

The Lads from New Ireland: a Textual and
Audience Analysis of Marginalised
Masculinities in Contemporary Irish Film

Debbie Ging B.A., M.A.

This thesis is submitted to Dublin City University
for the award of PhD in the Faculty of Humanities
and Social Sciences

2006

School of Communications
Supervisor: Dr. Barbara O'Connor

I hereby declare that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my own work.

Signed: Debbie Gray

ID No: 95160906

Date: 03/07/06

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Olive Lillian Nichols.

I am indebted to my supervisor, colleague and friend, Dr. Barbara O'Connor, who has been supportive, encouraging and patient, always in the right measure.

Although they remain unidentified, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the boys and men who agreed to participate in this research. I am also extremely grateful to the group leaders and coordinators who facilitated the focus groups and who supported me in every way possible.

I am especially grateful to the Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Science and Education, which part-funded the completion of this thesis, and in particular to Rhona McSweeney and Maureen Bohan for their support and encouragement. The Gender Equality Unit was established under the NDP (2000-2006) and is co-funded by European Structural Funds.

Thanks to the Head of the School of Communications, Brian Trench, for giving me breathing space when I most needed it.

Thanks to my colleague Dr. Pat Brereton for constructive feedback and moral support.

I am also grateful to Dr. Maggie Gibbon, Dr. Eithne O'Connell and Prof. Luke Gibbons for inspiring and encouraging me to pursue an academic career. Without them I would never have ended up doing this.

Thanks also (for technical, academic, archival and moral support) to:

Dr. Díog O'Connell, Dunlaoire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
Dr. Maeve Connolly, Dunlaoire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
Julie Allen, DCU Humanities Librarian
Eoin Campbell, School of Communications Technician
Sunniva O'Flynn, the Irish Film Archive
Edwina Forkin, Zanzibar Films
Michael Garland, Grand Pictures
Gareth Ivory, RTE Audience Research Department
Lance Daly, Fastnet Films
Macdara Kelleher, Fastnet Films
Moirá Horgan, Bord Scannán na hÉireann / the Irish Film Board

Finally, I would like to thank my partner and soul-mate of 15 years, Tom Cahill, and my children Marley and Willow. I have often been asked how I managed to do a PhD with a family but the truth is I couldn't have done it without them.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Men Running Wild: the 'New' hegemonic Masculinities of Contemporary Cinema.....	10
2.1 Introduction.....	10
2.2 Choose Life, Choose a Job, Choose a Career: British Underclass Film and the Emergence of the 'Loser' Lifestyle.....	17
2.3 Stealin' Stones and Breakin' Bones: Criminal Masculinities in the New Gangster Film.....	26
2.4 'Hipster Anomie' and the Fucked-by-Fate Masculinities of American 'Smart Film'....	35
2.5 Reflexive Sado-Masochism and the Angry White Masculinities of the 'Male Rampage Film'.....	43
2.6 Adolescent Masculinities in the American Teen Comedy.....	52
2.7 Conclusion.....	57
3. Cool Hibernia?: the Masculinities of the New Crime/Underclass Cycle in Contemporary Irish Film.....	59
3.1 Introduction.....	59
3.2 The Lads from Old Ireland.....	64
3.3 Irish Cinema's New Anti-Heroes: the 'Protest Masculinities' of the Celtic Tiger Era...69	
3.4 From Working-Class to Underclass Masculinities.....	73
3.5 Marginalised and Socially-Excluded Men.....	79
3.6 Criminal and Delinquent Masculinities.....	89
3.7 Conclusion.....	102
4. Men Watching Men: Investigating the Male Audience.....	105
4.1 Introduction.....	105
4.2 Approaching the Male Audience.....	110
4.3 The Male Gaze and Spectatorship.....	115
4.4 Multiple Subject Positionings: Class, Age and Gender in Practices of Reception.....	125
4.5 Gangsters, Boxers, Kung-Fu Fighters and Action Heroes: Exploring Multiple Pleasures and Identifications.....	132
4.6 Challenges to Pleasure and the Active Audience.....	139
4.7 Conclusion.....	144
5. Methodology.....	146
5.1 Introduction.....	146
5.2 Selecting a Category of Film Texts for Analysis.....	153
5.3 Qualitative Audience Research Design.....	157
5.4 Selection of Research Participants.....	160
5.5 Questionnaire (see appendix 1).....	166
5.6 Focus-Group Design.....	168
5.7 Group Interviewing and the Researcher-Researched Relationship.....	170
5.8 Data Analysis.....	174
5.9 Conclusion.....	177

6. National Cinema, Transnational Masculinities: Negotiations of Gender and Nation in Film-viewing Practices.....	179
6.1. Introduction.....	179
6.2 Mapping Media as Practice: Locating Irish film Consumption within Broader Contexts of Film and Media Use.....	182
6.2.1 Discrepancies in Patterns of Consumption among Groups.....	186
6.3 Qualitative Findings: The Geospatial and Sociospatial Geography of interpretive practices relating to <i>Intermission</i>	191
6.3.1 “I love watching Dublin films and shit and seeing places that you know”: Local versus National Communities among Young, Working-Class Viewers.....	193
6.3.2 “Unbelievably Irish”: Humour as National Imaginary among the GAA Group.....	202
6.3.4 “You wouldn’t want to associate with them”: the Role of Class and Location in Negotiating Character Identification among the Urban Professional Group.....	206
6.3.5 Locality, Age and Dis-identification among the Rural Men’s Group.....	211
6.4 Conclusion.....	214
7. Audiencing Masculinity: Viewers’ Perceptions of Irish film’s ‘New’ Men.....	219
7.1 Introduction.....	219
7.2 Male Violence: Symbolic, Performative or Real?.....	222
7.3 Exploring Changing Discourses on Masculinity through Discussions about <i>Intermission</i> and Other Irish Films.....	229
7.4 Irony and the Postmodern Audience.....	252
7.5 Conclusion.....	257
8. Class and Protest, Resistance and Subcultural Identity.....	262
8.1 Introduction.....	262
8.2 Underclass Masculinity as Protest.....	266
8.3 Underclass Masculinity as Subculture.....	275
8.4 Conclusion.....	287
9. Conclusion.....	291
9.1. National Film Culture Reconsidered.....	294
9.2 National Diversity, Transnational Homogeneity.....	296
9.3 Challenging Irony’s Counter-Hegemonic Claims	297
9.4 Class, Style and the Commodification of Subversion.....	300
Appendix 1 – Questionnaire.....	305
Appendix 2 – Audience Figures and Plot Summaries.....	310
Bibliography.....	320
Filmography.....	343

The Lads from New Ireland: a Textual and Audience Analysis of Marginalised Masculinities in Contemporary Irish Film

Debbie Ging, B.A., M.A., School of Communications, Dublin City University

Abstract

In the mid- to late-1990s, Irish Cinema underwent a radical shift, which entailed, among other significant features, a thematic trajectory from the rural to the urban, from the historical to the contemporary and from the local to the universal. This shift also involved a radical reconfiguration of cinematic masculinities, not only in relation to the representation of male characters but also in terms of how masculinity as discourse was being addressed. The earlier critiques of traditional patriarchal masculinity, which emerged from a more politically-engaged and less commercial period in Irish filmmaking, began to give way to more ambiguous, male-centered narratives, whose protagonists resist unequivocal ideological categorisation. What is most striking about this new cycle of male-themed and male-oriented films is their preoccupation with underclass, criminal and socially-marginalised masculinities at the height of the Celtic Tiger, a time of unprecedented economic prosperity in Ireland. Although Ireland's increased prosperity has also brought forth a number of urban, middle-class films featuring new, gay and reconstructed men (*About Adam*, *Goldfish Memory* and *When Brendan Met Trudy*), the enduring centrality and popularity over the past decade of 'indigenised' versions of a number of male-oriented (sub)genres from elsewhere merits particular attention. This thesis explores the changing discursive constructions of masculinity which characterise this strand of contemporary Irish filmmaking and the varying meanings and pleasures which they offer to different subsections of the male audience.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Over the past ten years, Irish cinema has demonstrated increasing generic and stylistic diversity in its growing ability to accommodate different scales and models of filmmaking, from small-scale experimental video work through low-budget arthouse productions to the more mainstream works of Jim Sheridan and Neil Jordan. In spite of this, there remains a strongly identifiable trend within indigenous filmmaking over the same period, whereby traditionally male-oriented (sub)genres with what is often referred to as ‘universal appeal’ have been (re)appropriated within an Irish context. Approximately twenty films made in the past decade revolve around themes of crime and social exclusion, and feature sympathetic male antiheroes who are variously marginalised, criminally active and ostensibly positioned in opposition to the *status quo*. These films include *I Went Down* (1997), *Crush Proof* (1999), *Vicious Circle* (1999), *Flick* (2000), *Saltwater* (2000), *Accelerator* (2001), *The General* (1998), *Ordinary Decent Criminal* (1999), *Veronica Guerin* (2003), *When the Sky Falls* (2000), *Last Days in Dublin* (2001), *Headrush* (2002), *Intermission* (2003), *The Halo Effect* (2004), *Adam and Paul* (2004) and *Man About Dog* (2004). *Dead Bodies* (2003) and *Freeze Frame* (2004) can also be loosely associated with this ‘cycle’ given their preoccupation with crime, while the comedies *Spin the Bottle* (2002) and *The Actors* (2003) tend toward parody of underclass and gangster identities. Most of these titles have proven to be commercially successful and even those that did not enjoy sustained theatrical release, such as *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof* and *Last Days in Dublin*, have achieved something of a cult video status among male audiences, as the empirical findings of this study show. Indeed, this study acknowledges the growing centrality of DVD/video in contemporary film-viewing practices by distinguishing between cinema in the strict theatrical sense and cinema as a body of films that also enjoy a significant ex-theatrical existence.

