these male characters, which echoes Arthur's (2001) 'neo-noir' definition of films of and following the 1990s. The *male* characters, as is the film noir-way, are:

killers that inhabit the urban margins [and] are in effect displaced persons, metaphoric survivors as well as the perpetrators of a violence that cannot be adequately named, that indeed must be filtered through the individual criminal ordeals (Arthur, 2001, p. 170)

Drive (2011) is teeming with these broken men suffering, surviving and perpetrating violence. Shannon runs the garage where Driver works. He is continually scheming and plotting. He is physically, morally, and spiritually bankrupt. He has a limp caused by a formerly broken pelvis for which he still walks with a calliper. This is the price he paid for a bad debt to gangster Nino—"I paid my dues" (Winding Refn, Palermo, Platt, & Pritzker, 2011). With the exception of Driver, who suffers near fatal violence, all of the male characters, Bernie, Cook, Nino and Shannon, meet a violent end by the close of the text. In noir fashion however, Driver is not redeemed to a stable or clear new equilibrium by his violent acts, he merely 'escapes' (Martin R., 1997). The masculine characters either gain nothing from their violent acts, or in Driver's case, escape with less than they started. These representations of the failure of masculine violence to achieve or gain redemption for the male figure, begin to signpost the increased irrecuperability of masculine violence in contemporary Western society.

Drive's (2011) eccentric and noir-like male characters also share a critical symbolic representation; the complete absence of their ability to bond homosocially, that is, with other men (Brandt, 2000). All the male bonds throughout the text are either absent or end in failure due to violence. This is encoded in a lack of intimacy between characters and with their proximity to violence with each other. In the moment when Driver first meets the most violent and menacing character, the lead gangster Bernie Rose, he refuses to shake his hand. Driver says, "My hands are a little dirty" (Winding Refn, Palermo, Platt, & Pritzker, 2011), which is strange because he has just removed his driving gloves. Bernie

responds, "So are mine" (Winding Refn, Palermo, Platt, & Pritzker, 2011) and Driver reluctantly shakes his hand. This exchange serves a number of functions. In Driver's persistently measured, stoic and steely silent persona (he says very little during the film), he isolates himself from the criminals he works with and those who personify violent menace like Bernie. Driver's hesitancy to 'deal with the devil' is understandable, yet played with quiet understatement by Ryan Gosling. They both agree they have dirty hands. This is a symbolic acknowledgement of the dark past of both characters, yet no personal background is ever revealed of Driver. We discover later in the film Driver is adept at violence and Bernie is also a skilled murderer, able to dispatch victims with an eerie and clinical calm. The climax of the film sees Bernie die at the hand of Driver, and Driver very nearly dies in their exchange. The development of the relationship—where they began as potential business partners— is sparse and stunted, they go from allies to enemies. Through these sometimes violent exchanges between Driver and Bernie, it highlights the failure of males to bond, in any real sense during the course of this text. There is an emptiness in these moments in the story that is representative of the difficulties in homosocial bonding and acts as a reflection of the crisis of masculinity in contemporary Western culture.

This interrogation of homosocial bonding "locates violence within a series of masculine homosocial realms" (Arellano, 2012, p. 1) and highlights in stark relief, not just Driver's alienation, but each male characters' alienation from each other. The only time any intimacy is shared, is as a precursor to, or in the context of, an act of violence. This makes provocative suggestions about the failure of the hegemony to provide firm meaning for the construction of masculine identity (Arellano, 2012; Brandt, 2000; West, 2000). This is exemplified when Bernie comes to dispatch Shannon for colluding with Driver over the theft of mob money. He leans on a car in Shannon's workshop, the sunlight is dappled coming through the window, providing a golden glow in part of the shots of this scene,

in stark contrast with the grime and grease of the garage. It is darkly foreboding and there is a quiet inevitability about the scene and in the solemn way in which Bernie approaches Shannon. He talks of "bad luck" (Winding Refn, Palermo, Platt, & Pritzker, 2011) and how he was excited about going into business. Bernie offers to shake Shannon's hand, and whips his switchblade along the length of Shannon's forearm. Bernie calmly, and in a strangely intimate way (context notwithstanding) soothes Shannon and in a compassionate voice says, "Don't worry, that's it, it's done, there's no pain, it's over, it's over" (Winding Refn, Palermo, Platt, & Pritzker, 2011), as if he was a vet putting down an animal. Bernie is then shown at home, washing the blade in his kitchen sink, akin to a household chore. This is a conspicuous visual ritual; he places the blade in an ornate display case, with other blades. There is no glory or redemption in this death, no recuperation of 'good' violence meted out by Bernie with any sense that anything has been achieved here. The violence in this case is instrumental, as Shannon knows something for which Bernie cannot allow him to remain living. Yet Bernie's final expression of the situation is sadness at the consequences; so even though he did not 'lose it' in an expressively violent way, the violence is not 'good' violence even in this criminal context. There is a quiet sadness that comes with it and the mournful and regretful look on Bernie's face as he sits quietly in his home. Symbolically, this reads as failure; a fatigue with the repetitive masculine behaviours Bernie's character is inscribed with. He does not 'achieve' from this action.