The reasons for the recent shift toward more commercially-oriented, generic filmmaking are complex and primarily, though not exclusively, economic. As has become increasingly evident to filmmakers throughout Europe, small-budget productions with limited audience appeal cannot compete with American mainstream cinema. As a result,

smaller countries, in particular, have had to adapt to the realities of an increasingly aggressive global market by adopting safer formats that will justify production costs and guarantee box-office returns. Over the past ten years of its second incarnation (1993 – 2003), the Irish Film Board actively pursued a policy of constructing “a practice of filmmaking that came from, and spoke to, its own national imaginary with authenticity and integrity, whilst also navigating the implications of international finance from a market dominated by doxa from elsewhere” (Stoneman 2005 p251). Filmmakers were encouraged to think of themselves as “market-responsive auteurs” (ibid. p252) who considered their audience at every stage of the production process. The implementation of this policy coincided with a conscious desire on the part of many Irish filmmakers to abandon national themes and stories in favour of more universal ones (McLoone 2000, Ging 2002, Barton 2004), with the result that Irish cinema started looking increasingly to successful formulae from elsewhere.

Rod Stoneman, former CEO of the Second Irish Film Board, readily acknowledges that the universalising effects of an increasingly globalised film industry on national cinema are not gender-neutral, given that, “The cycle of created demand is locked into specific audience targeting, often focussed on a teenage male demographic” (2005 p259). In Irish film studies, however, the recent move away from historical, rural and national narratives toward more contemporary, urban and universal ones has been theorised primarily within the parameters of national culture and identity (Ging 2002, Barton 2004, McLoone 2000). These changes have not been considered in terms of their impact on the cultural reconfiguration of gender relations, in spite of the fact that the vast majority of the films under analysis not only reappropriate male-oriented (sub)genres but also construct contemporary masculinities in ways that dovetail with important recent shifts in American and British cultural representations of gender. Andrew Higson (2000) points to the limitations of applying Benedict Anderson’s (1991) concept of the “imagined community” to national cinema since “modern communication networks operate on an increasingly transnational basis and cultural commodities are widely exchanged across national borders” (Higson 2000 p66). Similarly, while constructions of gender remain tightly bound to the nation-state, the increasingly transnational nature of corporate,

governmental and communications structures is facilitating new configurations of gender (Connell 2005). In response to these changes, Jeff Hearn (2005 p66) insists that, "Studying men needs to be less ethnocentric, less national(istic), and more fully located in transnational contexts."

Given that films such as *Intermission*, *Adam and Paul*, *Man About Dog* and *Head Rush* have drawn heavily on the themes and styles of cult films such as *Trainspotting*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Snatch* and *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* and that comparisons with these films have been ubiquitous in press reviews and in the films' own marketing strategies, it seems logical that their analysis should also take account of the transnational and intertextual nature of their production and reception. This thesis represents a departure from Irish film scholarship's focus on questions of national identity in that it approaches the films in question using frameworks that are emerging from British and American film studies. This work is concerned primarily with the genesis and significance of a range of new 'resistant' masculinities in cinema and the various subgenres in and across which they circulate. Taken together, the literature suggests that, in spite of the increasing heterogeneity and hybridity that characterises contemporary representations of masculinity in cinema (Spicer 2001), the past ten years have been witness to the emergence of a nonetheless significant and arguably influential repertoire of new hegemonic masculinities in mainstream British and American cinema. Although they are by no means static, homogenous or unambiguous, these reconfigurations of the masculine can be said to constitute a cohesive discourse or set of discourses on masculinity that articulate with and only make sense within the context of the social, economic and gender-political specificities of the past decade. In spite of or arguably because of the ubiquity of discourses in the public arena which celebrate new manism, metrosexuality and the perceived achievements of feminism, these cinematic subgenres posit their male antiheroes as variously resistant, defiant, angry, conflicted, troubled or disenfranchised in the face of key social transformations. In this sense, they largely eclipse the politics, aesthetics and target demographic of New Laddism, a phenomenon which started out as peculiarly British but has cross-fertilised with other forms to produce

numerous transnational or hybridised variants of resistant, anxious and self-consciously ironic masculinities.

Chapter 2 of this study identifies a number of key cinematic (sub)genres which have emerged across contemporary anglophone cinema in recent years, namely the British “underclass film” (Monk 2000), the new British gangster cycle, the American teen comedy (also known as “dude cinema”), the “male rampage film” (Pfeil 1995) and the American “smart film” (Sconce 2000). It explores the continuities that exist between these genres and between the various frameworks within which they have been analysed in the literature. Most importantly, the analysis points to the need to consider contemporary representations of gender in the context of an increasingly global, franchise-led, networked and converging mediasphere, which has accelerated and intensified formal and aesthetic synergies across different media forms and genres. Since the debates about mediated masculinities have arisen both within and beyond film studies, this study is underpinned by an inter-disciplinary approach which is informed by the contributions of sociologists, literary scholars, psychologists and gender theorists as well as those working in media studies, cultural studies and film studies. Indeed, the lack of scholarship on Lad Culture’s impact on contemporary cinema is implicitly critiqued by the researcher’s need to look beyond conventional films-studies literatures and approaches in order to explore the functioning and significance of the new cinematic masculinities.

Chapter 3 explores new discursive constructions of masculinity in contemporary Irish cinema. While close textual analysis of the films in question is used to demonstrate how, where and to what extent influences from recent British and American cinema are evident, the analysis also considers the films in their wider context of reception by looking at box-office revenue, press reviews, promotional strategies and other indicators of the *zeitgeist* into which these films have been tapping. It is argued that contemporary Irish cinema demands to be analysed both within and beyond the parameters of national cinema, on account of the increasingly intertextual dynamics that exist not only between different national cinemas but also across different media forms and texts. Finally, it is

considered essential to consider this cycle of films in the context of wider discourses on masculinity that have been circulating in the social arena for the past decade or more, many of which are also transnational in nature and are channeled via the news and entertainment media. By analysing this new cycle of Irish films in the context of the theoretical debates on masculinity outlined in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 maps out the key questions about audience reception that are addressed in the empirical strand of the research.

While many of the analyses offered by British and American film and cultural theorists present loosely similar explanations for the recent emergence of the excessive and beleaguered masculinities they describe, there is little real consensus regarding the pleasures and meanings that they offer for members of the male audience. Some commentators (Sconce 2002) have argued that the adolescent, disenfranchised and angry masculinities at large in contemporary cinema are intended to be read as class-based critiques of bourgeois values and consumer capitalism. Others (Cohan and Hark 1993, Tasker 1993, Gauntlett 2002) consider the possibility that they function as ironic, self-conscious performances of hypermasculinity that attest to the instability of patriarchal male identity and thus to the successes of feminism. The conscious encoding of postmodern texts as polysemic, self-referential and ironic makes these new discourses on masculinity especially difficult to unpack ideologically, with the result that there are often conflicting accounts of the pleasures and meanings they produce. What connects all of these discussions, however, is a tendency to make speculative assumptions about spectatorship and the audience without recourse to empirical ethnographies of reception.

Research that has considered how male audiences / consumers use mediated images as part of the social fabric of their daily lives (Robbins and Cohen 1978, Walkerdine 1986, Denski and Sholle 1992, Fiske and Dawson 1996, Lacey 2002) has yielded rich - and often unexpected - insights. Chapter 4 reviews the literature on male audiences and spectatorship, some of which supports recent claims that feminist readings of patriarchal masculinities cannot account for the complex ways in which audiences read and identify with texts and characters that appear to endorse male bravado and machismo. For some

spectators, it is claimed, male violence functions as a cipher for other, primarily class-related struggles (Robbins and Cohen 1979, Walkerdine 1986, Fiske and Dawson 1996). Mediated masculinities are thus viewed not merely as reflections of real masculinities but rather as a constituent part of the social world, through which numerous competing and conflicting discourses are channeled. By extending textual analysis to include socially-specific readings of films (Fiske and Dawson 1996), it is possible to open up new interpretations of these masculinities. Contemporary cinema thus becomes a rich source of information regarding how audiences relate filmic images and discourses to the various debates and discussions around masculinity and gender relations that are taking place in the wider social arena.

Chapter 5 outlines the methodological approach used in the study. While the perceived continuities between the Irish films and a number of (sub)genres or hybrid genres originating elsewhere, as well as the popularity of these films among young Irish men sets the terms of reference for the study, the highly speculative and contested nature of the literature on what these images mean to (male) audiences has prompted the inclusion of a substantial contextual element to the study. The research design is thus conceived on the basis of an integrated approach to film analysis, which looks not only at the text but also at industry audience figures, the reception and reviews around the text and empirical audience research (Austin 1999) as well as at the “wider gender scripts” (Nixon 1997) which inform and are informed by cultural representations of masculinity. However, as Mayne (2002) argues, while socially-specific audience studies can extend and shed light on textual analysis, ethnographies of reception are by no means presented as “the truth that will set us free from the overly abstract theorisation of the past” (ibid. p34). This chapter thus draws specific attention to the status of the interview transcript as text, and is conscious of the limitations inherent in (psycho)analysing the speech utterances of others (Tobin 2000).

Given the scarcity of qualitative empirical research on male film spectators, methodological approaches have been adopted from media studies, cultural studies, gender studies and sociology. This multi-disciplinary approach relates both texts and

viewing practices to macrosocial change, giving rise to a type of cultural ethnography which, according to Fiske and Dawson (1996), takes its place alongside - rather than in opposition to - textual and ideological approaches. By exploring how young Irish men from different socio-economic groups engage with the masculinities of contemporary cinema, this study expands the scope of gender scholarship in Irish film studies, makes a significant empirical contribution to current debates around media reception and adds to the growing body of (sociological) literature on Irish masculinity. It also extends some of the current debates about Lad Culture into the domain of cinema, and foregrounds the significance of class and of socially-specific practices of reception in these debates. The findings of this empirical work are presented thematically, in accordance with the key themes that emerged from participants' questionnaires, comments and conversations.

The findings presented in Chapter 6 demonstrate how practices of media use and reception are increasingly informed by intertextual cross-referencing, which is inevitably transnational in nature. Although the approach adopted does not disavow the significance of cinema in the construction of a national imaginary, it questions the coherence and stability of such a concept in a mediascape which is constantly converging and cross-fertilising. By extending the analysis into the realm of reception, the study shows that viewers' engagements with national cinema may also be local and transnational, oftentimes simultaneously. The findings indicate that cinema is implicated in the imagination of communities not only in terms of national identity but also along lines of class, gender, locality and subcultural identification. The research thus supports Andrew Higson's (2000) claim that national cinema – as both an ontological and an epistemological paradigm – can be a limiting concept, and it challenges the supposed integrity of a national imaginary from the point of view of cultural representations of and discourses on gender.

Chapter 7 explores the extent to which the films under analysis are perceived as having something to say about contemporary masculinities, and whether or not they are consciously viewed as continuous with wider postmodern and postfeminist discourses on gender. The way in which the study participants contextualised their film-viewing

practices and pleasures within “wider gender scripts’ (Nixon 1997) is considered to be of central importance here. The significance of postfeminist discourses on gender, as reflected through participants’ responses and accounts of film and media use, is explored in this chapter. Central to this discussion is the impact of Lad Culture on contemporary cinema and the question of how its ironic intentions are received by male audiences. By shifting the emphasis from a consideration of irony as a textual device to the exploration of irony as a reading strategy, the study breaks new ground by testing existing hypotheses on the ideological functioning of irony. While the findings of such small-scale empirical studies are not representative, they are nonetheless useful indicators of how viewers are receiving, citing and possibly questioning mediated images of and discourses on gender. Given that the presence of irony as a reading strategy as well as the audience’s propensity to ideological resistance are called into question here, this study points to the need for more intense and larger-scale studies of this nature.

Chapter 8 documents the study findings from the perspective of class-based subject positionings and their role in determining meaning. Whereas the gender-based discourses cited by participants were relatively similar, albeit qualified by different levels of (self)awareness, class was a much more divisive variable in terms of engendering different meanings and pleasures among viewers. This evidence of the different ways in which working-class and middle-class participants read and enjoyed images of socially-excluded masculinity is used to advance the core argument of the thesis, namely that the momentary resistive pleasures that such images afford young working-class men do not compensate for the more pervasive and long-term impact caused by the culture industries’ commodification of male social exclusion. Thus, while the Irish crime and underclass films serve to valorise marginalised, working-class subcultures such as bareback horse-riding and car-racing and therefore serve a potentially counter-hegemonic function, this commercialisation of social marginalisation as a style or subculture ultimately works in the interests of preserving rather than challenging white, middle-class male privilege by essentialising working-class / underclass identities.

Finally, Chapter 9 brings together all of these findings in relation to the wider literatures on men and masculinity in film. It synthesises the significance of the present research, not only in relation to Irish film scholarship, where both the analysis of contemporary masculinity and reception-studies approaches are under-represented¹, but also in the context of masculinity studies, where film and media research is sometimes marginalised. It also emphasises the relevance of the debates about postfeminist masculinities and Lad Culture to cinema, and suggests that the impact of wider mediated and unmediated discourses about masculinity cannot be ignored by film scholars in an increasingly transnational, intertextual and commercial mediascape, in which images and the symbolic arguably play an increasingly important role in the construction of gender. As the first study of its kind in Ireland, this research does not claim to address the full range of representations of and discourses on masculinity that are evident in contemporary Irish cinema. Rather it concentrates on a particular – albeit popular and pervasive – strand of filmmaking which addresses masculinity in a particular way, and thus constitutes an important inroad into the debates. As such it both responds to and extends existing scholarship on mediated masculinities as well as highlighting new areas for future enquiry.

¹ With the exception of Barbara O'Connor's (1997) study of female viewers of *The Ballroom of Romance* and Helen Byrne's (1997) work on the female cinema audience in 1940s/1950s Waterford, qualitative audience research has been largely absent from Irish film studies.

Chapter 2 -

Men Running Wild: the 'New' Hegemonic Masculinities of Contemporary Cinema

2.1 Introduction

Until recently, the study of masculinity in cinema has been confined almost exclusively to theories of male spectatorship in relation to the spectacle of the female body. The profound influence of Laura Mulvey's (1975) theorisation of a monolithic, psychosexually universal male audience (white, heterosexual and middle-class) has tended to focus film scholarship firmly on the representation of women (Neale 1993).¹ Indeed, concepts of the male spectator as theoretical psychoanalytical construct (Gauntlett 2002 p40) still assume priority over studies of the real or "social audience" (Kuhn 2002). However, while empirical studies of male spectators remain largely neglected (Hanke 1998 p185), a significant body of work has emerged since the 1990s which addresses the representation of masculinity in cinema (Donald 1992, Cohan and Hark 1993, Kirkham and Thumim 1993, Tasker 1993, Smith, 1996, Lehman 2001, Spicer 2001, Powrie, Davies and Babbington 2004, Pomerance and Gateward 2005). Irrespective of whether these analyses are underpinned by feminist, Marxist, postfeminist, postmodernist or queer perspectives, they remain largely preoccupied with the notion of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995), whereby action heroes and other versions of dominant masculinity have been the focus of enquiry.

According to Smith (1996 p88), this tendency to concentrate on images of the heroic male has effectively created a 'monolithic view' of masculinity in film studies, which disavows the multiplicity of masculinities or male subjectivities that populate mainstream cinema. However, even within the parameters of the debate on hegemonic masculinities in cinema, there is little consensus regarding the ideological functioning of the traditional male hero. Since the 1990s, both ontological and epistemological disturbances to the notion of an "unperturbed monolithic masculinity" (Cohan and Hark 1993 p3) have

¹ Mulvey's male gaze theory and its relevance to contemporary audience research are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

become increasingly evident in the diversity of cinematic masculinities available (Spicer 2001) and in the variety of theoretical approaches being applied to their analysis. Clearly, representational and analytical shifts do not occur in isolation but are associated with complex social transformations. Over the past ten years, the public focus on men and masculinities in western society and, in particular, on the social problematisation of masculinity (Ferguson 2003) has had the dual effect of drawing increased attention to masculinity as well as engendering a less stable and monolithic discourse on male identities in the news media, in public debates and at the level of cultural representation. The increasing recognition that accepted configurations of gendered behaviour are socially constructed, in other words that they are configured differently according to different geographical, cultural and historical formations and that they can therefore change (Connell 2005), has been at the heart of the recent disturbances to the invisibility of male power and privilege. According to Fred Fejes (1992), what has happened at the level of the cultural representation of men is best explained as a trajectory from the consideration of "masculinity as fact" to the "facticity of masculinity".