Drive (2001) continually provokes when it treats violence in this way, as it distances itself from tropes of the adrenaline fuelled action film full of "passion and acceleration" (Schubert, 2001 p. 193). The only truly intimate moment the two characters Bernie and Shannon share in the film, is when one is murdering the other. Up until this point, Bernie had largely been hostile to Shannon, even refusing to shake hands during the exchange

where he shakes Driver's hand. It is telling that Bernie extends his hand to shake Shannon's as a last gesture, as part of the motion of murdering him. When Driver later finds Shannon dead, sitting upright on the floor, their most intimate moment comes as Driver, who is by now sweaty, dishevelled, and covered in blood from his prior battles, finds his composure is fully broken. He reaches for Shannon's face in a touching gesture. Driver is visibly upset and wet-eyed—Shannon is dead and his face falls away from Driver's hand, symbolically as if he is turning away. This illustrates that whilst masculine interactions in this film tend to be located either around discussions of money, violence and crime, it shows a preoccupation with the relationship between masculinity and violence, and also a stark dislocation of the capacity for much else in homosocial relationships (Arellano, 2012).Only when the violence occurs, does any kind of doomed and fractured intimacy occur. This idea is re-affirmed as Driver's relationships with other men in the film are derelict and deficient in some way. He is isolated from them, attempting to isolate himself from the violence, yet makes choices to be close to it and to the violent men, linking the concept of the narrative confusion of masculine identity and the place violence has within it. If popular culture narratives seen in film can reflect social climes, then this violently realised intimacy may signify a growing absence, confusion or fracturing of homosocial bonding in Western culture. This could reflect the idea of men feeling less secure about their place in the social world (Rosin, 2012; Sansom, 2011) and more confused about their identity as it relates to the dominant hegemony.

The representations of a lack in intimacy and homosocial bonding are strengthened by the ambiguity the film establishes through its noir genre referencing. *Drive* (2011) is further distinguished from other genres, action, thriller or drama, in how the bloodshed is part of the narrative and visual landscape of the film (Martin, P., 1997). *Drive* (2011) is hard to categorise; it is not a modern western, a gangster film, an action film, or a road

movie, even if it contains aspects of those genres. It is a neon tinged neo-noir film very much of the 21st century. The neon pink opening credits contrast with the dark city skylines and shadows of cars passing by. The characters' environment is predominantly encoded as dangerous, or "encoded with signifiers of mortality" (Arthur, 2001 p. 164). The dividing line between objects, bodies and architectural or location settings is blurred. These blurred moments, which create a resonance throughout the text, are ultimately enacted and distinguished through violence (Arthur, 2001; Martin, P., 1997). These resonances are strengthened through Nicholas Winding Refn's direction, who with this film maintains his reputation for grim and "generous depiction[s] of stylized violence" (de Jesus, 2012, p. 1). The depiction of the 'character' of L.A. the city, expresses this relationship between violence and masculinity and adds noir-weight to the film as *Drive* is the epitome of "the urban alienation, visual style, and moral ambiguity of L.A. film noir" (de Jesus, 2012, p. 1).

The opening establishing shots of *Drive* (2011) shows Driver staring out at the cityscape. His apartment is sparsely lit with minimal furniture or possessions, representing a detachment from his surroundings, hinting at his alienation. The camera moves outside to the shadowy streets. Driver makes his way along nondescript highways—car parks, roadways, freeways, concrete overpasses and tunnels. These scenes are visible at different moments, often depicted with the inherent anonymity of passing traffic. Shadows and light alternately play across his face as he drives, his expression one of somber concentration. In the opening moments there are shadows of skyscrapers and bright city lights which shine out from the dark; the combination of shots in this sequence present an uninviting, anonymous and forboding environment, the "[a]rchitectural spaces bear

the unmistakable residue of the uncanny" (Arthur, 2001, p. 166). *Drive* (2011) therefore uses filmic modes of noir throughout in a way that represents:

> The modern city, in its intrinsic verticality and accretion of concealed and forbidden realms, provides the series with a plethora of parking garages, sewers, subway tunnels, and other subterranean areas mobilised in the course of violent action as the harbingers of death (Arthur, 2001, p.166)

This architectural expression provokes a simultaneous intimacy and claustrophobia with the characters; it brings us close to them but in an intimidating and dark way. The character of the city is ominous, anonymous and isolating, which, by its interpretation through the noir genre, amplifies links to representations of a broken, violent and potentially dangerous masculinity.