Thus, while conventional action heroes, soldiers and gangsters continue to dominate mainstream movie schedules, they have become considerably less stable signifiers of male power and authority. Some theorists, including Cohan and Hark (1993), Neale (1983, 1993) and Smith (1996), argue that this has always been so, given that most Hollywood film texts "rarely efface the disturbances and slippages that result from putting men on screen as completely and as seamlessly as the culture - and the criticism - has assumed" (Cohan and Hark 1993 p3). Increasingly, postfeminist and postmodern frameworks are being used to identify the faultlines and contradictions that underpin the performance of "muscular masculinity" (Tasker 1993) in a society in which the legitimation of patriarchy is becoming increasingly problematic (Connell 1995). Both Yvonne Tasker (1993) and Fred Pfeil (1995) have argued that the 'archetypal' cinematic heroes of the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* films are contradictory, ambiguous and highly self-reflexive meditations on male power and powerlessness rather than unequivocal endorsements of the patriarchal order.

Meanwhile, the traditional, hypermasculine action heroes of mainstream cinema have themselves undergone considerable transformations in recent years, which acknowledge the gender-political changes of the past thirty years and the limitations within which the justification of patriarchal masculinity can be taken seriously. Examples of such changes include the modernising of traditional, violent he-men, such as Steven Segal's recent re-casting as "Eco-Man" to fit with the changing social and political consciousness of modern audiences as well as the increased foregrounding of irony and parody in displays of machismo and male bravado². Susan Jeffords (1994) has also drawn attention to the increased emphasis on fathering and love in 1990s Hollywood cinema, arguing that physical power, spectacle and externality (Kirkham and Thumim 1993) have given way to more introspective and complex aspects of male identity. She argues that, "recent Hollywood male star/heroes have been constructed as more internalised versions of their historical counterparts. More film time is devoted to explorations of their ethical dilemmas, emotional traumas, and psychological goals, and less to their skill with weapons, their athletic abilities, or their gutsy showdowns of opponents" (Jeffords 1994 p245).

While for many, these developments are taken as evidence of progressive reconceptualisations of gender, for theorists using more conventional feminist and Marxist analytical frameworks, these shifts indicate little more than the patriarchy's ability to respond to the threat of lost power (Steinman 1992). According to Hanke (1998), patriarchy is adept at hijacking ostensible challenges and turning them to its own advantage in order to perpetuate the hegemony of white, middle-class masculinity over women, children, men of colour and homosexual men. He thus views such disturbances to patriarchal norms as evidence of patriarchy reforming "masculinity to meet the next historical turn, to regain the pleasure of reinforcing the norm, to fit the social climate, or to articulate the new racism" (Hanke 1998 p189). In a similar vein, Aronson and Kimmel (2001) have argued that, in a number of recent mainstream Hollywood films, gay characters are not indicative of a more diverse and gender-fluid approach to masculinity

² MacKinnon, K. (1997 p88), for example, regards Arnold Schwarzenegger movies as "counter-cultural deployment of the parodic super-phallus".

but rather function to bring heterosexual couples together, thus reaffirming the centrality of conservative family values and of heteronormative masculinity. Transformations to hegemonic masculinity can thus be read as positive responses to advances in gender equality as well as ways of resisting change through the symbolic recuperation of lost male power.

This study deals with a particular type of transformation in the cinematic representation of masculinity, which has been largely overlooked in the literature to date, namely the self-conscious repackaging of hard, working-class masculinity. While this phenomenon has been addressed by media and cultural studies scholars in the debates about Lad Culture (Whelehan 2000, Gauntlett 2002, Beynon 2002, Attwood 2005, Messner and Montez de Oca 2005), film scholars have been slower to address masculinity in these terms, despite the prevalence of this imagery in a significant number of British, American, and Irish films in recent years.³ With the exception of a small number of British theorists, including Spicer (2001), Monk (2000) and Chibnall (2001), few film theorists have considered the ironic machismo, which has become increasingly visible in contemporary male-oriented cinema, as operating in tandem with broader trends in the cultural 'genderscape'. This chapter maps out significant continuities between a number of new subgenres that deal with masculinity and social change in highly ambivalent terms. It reviews the existing film-studies scholarship on hegemonic masculinity and establishes pertinent links between the film-theoretical frameworks which have been used to analyse the masculinities that characterise these generic categories. However, it also looks to media studies and cultural studies, where many of the debates about representation, the gaze and the audience have been a pivotal force in theorising key transformations in the cultural representation of masculinity, in particular with regard to the emergence of New Laddism.

³ This analysis focuses primarily on British and American cinema as these exert the most powerful influences on Irish film and media culture. According to Joe Lee (1997 p11-12), Ireland's geographical, linguistic, cultural and psychological location means that it is uniquely positioned in relation to the global English-speaking media.

In one sense, therefore, this study does not constitute a departure from the trend noted by Smith (1996), given its focus on the question of new hegemonic masculinities. However, it does shift the discussion of hegemonic masculinity away from the allegedly pro-social heroes of genres such as the war drama, the epic and the action film to consider a new breed of ostensibly anti-social (anti)heroes, whose ideological significance is disputed in similar terms, since they have been interpreted as both lampooning and reconfiguring hegemonic masculinity. These masculinities have emerged in five key (sub)genres over the past ten years, namely the British underclass films of the 1990s (Monk 2000), the new British gangster cycle (Chibnall 2001), the American “smart film” (Sconce 2003), the “male rampage film” (Pfeil 1995) and the teen or “gross-out” comedy. These reconfigurations of masculinity and the (sub)genres from which they originate represent a significant departure from the parameters within which hegemonic masculinity in mainstream cinema has, to date, been defined. Indeed whether it is more appropriate to consider them primarily as reworkings of hegemonic masculinity or as parodies of their own obsolescence, is a central question of the research. Irrespective of whether they appear oblivious to or in denial of changing gender relations, whether they are overtly resistant to these developments or anxiously and self-consciously accept change - albeit heavily cloaked in irony (Gauntlett 2002) – they are best understood as a range of responses (resistance, denial, negotiation) to the changing political and social codes of (post)modernity. The popularity of these masculinities, in Ireland and elsewhere, the transnational and intertextual nature of their evolution, and their significance in relation to contemporary gender politics suggests that they merit, and indeed require, closer analysis than they have, to date, achieved in film studies.

As is demonstrated in detail in this chapter, the new subgenres under analysis here and the masculinities they feature are linked by a number of key transformations. The most notable of these is the rejection of work as a signifier of masculinity, whereby the middle-class or upwardly-mobile working-class hero has been replaced by a new underclass (anti)hero. This is perhaps the most important deviation from Hanke's concept of dominant masculinity, since the protagonist's socio-economic status tends toward downward mobility and social exclusion, and it raises crucial questions about the

significance of class in contemporary representations of masculinity, which are addressed in detail in Chapter 8. Other important transformations include a shift from pro-social to what are often described as “anti-social” behaviours and attitudes, and the positioning of male protagonists in opposition to the forces of law and order. Most of these subgenres exhibit a fascination with the criminal underworld, which is sometimes played out as a means of escaping the suffocating responsibilities of work, relationships and consumer capitalism. Other common characteristics that mark a departure from the stern-faced bravado of conventional male superhero include the rejection of paternal authority, a preoccupation with pain and suffering and a regression into the world of male adolescent pleasures.