7.2.1 Noir, violence and masculinity

Contextualising these moments adds up to a noir-like sense of ambiguity, uncertainty and eccentricity. This creates the sensation of 'neo-noir' as "haunted by a spectral semiotics or textual ecology of mayhem" (Arthur, 2001, p. 154) that is distinguished from the violence and brutality in other genres of commercial film. This strengthens the reading of *Drive* (2011) as a noir text and most critically, allows greater space for social critique, because referring specifically to noir text, Slocum (2001) argues that "[w]hen depictions of violence fall outside, run counter to, or exceed those normative frameworks, the acts mount both cultural and representational challenges" (p. 18). Arguably there is a case for noir as a set of cultural conventions that has become a generalised style appropriated by some mainstream films (Hirsch, 1999; Martin, P., 1997). The vein of moral ambiguity in masculine representation is enabled in part by the noir-like styling and modes which runs

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throughout the text of *Drive* (2011) and revisits and re-presents the crisis of masculinity. Noir texts are convincingly linked over the decades to the recycling and restaging of masculine cultural issues (Arthur, 2001; Martin R., 1997; Slocum, 2001). The repetitive nature of these representations strengthens the embedded codes and reinforces their value as cultural signifiers. The general absence of "regeneration through violence" (Slotkin, 1992, p. 29) in film noir endings, and in *Drive* (2011), renders the violent acts within this film, largely non-redemptive. This provides significant context for the argument of this thesis that non-redemptive filmic narratives reflect social issues of non-redemptive patterns in masculine identity. It also creates a sensation of confusion in representations of masculine identity. For the most part it helps emphasise the consequences of violence: physically, psychologically and socially.

7.3 Consequences of violence

Representations of confusion, regret and the consequences of violence are particularly evident as the symptom of a gender in crisis throughout *Drive* (2011). These themes are explored in a sequence where Driver kisses Irene in their apartment building lift. He moves close to her, pushing her back to safety, both symbolically and as it turns out literally, almost shielding her with his body. The sequence begins tenderly as the lights dim in an eerie and theatrical way, the music poignant but with an edginess that makes this scene romantic, but also with apprehension. In striking contrast Driver then turns away from Irene and their slow-motion romanticism, to brutally assault the henchman accompanying them in the lift. Driver finishes the altercation by viciously stomping on the man's head, to the point where visceral cracks and snaps of the man's skull can be heard and a 'mushing' sound as Driver stomps on brain tissue and skull fragments. Irene looks on in horror. This is a key moment, where the violence crosses a boundary from the instrumental type that is in the defensive protection of he and Irene, to a violence that is

expressive and in doing so is represented as more brutal and horrific than the fight that led to it. Driver, at the moment he goes too far and stomps on the man's skull to excess, is evidently frustrated, his grunts synchronised with the stomping sound, at this point the violence crosses over into expressive violence and Driver has lost it. This shifts the narrative from the redemptive potential of a protective and in control hegemonic male, to something altogether more dead and empty. The blood spilt in this scene "establishes the hero's superiority on the battlefield" (Piatti-Farnell, 2013, p. 1145), yet it raises questions about the masculine association with the solution of violence, what is 'good' violence and what is 'bad' violence are examined here, showing the horror violence can bring. The potential here is for Driver to redeem himself, to protect the feminine; a sure sign of the re-affirmation of the dominant masculine hegemony (Arellano, 2012) and to gain something, perhaps to gain victory over his male opponent. This scene holds the promise of redemption for him and the possibility of re-affirming his masculine identity in accordance with dominant ideals, that is, in the protection of self and others through physical force. The representation here is, however, of the horrifying consequences of violence. As Irene looks back to Driver from outside the lift, he looks back sweating, confused and frustrated, the lift door slides shut symbolically closing what potential there could have been between them, and the redemption possible in Driver's relationship with Irene. The suggestion that hegemonic masculine violence is not a desirable or viable solution to issues within the storyline, and, as this chapter argues, as an allegory for wider social issues of masculine violence. It provides a space for the regret of violence to be given a human face— that of Driver (Swirski, 2011). This regret is shown in moments where Irene cannot believe what she sees, and where Driver drives around the city alone, the camera focused on his face as he stares sorrowfully at the anonymous cityscape.

The moral ambiguity of these moments points to confusion over the performance of hegemonic masculine identity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Driver sought to do the

right thing by protecting Irene, yet ultimately horrified her with expressions of masculine violence. When violence as a masculine solution begins to fail in filmic texts, it critiques the link of brutal violence and masculinity (Hobbs, 2013). As instrumental and expressive violence continually cross back and forth, the distinction of good or bad violence become largely redundant concepts in *Drive* (2011); the violence as hegemonic masculine mode gets Driver no closer to anyone or anything he may want. It does not help him get the girl. It is not a path to success or redemption. It is a failed attempt to restore the prior equilibrium. These repeated failures suggest that the narrative of *Drive* (2011) focuses on the non-redemptive consequences of violence.

The consequences of violence are further emphasised in *Drive* (2011) and signal more of the social anxiety around violence, rather than being glorified as can be more cinematically familiar (Bick, 1999; Charney, 2001). The violence stands apart in *Drive* (2011), as aided by the brutal realism in the expression of violence throughout the film, from more throwaway casual violence seen in some movies where there is no blood, and someone can be punched again and again without much consequence (Arthur, 2001; Bick, 1999). The first act of violence perpetrated in the film is carried out off-screen. The aftermath of this violence has a quiet apprehension about it, as the consequences of the violence are slowly revealed, portraying a greater sense of anxiety for the characters, rather than loud dramatic on-screen moments or adrenalised kinectivity. Driver arrives at the apartment building car park and sees two thugs leaving, one carrying a baseball bat. Key to this sequence is the order in which the consequence is revealed, rather than the act of violence itself. Driver walks around a corner to hear Standard pleading with his son "Don't be scared, it's our secret" (Winding Refn, Palermo, Platt, & Pritzker, 2011). Driver sees the boy Benecio half hiding in the doorway, edging away from something unseen. His father is then revealed, lying in broken shadow, bloodied and badly beaten, spitting blood on the car park floor. Notably, Driver approaches Benecio first, ignoring the victim

(Standard) and inaudibly has a talk with him. Driver is not seen talking to Standard until the next scene when Standard has cleaned himself up in the bathroom. These slow and quiet moments, question the complex relationship between violence enacted by, and on the masculine, in part by not celebrating it, and linking with the potentially traumatic consequences for the victim and those close to or in proximity to the victim (Edwards, 2006; Connell, 2005). There is a simultaneous dislocation and quiet mourning about this moment, the interplay between grief and mourning becoming an important mode through which masculine violence and identity are interrogated (Piatti-Farnell, 2014). This is also highlighted by the slowness of this sequence and the soundscore throughout which is quiet and foreboding. As Kaplan (2005) argues, it is possible to identify collective anxieties being re-lived or re-staged through media texts. Links are shown in this narrative of quietness or mournfulness, where the emphasis is on the consequences rather than the act of violence itself.

Major themes of confusion about the relationship violence has to masculine identity and the emphasis the text places on the consequences of violence are identified in *Drive* (2011), are largely enabled by the ambiguities provided by this noir-like text. The consequences of violence in this storyline do not redeem any of the characters to an improved equilibrium; in fact the bloodshed fails all involved. Arthur (2001) argues that noir films were originally "construed as symptoms or thinly veiled allegories of social problems induced by wartime immersion in bloodshed" (p. 155). Whilst Arthur (2001) refers largely to post-WWII texts, *Drive* (2011) and all the texts considered in this research, were written, produced and released whilst the US was at war in, most prominently, Afghanistan and later in Iraq. This posits *Drive* (2011) within this 'bloodshed' context post-9/11, setting up the possibility for social allegory and the reflection of violent issues relating to masculinity (specifically men at war). Secondly, these wars have largely been without clear purpose, end or victor (Batchelor, 2009;

McAvan, 2009; Sciurba, 2009). The general absence of "regeneration through violence" (Slotkin, 1992, p. 29) in film noir endings, renders the violent act or acts within this film, as largely non-redemptive. This gives strength to the argument of this research that non-redemptive filmic narratives reflect significant social issues of non-redemptive activities.