Significantly, however, these urban rebels, stoners, ‘losers’ and neo-gangsters also display some important continuities with their predecessors, most notably in the continued foregrounding of white, heterosexual masculinity. Attributed by some to a nostalgia for the ‘certainties’ of pre-feminist or ‘unreconstructed’ masculinity, the revival of the working-class hero (Spicer 2001), the 1960s gangster and the ‘wild man’ of the mythopoetic movement is especially evident in the new British gangster cycle, the “male rampage film” (Pfeil 1995) and in a number of male-oriented British underclass films (Monk 2000). Although many of these characters still engage in physical action and acts of bravado, including armed conflict and robbery, bare-knuckle and kung-fu fighting, stealing cars and joy-riding, the films frequently employ highly articulate and intelligent voiceover and dialogue, in which characters self-consciously ponder their fate, their identities and other existential issues. This is evident not only in the introspective, angsty films described by Jeffrey Sconce (2003) but also in mainstream action films such as *Die Hard* (1988), in which John McClane (Bruce Willis) offers the audience a tongue-in-cheek commentary throughout. According to Tasker (1993 p239), “Whilst *Die Hard* gives us Bruce Willis as action hero pin-up, his persona is very much defined through the voice, more wise-guy than tough-guy.”

Finally, these new genres and masculinities are distinguished by their typically postmodern elements and by their articulation with the wider gender discourses that

inform and are informed by postfeminism. They are heavily influenced by trans-national, cross-media intertextuality as well as by the internal textual elements of postmodern texts, such as pastiche, parody, polysemy, self-reflexivity and irony. Since these masculinities and discourses are seen as indexing, responding to and partly constructing changes in the gender order that are not specific to Ireland but which resonate throughout western culture, they are discussed not only in relation to national identity and indigenous film culture but also in the context of an increasingly globalised gender and media order. The increasingly intertextual dynamic which underpins contemporary mediated masculinities means that Irish cinema - and the masculine typologies it portrays - must be examined not only in relation to masculine images emerging from other national cinemas but also in relation to those being articulated through other media forms such as advertising, television and style magazines. Indeed, it is the specifically postmodern features of the films under analysis, most notably their intertextuality and conscious foregrounding of irony, that makes the ideological functioning of the new masculinities such a contested issue within media and cultural studies, and consequently such a rich area of enquiry for audience reception.

2.2 Choose Life, Choose a Job, Choose a Career: British Underclass Film and the Emergence of the 'Loser' Lifestyle

During the 1990s, a significant number of films were made in Britain that featured underclass or socially-excluded masculinities, including *Trainspotting* (1996), *Twin Town* (1997), *Shopping* (1994), *Naked* (1993), *Small Faces* (1996) and *Goodbye Charlie Bright* (2001). At around the same time in Ireland, the emergence of *Accelerator* (1999) and *Crush Proof* (1999) marked an important departure from the upbeat portraits of working-class life that characterised *The Commitments* (1991), *The Snapper* (1993) and *The Van* (1996). *Accelerator* and *Crush Proof* featured almost exclusively male groups and revolved around joy-riding and bare-back horse-riding, respectively. Like their British counterparts, they appeared to address men's social exclusion not as a social problem but rather as a subcultural lifestyle (Monk 2000). In the years that followed, they were succeeded by a series of films that featured similar, socially-excluded and often criminal male (anti)heroes, including *Last Days in Dublin* (2001), *The Actors* (2003), *Intermission* (2003), *Spin the Bottle* (2003), *The Halo Effect* (2004), *Adam and Paul* (2004), *Man About Dog* (2004) and *Headrush* (2004).

Claire Monk (2000) has been quick to situate the British films and their discursive constructions of masculinity within the context of British Lad Culture. She argues that they addressed the male audience as "a social problem, a political interest group and a consumer market often simultaneously within the same film" (Monk 2000 p157), and claims that their ideological ambiguity accommodated reactionary readings with obvious appeal to the post-political 'lad demographic' of the 1990s. While, with the exception of *Ging* (2004), the Irish underclass films have not yet been analysed from the perspective of their treatment of masculinity, consideration of the broader social context of their reception indicates clear links both with the British underclass films and with British Lad Culture. The press reviews surrounding *Intermission* and *Headrush*, in particular, and the promotional strategies employed by their distributors have regularly drawn comparisons with British films such as *Trainspotting*, *Snatch* (2000) and *Lock Stock and Two Smoking*

Barrels (1998).⁴ The video/DVD cover for *Intermission* features reviews by British lad magazines *FHM* and *Maxim*, which not only compare the film to *Trainspotting* but also mobilise a specifically ‘laddish’ mode of address:

FHM – A comedy drama that rivals *Trainspotting* for balls, brains and back alley wit

Maxim – Fast-paced, foul-mouthed and funny

Although both Lad Culture and what Claire Monk (2000) has described as “British Underclass Cinema” emerged under the banner of ‘Cool Britannia’, an increasingly globalising mass media has generated a considerable dovetailing and cross-fertilisation of the new masculine identities that are associated with both. In the media and cultural studies literature, there is widespread consensus that New Laddism was generated primarily by the British men's magazine market and, more specifically, with the launch of *Loaded* magazine in 1994 (Southwell 1998, Ross 1999, Calcutt 2000, Whelehan 2000, Jackson et al. 2001, Gauntlett 2002, Beynon 2002). According to Ross (1999), the “*Loaded* effect” was one of the key cultural influences of the 1990s. However, the widespread popularity of this simultaneously aggressive and playful portrait of masculinity must be attributed to broader-reaching social trends, as well as to the readiness of other media forms, such as cinema, advertising and television, to adopt what Imelda Whelehan (2000 p6) terms “the lad credo”. Attributing the popularity of contemporary British gangster films to their espousal of Lad Culture’s gender politics, Steve Chibnall contends that, “If the launch of *loaded* in 1994 pre-dated British cinema's gangster cycle, it is only because magazine publishing is faster to react to the emergence of new social attitudes and moods” (Chibnall 2001 p2).

The widespread acceptance of the iconography and gender politics of New Laddism has been attributed to a number of factors. According to Anthony McMahon (1999), a “progressive” or “optimistic” rhetoric of change has come to dominate public debates on

⁴ For examples, see http://www.headrushthemovie.com/press_clips.php. Gerry McCarthy, ‘Vice of a New Generation: Ireland’s answer to *Trainspotting* is also Shimmy Marcus’ answer to Hollywood’ in *The Sunday Times* (Culture supplement), February, 2004 and Michael Dywer, ‘That’s a Wrap’ in *The Ticket*, *The Irish Times*, 21st August 2003, p. 2.

gender equality. This has been partly engendered by a consensus in the popular media on the demise and obsolescence of second-wave feminism, and the welcoming of a more individualistic, consumer-oriented and apolitical concept of female emancipation. This has dovetailed ideologically with the globalising of self-help culture and its tendency toward biodeterminist accounts of gender difference, of which John Gray's (1993) *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* is the archetypal text. It is in this context of a postmodern, postfeminist culture, which consciously rejects identity politics and political correctness, that the parodic hypermasculinity of Lad Culture has been able to flourish. However, while some theorists argue that, beneath its bravado, Laddism gives voice to male insecurities and offers a playful commentary on the obsolescence of machismo (Gauntlett 2002), others maintain that it is a conscious and collective response to the objectification and commodification of the male body in the advertising and style magazines of the 1980s (Alexander 1997, Beynon 2002) as well as a form of resistance to the increasing assertiveness of women (Whelehan 2000, Beynon 2002).

According to Beynon (2002 p113), "Laddism was a celebration of the irresponsible, of unreconstructed young men-running-wild reduced to their crude basics and promoted in Loaded through jockstrap humour and 'bikini-style' photography." Also in the early 1990s, a proliferation of 'laddish' television shows emerged in Britain, including *The Frank Skinner Show*, *Fantasy Football League*, *The Grimleys*, *They Think It's All Over* and *Men Behaving Badly* (Whelehan 2000, Beynon 2002). 'Brit pop' bands such as *Oasis*, *Pulp* and *Blur* traded on the 'men-behaving-badly' image and Nick Hornby's novel *Fever Pitch* consolidated the male obsession with football as a key signifier of both working-class and middle-class male identity⁵. Since *Fever Pitch*'s adaptation as a film in 1997, the focus of a number of recent soccer films has shifted from the game itself to an ambivalent preoccupation with soccer hooliganism. In summer 2004, the controversial film *The Football Factory* was released in Britain. Meanwhile, a film based on Irvine Welsh's *Soul Crew* about the Cardiff City 'firm' is currently in production, and the American film *Green Street*, whose working title was *Hooligans* and which tells the story

⁵ According to Edwards (1997 p83), the link with football is hardly surprising "as football has historically always been a bastion of blow-drying, smut-swaggering, sharp-looking English laddism".

of a Harvard graduate who becomes immersed in the lifestyle of West Ham United's 'Inter City Firm' (Dart 2004), went on release in 2005.