7.4 Post 9/11 and war anxieties

It is important therefore to review the potential for allegories of this war or context of bloodshed, and explore avenues for the re-staging anxieties relating to war (Charney, 2001; Kaplan, 2005). This research will also remain cautious that not all popular cultural texts with violence or any type of warfare are immediately pre-occupied with recycling or re-staging this context (Piatti-Farnell, 2014). In an early scene, Driver is parked outside a pawn shop where Standard is about to carry out a robbery. On the wall is a large mural of the American flag and the patriotic phrase, "God Bless America" emblazoned in large letters across the flag; this phrase is seen again as the scene progresses. Standard is then shot dead, unceremoniously, without slow-motion. There is a quiet tension before he is put down like a dog in the car park. The bullet caught him awkwardly in the back of his head. The war anxiety allegory runs in the storyline that Standard was to perpetrate an act for the greater good as he was going to carry out a bad violent act or threat to protect his family. He is then murdered by an unseen foe (very much like Al Qaeda hiding in caves or as unseen terrorists) with no glorious or brave death. To reinforce the war allegory narrative, shortly after the robbery which is followed by a loud car chase, Driver threatens Blanche (Christina Hendricks). Having methodically put on his driving gloves, he states, "You just got a little boy's father killed" (Winding Refn, Palermo, Platt, & Pritzker, 2011); a potent representation of fathers being killed in wartime. In *Drive* (2011) it is this sequence that signposts "cultural fears and apprehension" (Piatti-Farnell, 2014, p. 160) to be dealt with regards to violence and war and signals that "the dislocation of Western

history is projected onto an imaginary framework" (p. 160). This then enables commemoration and the processing of anxiety "uncorrupted by grief" (p. 160), because this is a text seemingly unrelated to collective anxieties about the masculine place in war, but it raises the possibility that this also aids in the collective grieving process by re-staging or re-living the consequences of violence (Kaplan, 2005). Combined with early identification of the futility (yet inevitability) of masculine violence and the attempt to wrestle redemption through it, "one might expect a socially affirmative, purgative use of violence" (Arthur, 2001, p. 160). Yet with the juxtaposition in this robbery scene of the large US flag, patriotic slogan and the failure of violence, there are potential allegories for the anxieties of war. One critical way the text of *Drive* (2011) further distinguishes itself as potentially representing the social anxieties of war, is the lack of distinction between 'good' and 'bad' violence. These distinctions have become less clear in modern times as the reason for the US to go to war have substantially been in doubt (Chomsky, 2003). Violence here, as in the Iraq/Afghanistan wars, offers no solution which coheres with ambiguities around violence representing social anxieties about loss (Usmar, 2014). In part this text reflects a resistance to the dominant masculine hegemony and the social loss the masculine solution that violence provokes.

7.5 Conclusion

The analysis of *Drive* (2011) in this chapter shows that the representationally redemptive power of violence can fail. This reflects the crisis of masculinity as a collapse in traditional or common codes of dominant masculinity (Cheng, 1999). This represents the failure of these codes to bring about connection, happiness and satisfaction. The failure of these codes is the inability to adapt amongst the glaring sight of their faults, their failures in personal relationships and in war. In this case, the violence represents a collapse because its consequences fail the male characters of the text. If we think that

"[m]any of the images of hegemonic masculinity are aspirational, depicting fantasy or fictional characters whose attainments represent the extremes of socially approved masculine achievements" (Hatty, 2000, p. 117), then their failure, or their non-redemption, reflects the failure of the masculine hegemony to bring about satisfaction and deepens the crisis of masculinity.

Furthermore, this chapter presents compelling evidence that the recycling of collective social anxieties are being represented in popular culture, through violent masculine expressions that result in non-redemptive story arcs. This is portrayed through depictions of violence enacted by men, generally done to men. These moments raise questions about the value and the failure of the masculine hegemony. The post-9/11 climate of mass or collective anxieties, as argued by Kaplan (2005) and the lengthy wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, remain relevant context for this film. These events represent a significantly non-redemptive political and social narrative of their own. The United States then President George W. Bush, set clear trajectories to "rid the world of evil doers" (Chomsky, 2003, p. 109) by invading Iraq and Afghanistan—the United States in this context is a state power rather than its respective society. This creates a deeper social anxiety, by the sense that these wars were entered into with ulterior motives, namely in Iraq in the pursuit of monetary gain through oil reserves (Chomsky, 2003). The rhetoric of fear was used to legitimise these invasions, because the United States "[e]mpire promises protection from dangers that it rhetorically magnifies in order to secure itself, a magnification that intensifies our fear in the dark" (Brown, 2005, p. 10). These fears, intensifications and deceptions present the non-redemptive arcs that are then re-presented in popular culture—in this case film. One argument is that these war-mongering actions are international crimes "too horrible to fully know, the blocked knowledge returns cultural symptoms that betray crimes" (Deren & Moffatt, 2005, p. 134). In this thesis

three film texts show that redemption is not reached by any of the male protagonists through violent or other demonstrably dominant masculine acts. Masculinity is tightly linked to these re-presentations because gender, the body, technology and violence (as the masculine realm) are ubiquitous in contemporary Western culture. They are the spaces in which these struggles are influenced, played out and contested. Masculine identity is used as a method to interrogate these issues, raising questions about the value of the traditional masculine hegemony, and its part in creating and maintaining these redemptive dead-ends. These representations of masculinity show deep seams of confusion and frustration in the formation and maintenance of masculine identity.