This last example draws attention to the fact that, in spite of Laddism's origins as a distinctly British phenomenon, 'lads', 'chavs', 'dudes', 'losers' and 'slackers' have become variants of a transnational cultural phenomenon that has mutual appeal and influence. Beynon (2002) points out that laddism has been successfully exported to the United States, and both Beynon and Gauntlett (2002) attest to the significance of the huge circulations of the American editions of *FHM* and *Maxim*.⁶ American popular culture has also produced its own strain of new macho, featuring pop icons such as *Eminem*, programmes such as *Beavis and Butthead*, *Southpark* and *Jackass* and teenage gross-out movies such as *American Pie* (1999), *There's Something About Mary* (1998) and *Tomcats* (2001). While Irish variants of British Lad Culture are becoming increasingly evident in indigenous television and advertising, its influence is most pronounced in contemporary cinema. Actor Colin Farrell, who has adopted a tough, working-class image in spite of his middle-class background, has been hailed in the popular British press as the new icon of Irish laddism.⁷

The impact of Lad Culture on British cinema, however, is not restricted to films about football and has had a wide-ranging influence on a number contemporary texts (Spicer 2001). In addition to the underclass films analysed by Monk, which include *Shopping*, *Trainspotting*, *Twin Town*, *Naked*, *Small Faces*, *Goodbye Charlie Bright*, and, to a lesser extent, *Smalltime* (1996) and *TwentyFourSeven* (1997), the prevalence of Lad Culture has also been used to explain the recent revival of the British gangster genre, discussed in detail below. Indeed, many of the "smart films" (Sconce 2003) and "male rampage films" (Pfeil 1995) analysed here have in common with the British underclass and gangster

⁶ FHM has a U.S. circulation of 844,000 and Maxim 2,554,000 (Gauntlett 2002 p156-161).

⁷ Farrell is frequently referred to as "Irish bad lad", "bad boy" and "Hollywood hellraiser". For examples, see 'Dream Lover!', *The News of the World*, August 21, 2005, 'Can we have our REAL men back?', *Daily Mail* (London), June 28, 2005, '500 Sex Texts'; Phone Girl Sues Farrell Over Dirty Calls, *Daily Star*, October 23, 2005, 'Daddy Farrell's Left in the Lurch', *Daily Star*, February 29, 2004, 'My Sex Life Laid Bare, by Farrell', *The News of the World*, June 1, 2003 and 'Booze Loser', *The News of the World*, July 10, 2005.

films a predilection for irony, and both frequently present their male protagonists as highly articulate social outcasts who have carved out an identity and a lifestyle in the underclass wastelands of postmodern Britain and America. As is discussed in the section on "smart film" below, 'cult' films such as *Trainspotting* and *Fight Club* (1999) mobilise strikingly similar discourses of anti-consumerism, which are frequently suffused with the dual rhetoric of Laddism's gender politics and those of the American men's movement. According to Andrew Spicer (2001 p195), the protagonists of *Trainspotting* explicitly reject "the world of glib careerism and slowly rotting suburban respectability, surrounded by gadgets."

This overt repudiation of bourgeois respectability is a key feature of the complex and often contradictory politics of class mobilised both by the British underclass films and by Lad Culture. In the past, working-class masculinities have frequently been evoked in British cinema as signifiers of strength and 'authenticity' in response to perceived crises in the stability of male identity. According to Spicer (2001), the urban tough who emerged in 1950s British cinema was strongly identified with the industrial north and, as such, presented a challenge to the hegemony of southern, middle-class masculinity. Spicer draws particular attention to the packaging of Welsh actor Stanley Baker as a 'tough guy' in the American mould to replace the Bulldog Drummond-like figure of the traditional British, gentlemanly hero (Beynon 2002 p73). He argues that, in films such as *Cruel Sea* (1952) and *Hell Drivers* (1957), Baker demolished the "paralysed and paralysing hegemony of gentlemanliness" (Green 1960 cited in Spicer 2001 p91), while Albert Finney epitomised a "new generation of non-gentlemanly rebels, often (as in *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning*, 1960) placed in the industrial North of England, itself depicted as 'authentic' and grittily masculine in contrast to the affluent, effete and softly feminine South" (Beynon 2002 p73). In these bleak northern settings, the new working-class heroes "contested the dominant middle class paradigms of British culture in the 1950s" (Spicer 2001 p91). According to Pierre Bourdieu, this concept of working-class culture as a repository of 'real' or 'pure' masculinity is related to a lack of empowerment in other spheres. He states that the attachment to the values of masculinity by the working class is "characteristic of people who have little to fall back on except their labour-power, and

sometimes their fighting strength" and that "the idea of masculinity is one of the last refuges of the identity of the dominated classes. (Bourdieu 1993 p4).

Lad Culture's appeal, however, transcends class boundaries in the sense that it appeals not only to working-class consumers. While its appropriation and commodification of working-class masculine identity is often overtly framed as a rejection of bourgeois respectability, it has been more readily understood as a response to the threat of emasculation posed by feminism, new mannism and political correctness (Whelehan 2000, Giroux and Szeman 2002). The valorisation of tough, working-class masculinity is strongly evident in contemporary British advertising for products such as Ben Sherman, Lambretta and Diadora, and in recent television programmes such as *Aggro*, *Britain's Hardest* and *Britain's Roughest Pubs*⁸. Lad Culture thus commodifies working-class machismo as a form of entertainment, a means of selling sportswear and as a signifier of rebellion. Within the postmodern economy of images, therefore, the supposed authenticity of working-class masculinity, both threatened and deeply threatening, has become a resource that is increasingly available to both working-class and middle-class men. According to Claire Monk (2000 p161), images of working-class male youth have been mobilised by popular culture "as an emblem for a wider range of male insecurities and fears in need of reassurance", thus reasserting - or attempting to reassert - the hegemony of traditional masculinity and the re-empowerment both of men who feel genuinely dispossessed and marginalised as well as those whose anxieties may have nothing to do with poverty, drugs or unemployment (ibid.).

The revamped working-class masculinities of Lad Culture and Underclass Cinema thus mark a significant departure from the traditional working-class hero of British cinema,

⁸ *Britain's Hardest* was aired on Sky One in 2003. It featured masochistic feats of endurance, including water torture and the rack, and was described on the Sky website as, "an extreme endurance test designed to separate the bona fide tough guys from the wannabes...Set against a backdrop of disused industrial units, each episode will feature six of the hardest men in the UK going eyeball to eyeball over five extreme tests". *Britain's Toughest Pubs* was also aired on Sky One in the same year. The website claimed, "We go there so that the viewer doesn't have to. These are rough, tough, grim-looking boozers we've always wanted to be man enough to drink in but wouldn't dare enter." (http://www.skypublicity.co.uk/brochure_pdfs/SkyOneWinter2003.pdf)

most notably in their attitude toward work. While films such as *The Full Monty* (1997), *Brassed Off* (1996), *Smalltime*, *TwentyFourSeven*, *Nil by Mouth* (1997), *Raining Stones* (1993) and *My Name is Joe* (1998) explore the devastating consequences of unemployment on working-class men, the underclass youth films such as *Trainspotting*, *Twin Town*, *Naked*, *Shopping*, *Small Faces* and *Goodbye Charlie Bright* depict men who have turned to alternative signifiers of hard masculinity. Rather than occupying positions of power within the system, they consciously position themselves on the margins, seeking out new masculine identifiers through their association with crime, rebellion and estrangement from the world of women and family values. Unlike the protagonists of *The Full Monty* or *Brassed Off*, these men do not feel emasculated by unemployment. In *Twin Town*, *Trainspotting* and *Naked*, employment, like consumerism, is constructed as the domain of women. Interestingly, Renton's caustic critique of bourgeois lifestyle choices in *Trainspotting* resurfaces in a number of recent American "smart films", most notably in *Fight Club* and *American Beauty* (1999), whose rejection of commodity fetishism is played out in more explicitly gendered terms.

This cynical and often celebratory rejection of the working world appears to be at odds with the accounts of disempowerment, emasculation and loss of self-esteem that are documented in the sociological literature on unemployed men (Marsden and Duff 1975, McKee and Bell 1986). Rather than articulating feelings of humiliation, depression or fear of being deserted (Willott and Griffin 1996, Faludi 1999) or exhibiting signs of psychological distress (Whelan, Hannan and Creighton 1991), these male characters have carved out alternative, underclass identities and lifestyles, in which their masculine validation does not depend on work and breadwinning, attracting women or the acquisition of property and material goods. To a large extent, therefore, they embody the characteristics of what Connell (1995) describes as "protest masculinities", whereby young unemployed men, in the absence of a gendered claim to power, develop and exhibit "spectacular masculinities centered around sexuality, violence and bohemianism" as a way of reclaiming male power. According to Haywood and Mac an Ghail:

This style is developed in relation to a position of powerlessness where the existing cultural resources for a gendered claim to power are no longer

available. In response, men exaggerate, through the pressure of existing masculine conventions, their claims to masculinity (ibid. 2003 p39).