We live in a society where violence is actually at an all-time low (Kaplan, 2005; Rosin, 2012), but the expression of it in popular culture relates to the expression of frustrations and anxieties and how they affect masculine identity. They affect masculine identity in a complex way. Sadly, "the pressures to speak an act violently are everywhere…Violence is not a deviant act; it is a conforming one" (Toomey, 1992, p. 44). And whilst "violent masculinity is then officially condemned and vilified in our society" (Antony, Liggins & Usaklis, 1998, p. 28), in cultural forms this violence is often celebrated. Perhaps this helps explain why "reaching deep into the historical and cultural storehouse of masculinity, a young man may still retrieve the ultimate tool of manly self-assertiveness; omnipotence through violence." (Hatty, 2000, p. 6) Whilst two of the three texts seem to be critical, or in some senses presenting a cultural fatigue or desperation with masculine violence, "the fact that violence helps to shore up male identity is an aspect of modern culture which is difficult to assimilate" (Antony et al, 1998, p. 28). Yet the expression of the failure of masculine violence, to solve problems or resolve crises, re-presents the failure of hegemonic masculinity to provide meaning to men; perhaps the yawning emptiness presented by these texts, can begin to be filled by something optimistic and anew (Connell

& Messerschmidt, 2005). The breakdown in the usefulness of current hegemonic values is represented in the non-redemptive storylines of this text. Masculine violence as a solution fails, and this represents a moment in time that acknowledges dominant hegemonic masculinity is corrupt and failing to safely locate the lived experience of men in contemporary Western culture.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8. Introduction

This study has examined representations of masculinity and reflections upon the crisis of masculinity in post-2000 Hollywood film by examining three films with male protagonists as main characters. The hypothesis was that these representations could reflect irrecoverable socio-political issues. These include but are not limited to; the dissatisfaction present in an intensely consumerist society, collective social anxieties about the contradictions of the US at war in the post-2000 era and the symbolic failure of the masculine body to win out in these conflicts. Clear connections are made between representations of the social construct of masculinity as perpetuating these challenges but also simultaneously being aggravated by them at the subjective level. Patterns are analysed in this thesis that demonstrate this connection. The claim is therefore argued that representations of masculinity do reflect irrecuperable issues in the socio-political sphere and that the crisis of masculinity is firmly located at the intersection of these issues.

One of the cautionary arguments presented by the literature review was to be mindful that even where subversions of hegemonic masculinity were presented, their recuperation is inevitable in mainstream Hollywood film. Film remains a persistent instrument to transmit hegemonic ideals and maintain patriarchal power. Scholarship argues that with widespread confusion about masculine identity "[o]ne should always keep in mind the adaptive power of hegemony, capable of turning an instance of original subversion into a commodified corroboration of hegemonic discourse" (Lay, 2000, p. 229). In the case of these three films, a pattern was present where dominant hegemonic ideals or behaviours, regardless of context, did not redeem the male characters.

There is an open-endedness about these texts that helps solidify the irreconcilable representations of the crisis of masculinity. None of the male protagonists reach a

satisfactory cinematic climax, even through all their attempts at staging hegemonic masculine ideals or reclaiming ideal territory. These ideas are portrayed through themes of loss, absence and confusion as the overarching representations of the male protagonists. In order to focus on potential evidence of the crisis, attention was paid to moments in the three films that offered signs or signifiers of hegemonic masculinity and also opportunities to negotiate other forms of masculinity. These codes were then connected to social, psychological and film theory as well as gender studies as they relate to masculinity in contemporary society. The concept of hegemonic masculinity was used as a central framework through which representations of masculinity were assessed. This concept was used as a continuous litmus test to detect subversions or recuperation in the representations of masculinity. A clear link between these moments of subversion as well as recuperation has been made to implications for hegemonic masculinity and the securing of subjective male identity as it relates to social climate in Western contemporary culture. Social comment, critique and other subversions of dominant ideals were presented and analysed across the range of the three films. This is significant because these representations and the potential subversions of hegemonic masculinity would be key indicators, or waypoints, to help determine representations of the crisis of masculinity within film. In these concluding remarks I will bring together the intersecting issues across these themes and highlight their relation to the crisis of masculinity.