In the past ten years, a substantial number of French films have also emerged which directly confront the issue of protest masculinities. According to Carrie Tarr (2004), following on from the *Beur* and *banlieue* films of 1995, such as *La Haine*, a significant body of films has continued to address socially-excluded and underclass masculinities in France⁹. While lacking the laddish of irony of British underclass cinema, the "constructions of testosterone-fuelled underclass youths" in recent films such as *Ma 6-T va crack-er* (1997), *Comme un aimant/The Magnet* (2000) and *Le Ciel, les oiseaux...et ta mère/Boys on the Beach* (1999) are, according to Tarr, nonetheless ambiguous and problematic. On the one hand they acknowledge that socially-excluded young men find it difficult to assert their masculinity in socially acceptable ways, since their socio-economic status and lack of male role models "prevent them from assuming an active role in society through work, a family and a place of their own. Instead, they seek to protest at their emasculation through an over-aggressive but ultimately self-defeating performance of phallic masculinity" (Tarr 2004 p111.) However, while the films implicitly address the destructiveness and emotional retardation implicit in compulsory performances of hypermasculinity, Tarr argues that they run the risk of celebrating male violence and misogyny by failing to present alternatives.

Clearly, the underclass male characters of recent British, French and Irish cinema can be read as genuine protest masculinities that articulate the concerns of men who are socially excluded from the patriarchal dividend and who re-present their powerlessness as a threat. However, they can also be understood as reactionary attempts to re-establish stable, hegemonic norms and practices in the face of changes that have little or nothing to do with class oppression (Kimmel 1996, Connell 2000). As Monk points out, it is the films' conscious deployment of irony, a key feature both of postmodernism and of Lad Culture that facilitates such a diverse range of readings. While media theorists such as

⁹ Tarr (2004 p110) describes the *Beur* films as "films made by and/or featuring second-generation young people of Maghrebi or North African origin in France" and the *banlieue* films as "films set in multi-ethnic working-class estates on the urban periphery".

Gauntlett (2002) and Sconce (2002), like Richard Rorty (1989), view irony as a political tool which can be used to contest and (re)negotiate dominant ideologies, others perceive lad culture's deployment of irony as a means to disguise male sexism and homophobia within a highly stylised rhetoric of - ostensibly anti-hegemonic - rebellion (Whelehan 2000, Giroux and Szeman, 2001). Whether these films are understood as representing or articulating predominantly class-based, racialised or gender-based critiques of society - or indeed any critique at all - may differ across different socio-economic groups and interpretive communities, as is illustrated by the audience studies outlined in Chapter 4.

The presence or absence of irony, not only within the text but also as a reading strategy, thus becomes an important way of deciphering the ideological functioning of these texts. According to Beynon, "if for most laddism is just another clever way of making money out of young male consumers by resurrecting the appeal of the working class jack-the-lad, hell bent on having a good time, others still regard it as a genuine rebellion, a reassertion of something 'fundamentally masculine'" (Beynon 2002 p114). Beynon's comment indicates an awareness of the possibility that, even if the underclass masculinities of contemporary cinema are understood by many as ludic reappropriations of machismo that serve to conceal male anxieties and insecurities in a changing world (Faludi 1999, Gauntlett 2002), ironic masculinities do not always function ironically. According to Whelehan (2000), Lad Culture's deployment of irony enables it to articulate misogynistic, homophobic and racist discourses under the guise of self-knowing parody. The increasing influence of Lad Culture on contemporary British, American and Irish cinema thus raises important questions about the changing use and meaning of irony in the context of postfeminist reworkings of masculinity. Precisely how Irish male spectators engage with the ironic underpinnings of contemporary Irish films is a key objective of the empirical audience strand of this study, and is addressed in detail in Chapter 7.

2.3 Stealin' Stones and Breakin' Bones¹⁰: Criminal Masculinities in the New Gangster Film

Given the declining significance of work as a signifier of masculinity in many recent cultural representations of men, it is perhaps unsurprising that criminality and gangster culture have become increasingly popular tropes. The crime film, a genre with an extraordinary capacity to continually reinvent itself, has recently enjoyed a considerable revival: in Britain, with the new British gangster cycle (Chibnall 2001), in the United States, with the “new brutalism” (Shelley 1993) of Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and later *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and in Ireland, with biopics about real gangland figures such as *The General* and the emergence of a new breed of crime capers including *Headrush*, *Intermission* and *Man About Dog*. Steve Neale (2002 p36) attributes the revival of the classic gangster film in the 1990s to ex-FBI agents publishing accounts of the ways in which evidence was gathered in cases involving the mafia (*Donnie Brasco*, 1997) as well as to gangsters writing or speaking about their own experiences of the criminal underworld (*Goodfellas*, 1990). In Irish films studies, Lance Pettit (2004) has discussed the recent popularity of the genre in relation to media and public concerns about increasing crime rates in the 1990s in Ireland. In British film studies, however, the new British gangster cycle and the revival of gangster iconography across a broad range of popular media has been explained in specifically gendered terms. Claire Monk (1999), Steve Chibnall (2001) and Danny Leigh (2000) all argue that the genre is deeply indebted to the dynamics of Lad Culture and has been reappropriated to articulate a specifically postfeminist set of concerns.

According to Neale (2002), what distinguishes the gangster genre as a sub-genre of the crime genre, is its focus on criminals and criminal activity, and therefore its sympathetic positioning of the spectator within that world. This has caused considerable concern among American censors in the past, and has prompted many to theorise the gangster

¹⁰ ‘Stealin' Stones and Breakin' Bones’ was one of the official taglines for *Snatch* (2000)

film as inherently antisocial or antithetical to the American Dream¹¹. A range of similar concerns have recently surfaced in Britain, in response to the new British crime cycle, described by Steve Chibnall (2001) as British cinema's most significant cycle of films since the 1970s. This cycle includes *Hard Men* (1997), *Mojo* (1997), *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998), *Fast Food* (1998), *You're Dead* (1999), *The Debt Collector* (1999), *Love, Honour and Obey* (2000), *Snatch* (2000), *Gangster No. 1* (2000), *Sexy Beast* (2000), *Shiner* (2000), *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2000), *Circus* (2000), *Rancid Aluminium* (2000) and *I'll Sleep When I'm Dead* (2004). This cycle has also stimulated considerable public controversy in Britain. John Abbott, director-general of the National Criminal Intelligence Service, claimed that the films portrayed a "darkly glamorous" image of gangsterism and made a "concerted attempt to show organised crime as 'a bit of a laugh' carried out by 'cheeky chappies' and the portrayal of violence as a 'pretty good way of doing business'" (Abbott 2000 cited in Chibnall 2001 p1). Chibnall also cites *Sunday Times* journalist Bryan Appleyard, who described the films as "sexist and fascist" and linked them to a rise in violent crime in Britain.

The figure of the new gangster thus appears to have one foot in the past and the other placed firmly in the codes and conventions of contemporary Lad Culture. These include a preoccupation with working-class masculinity (again unrelated to conventional work), the positioning of the protagonist outside of and in antagonist relation to mainstream society and the forces of law and order, a fascination with criminality and violence and the creation of a homosocial space from which women are excluded, except as sex objects. Danny Leigh (2000) attributes the nostalgic revival of this genre to the popularisation of hip hop and gangsta in the 1980s, the reconfiguration of the crime movie as flip pulp fiction by Tarantino et al. and the fact that "the new generation find themselves positioned beside the PR well of prevailing lad culture" (Leigh 2000 p25). He argues that, unlike American gangster cinema, which has demystified its underworld and acknowledged the transformation of the mafia (Creeber 2002), British cinema continues

¹¹ In Warshow's seminal *The Gangster as Tragic Hero* (1970 p136), he states that "the gangster is the 'no' to that great American 'yes' which is stamped so big over our official culture and yet has so little to do with the way we really feel about our lives."

to revel in the myth of "omnipotent domestic crime syndicates" (Leigh 2000 p24), in spite of the fact that guns and gunfights are rare in Britain and that *The Long Good Friday* (1979) was already signaling the death of traditional post-war gangsterism. According to Steve Chibnall (2001 p2), "It does not take Sherlock Holmes to deduce that the gangster cycle might index wider gender anxieties and to relate these anxieties to both changing occupational structures and social expectations and to the demonstrable gains of feminism."