The lasting sense left by this analysis is a representation of widespread confusion in the securing of masculine identity, either through traditional values or by the failure to negotiate new ones. Repeated attempts to secure satisfaction through familiar ideals of masculinity failed to redeem the male characters within the film narratives. The idea that masculinity is not fully recuperated or redeemed through portrayals of hegemonic masculinity in mainstream film adds new knowledge to the field.

8.1 Major findings

In both *Drive* (2011) and *The Wrestler* (2008), analysis revealed symbolic representations of social anxieties as they relate to a post 9/11 context and the wars that followed. The key mode for this was the way in which the texts focused on the consequences of the characters' actions, through the use of violence and by utilising the body as a symbolic weapon or machine. The manifest failure of the male body or the use of violence to bring the characters cinematic satisfaction intersects with the crisis of masculinity because hegemonic masculinity itself engenders masculinity as providing a physical, sometimes violent solution.

The failure of dominant hegemonies in these representational contexts provides an allegory for the futility of war. It also provides symbolic meaning to the contradictions in the poor treatment of soldiers as they returned home. They had acted on the government demands that they perform, yet like the male protagonists in *Drive* (2011) and *The Wrestler* (2008), they were not rewarded. This can be seen in *The Wrestler* (2008) as The Ram died for no sacrificial or heroic purpose. He dies out of devotion to the crowd and his identity in the ring. In *Drive* (2011), the main protagonist gains nothing other than survival from his hegemonically masculine endeavours which involved both violence and skilled driving. The non-redemption of these male heroes queries mythic structures of masculinity and heroism and represents the potential to disrupt dominant cultural notions of masculinity. The failure of the hero or male protagonist in these films presents anxieties or discrepancies in the collective unconscious about the fallibility of hegemonic masculinity.

Attempts to re-negotiate terms with hegemonic representations to establish a new equilibrium or other satisfactory outcome for the characters also fails. The ways in which these confusions are portrayed are evident in interlinked moments across all three texts.

A persistent theme represented is a lack of intimacy in social, familial and homosocial contexts. In some cases it pivoted around violence as the men in *Drive* (2011) had their most intimate moments centred on violent activity. In *The Wrestler* (2008) The Ram was most at home with his wrestling colleagues and the violence performed in the ring. In *Don Jon* (2013), Jon spends most of the film trying to fathom true intimacy with others whilst being frustrated by his own addiction to digital porn. For the most part, the idea of intimate relations with others seems bewildering to all three male protagonists. Even as the characters negotiate different modes of behaviour from the dominant hegemony in faltering attempts to recoup their loss, satisfaction eludes them.

At the end of *Don Jon* (2013) Jon is unsure about the future in an ambiguous denouement with his new partner. These texts make representative suggestions about the lived experience of men in Western culture, where intimate bonds with others have failed and dominant ideals provided by hegemonic masculinities do not provide an adequate script from which to recuperate those lost bonds. They will not help men restore healthy relations and hegemonic ideals actually contribute to the crisis of masculinity by damaging relations with others. This acts as a barometer for the crisis in masculinity because it suggests, through representation, that the hegemony in post-2000 Western culture is immovable, inflexible and is in fact potentially damaging to men and their relations with others. The damage caused by the hegemony to relations with others in this way is not a new idea, it has been argued by scholarship already highlighted in this thesis (Brandt, 2000; Messerschmidt, 2012; Robinson, 2001). The argument presented here, however, makes clear connections between irreconcilable differences in social trends and the failure of dominant hegemonic representations to symbolically or manifestly resolve those differences.

A further overarching theme that intersects in the texts is the pervasive and potentially destructive consequences of an intensely consumerist culture. This can be separated into two interconnected ideas. Firstly, through the commodification of the body, both their own and others, the The Ram and Jon are left confused and unfulfilled. Seeking shelter in hegemonic ideals does not redeem the men, it pushes them further away from happiness because:

> On the one side…there is the erosion of the boundaries between body and world, body and image, body and machine. On the other, there is its direct pathologisation: trauma as the collapse of the distinction between inner and outer, observer and scene, representation and perception, as the failure of the subject's proper distance with respect to representation…a collapse of proper boundary maintenance (Seltzer, 1997, p. 35)

Boundaries between the inner and outer selves are represented as faltering in evidence gathered from the texts, as the characters try to make sense of their identity against powerful ideals of how they are supposed to be. Evidence presented by the texts represents a consumer culture transmitting messages that indicate securing hegemonic masculine identity men must continually be commodified and be enjoyed as spectacle for others to gaze upon. Their bodies must be a site to change not just their outer world, but also their inner world. The unrealistic expectations of these cultural pressure points are represented in *The Wrestler* (2008) and *Don Jon* (2013) as they manifest in pathologies of addiction, confusion and failure in intimate relations.

The second connected idea, relates to the consumption of the 'thing'—whether it be the body or sex —outweighs the pleasure of the act itself. In 1990s film and literature this idea was termed blank fiction, because "in blank fiction pleasure is explored more in ways that illustrate the extent of commodification's encroachment into human experience than to offer any relief from it" (Annesley, 1998, p. 378). This was proposed by James Annesley (1998) and whilst he largely refers to popular literature, the idea was expanded

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to include films like *Fight Club* (1999). This perspective is useful because it "identifies the logic of consumerism and its persistent colonisation of subjectivity as the root causes of this gendered malaise" (Gronstad, 2003, p. 8), and as this research further reveals, consumerism reaches deeply into the difficulties faced in the representations of masculine identity. The texts analysed in this thesis represent the idea that in post-2000 film, this blank fiction state has become so advanced as to leave masculine identity in a perpetual state of confusion. The cultural product and social climates that are represented through the narratives of this thesis have moved forward, into a darker, even more nihilistic and non-redemptive space. *The Wrestler* (2008), *Don Jon* (2013) and *Drive* (2011) reflect a shift into a new post-war, post-economic collapse era of blank fiction, where the same obsessions with consumerism feed into the crisis of masculinity in a darker and more pathological way than in the 1990s. This shift represents an overriding sense that these obsessions fail to provide meaningful satisfaction and have a negative impact on the subjective instability of masculine identity.

Don Jon (2013) suggests the displacement of these issues, such as failures of intimacy and the pressures of consumerism, can result in a reliance on technology to fill the gap. In a consumer culture driven by market forces, technology eagerly steps in. Pathologies such as porn addiction are, therefore, also represented as easier to develop. Rather than increasing satisfactory links between people through faster communications, ICTs can compress the space between people by accelerating the commodification of bodies, time and sex, thereby reducing levels of genuine personal exchange and intimacy. Represented is the sense that technology can, therefore, aggravate the crisis of masculinity by providing false connections and the phantasm that it can augment or replace the intimate and social needs of men.

One of the defining links that brings together all three texts is the questioning of patriarchal power. The thesis argues that the representative expressions of frustration, loss and confusion are related closely to Clare's (2001) argument, that rather than the patriarchy being under major threat because inequality in the private and public sphere is still rife, but in contemporary culture patriarchal power is increasingly hard to justify. This intersects through the power structures at all points involved with consumerism, the commodification of the body, technology and violence. Hegemonic masculinities are represented in this analysis to be in a fixed state of non-negotiation with possible alternatives, even to the detriment of the men attempting to perform these types of masculinity. A perilous contradiction exists between the dangers of persisting with the patriarchy as it dictates inequity and destructive social power and the possibility for change and rejuvenation.

This thesis argues that the crisis of masculinity, in its current incarnation, is reflected in a widespread anxiety about how to live out ideal values of masculine identity when these values have been re-packaged and represented by the interests of a society so consumed with commerce and commerciality. The crisis is deepened by further confusions about how these ideals are negotiated at a symbolic level. The thesis argues that these films reflect the impossibility of straightforward causes for these social anxieties, instead creating a set of interconnected signs and signifiers that have notable implications for masculine identity in contemporary culture. The crisis of masculinity, it is argued, is located at the point where traditional values or hegemonic masculinity, are failing to adapt to change. Hegemonic masculinity and its monolithic cultural solutions, such as recurring ideas about the body, technology and violence, are in fact harmful to men and contribute to the tension felt within masculine identity.

8.2 Limitations and future research

The primary limitation of this research is that it analysed only three films. The study is also limited by time and scope, as to the number of themes relating to masculinity it covered. The crisis of masculinity is a complex issue and new contributions are vital to this important area of study. To gain a broader picture of the crisis of masculinity in the post-2000 era research could narrow the gap highlighted by this study by targeting the wider possibility of non-redemptive narratives being reflected in a greater range of films, as well as looking at broader popular culture including music videos and television shows. To develop the scale of this study further, research could encompass issues where irreversibility is a potentially more defined pattern such as with climate change and sustainability. It would be increasingly valuable to see the varying portrayals of men as the perpetrators or potential saviours of apocalyptic scenarios in this context.

It would also be valuable to expand the scope of this investigation by examining films that do have redemptive characterisation of men and analyse this in terms of accepted hegemonic ideals and how it relates to social climate. Another way to further extend and build on this study would be to look at other forms of non-hegemonic representations of men in film. With greater acceptance of LGBT communities, alternatives to the nuclear family, same sex marriages and a more permissive society, different performances of gender and their represented interactions with hegemonic masculinity would build on this study.

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