Significantly, the new gangster is a global, hybridised figure who has evolved as a result of complex intertextual flows, not only between national cinemas but also across a wide variety of other media. Television dramas such as *CSI Crime Scene Investigation*, *Law and Order*, *Family*, *Sopranos*, *Without a Trace*, *Ultimate Force* and *Hustle* all contribute to an increasingly globalised contemporary gangster aesthetic. Crime and criminality have also become a staple ingredient of reality television, with 'reality crime' shows such as *Traffic Cops Special*, *Street Time*, *America's Dumbest Criminals*, *Real Crime*, *America's Most Wanted*, *Unsolved Mysteries* and *Real Stories of the Highway Patrol* representing both a new genre of entertainment and a new kind of crime news (Surette 1998, Fishman 1998, Fishman and Cavender 1998). Even soap operas such as *Eastenders* have adopted substantial elements of the gangster genre in a bid to attract larger numbers of male viewers.¹² Contemporary computer and video games aimed at the male market also point to the popularity of gangsters and the criminal underworld. Recent additions to the games market include the hugely popular *Grand Theft Auto* series (Playstation), *Crime Cities* (PC Games, 2001), *Crime Killer* (Playstation, 1998) and *True Crime: Streets of L.A.* (Playstation 2, 2003). Variants of these gangster figures and other criminal masculinities also permeate a wide range of contemporary print and television advertisements for products including Sony Playstation, Dunkits, Bacardi, Carlsberg, Diadora, Fuji, Kit Kat, HBSC Bank, Vanilla Coke and TSB, all of which depend on the audience's ability to recognise characters in their film-defined roles.¹³

¹² According to Christine Geraghty (1991), the narrative organisation of British soaps has become increasingly centered on male process.

¹³ In the advertisement for Kit Kat, Jason Stantham plays the same wise-cracking character he plays in *Snatch*, *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* and *The Italian Job*. In the television advertisements for

To the fore in the revival of the gangster genre and its male types have been British men's magazines such as *Loaded*, *FHM*, *Maxim* and *Front*, which promote gangster films and regularly run feature articles and interviews on real gangland criminals and 'celebrity' characters in the British mafia. Leigh (2000 p23) comments that, "Given the rise of the New Lad consumer with his unashamed taste for testosterone-fuelled pleasures, the rise of the new Brit gangster film can be seen as an inevitable counterpart to the success of such UK men's magazines as *Loaded* and *FHM*". The significance of the lad demographic in the marketing of new gangster films is also well illustrated by actor Paul Bettany's comments in relation to the distribution of his debut feature *Gangster No. 1* (2000). According to Ryan Gilbey (2004), the distributor FilmFour tried to pitch the film as a spin-off of Ritchie's *Lock, Stock* by asking Bettany to read the trailer for the film, "We're gangsters!", in a celebratory tone. When Bettany asked why they replied, "Well, our survey says that men between the ages of 15 and 28 get the horn every time they hear the word 'gangster'" (cited in Gilbey 2004). According to Bettany, "We tried to make an adult film about violence, without glorifying violence, and then they go and trivialise it. No one who went in thinking it was going to be a lads' movie can have come out satisfied" (ibid.). Lad magazines have also played significant role in securing the cult status of gangster classics such as *Get Carter* (1971), recently re-released on DVD (Monk 1999). The film's director, Mike Hodges, commented, "I did find the attention that *Get Carter* received in the 1990s very curious [...] I think it all comes down to a certain confusion or sadness that modern men have. They don't always know who they're supposed to be, or what their roles are, do they? A character like Carter makes them nostalgic for a time that they didn't necessarily know but that they've heard about from their fathers. Carter gets things done this way, no messing about. That can be comforting for a lot of men" (Hodges cited in Gilbey 2004).

Bacardi and the magazine advertisements for Fila watches, Vinnie Jones performs the same stern-faced, violent masculine character that he plays in the Guy Richie films. Similarly, Samuel L. Jackson refers to his ponderous *Pulp Fiction* character in the surreal banking advertisement for HBSC Bank, while the Vanilla Coke advertisement features Vincent Curatola and Vincent Pastore who, while they do not play their characters from *The Sopranos*, draw on the audience's familiarity with the programme and the genre to enact stereotypical Mafia characterisations.

Bettany's and Hodges' comments attest not only to Lad Culture's profit-driven reappropriation of popular masculine icons but also to its political sensitivities regarding the desires and attitudes of certain male audiences. According to Leigh, there is a direct link between the popularity of nostalgic evocations of tough, white, working-class masculinity and the perceived threat of feminism and minority groups. In spite of the fact that today's gangland criminals are more likely to be the Triad extortionists and the Yardies and Turkish heroin dealers of Dalston, he argues that contemporary British crime cinema insists on representations of Englishness that are suggestive of a nationalistic and reactionary politics of race and gender. Similarly, Chibnall argues that, although drug-trafficking, money laundering, counterfeiting, forgery, VAT fiddling, vehicle theft and illegal immigration are the primary criminal activities in Britain today, British crime films are still fascinated with armed robbery, protection racketeering and unregulated betting and boxing. He perceives the "marked tendency to prioritise the concerns of young white heterosexual metropolitan Englishmen" as a deliberate reaction on the part of certain filmmakers against the inclusive, multi-ethnic portrait of modern Britishness that has come to define national cinema.

Both critics have been quick to trace the intertextual and global influences at work in films such as *Lock Stock*, which pay homage not only to the classic gangster films of previous decades but also to the American gangster genre and its reworkings by Tarantino. According to Leigh, *Lock, Stock* is indebted to the London gangland mythology of MacKenzie's *The Long Good Friday* (1979) and is generally seen as the prototype for the new British crime cycle, although Chibnall challenges this assumption by asserting that *Hard Men* (1997) and *Face* (1997) predated it. In addition to references to classic British gangster films, Leigh contends that Ritchie's work is replete with other influences, including Scorsese, Ferrara and, especially, Tarantino. According to Spicer (2001 p192), *Lock Stock's* "highly allusive intertextuality and numerous bouts of stylised violence derive from Quentin Tarantino's influential *Reservoir Dogs* (1991) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994)." Similarly, Leigh points out that *Fast Food* and *Circus* both reappropriate the 'ear' motif from *Reservoir Dogs*, while *Circus'* location in Brighton references both *Mona Lisa* (1986) and *Brighton Rock* (1947): "time and time again the new boys return to

Hodges' and MacKenzie's twin genre shibboleths (with the occasional faux-LSD nod to Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg's *Performance*)" (Leigh 2000 p22-25). For Chibnall, the influence of Tarantino has been a crucial factor in turning traditional 'realist' gangster films into a "semi-comedic travesty in which authenticity is replaced by pastiche" (ibid. p2).

What underpins both Leigh's and Chibnall's analyses is a scepticism not only about the quality and authenticity of the new gangster films but also a concern about the politics of the postmodern. Leigh argues that the new films are characterised by adolescent hysteria and shoddy compromise, whereby authenticity is abandoned in favour of mass market entertainment values and music video aesthetics are used to fill the gaps. He is also critical of the way in which the genre has been transformed by its attempts to reconcile thuggery with crowd-pleasing comedy. This, he claims, is achieved through "Tarantino mode", whereby black humour removes the need to engage fully with what's going on. Both Leigh and Ryan Gilbey (2004) have argued that the new films have airbrushed out the homosexual and homoerotic elements of classics such as *The Long Good Friday* and *Performance* to accommodate unequivocally heterosexual personae such as Vinnie Jones. With the exception of *Love, Honour and Obey* and *Ganster No. 1*, Leigh disregards the new sub-genre as postmodern style over substance, and perceives in its nostalgia for white, working-class masculinity a reactionary politics of gender and race that dovetails with the logic of New Laddism.

Chibnall (2001) also distinguishes between contemporary gangster films that strive for "unvarnished authenticity" (gangster-heavy) and those that "cheerfully peddle myth (gangster-light)". The latter, he claims, are identified by distancing, irony and an awareness of the artifice of film-making, a strong emphasis on music and soundtrack and fast editing and striking cinematography. Gangster-light films also have more fragmented, less coherent plots, are punctuated with 'cool moments', feature shocking / witty dialogue, cast familiar faces from TV and advertising (such as Vinnie Jones) and are characterised by faux-ness, which he defines as "a knowing theatrical distortion of real life, a mutually condoned simulacrum that, by a typically post-modern conceit, is

something better than the real thing" (ibid. p3). Chibnall suggests that, given their masculinist subject matter and lack of cinematic spectacle, these films are not suitable as 'date movies' and are therefore consciously geared toward video. Gangster heavy, on the other hand, requires audience involvement and identification, is intense and predominantly introspective, features naturalistic dialogue and is underscored by an unobtrusive use of cinematography, music and editing. It is informed by a tragic (Shakespearean / Jacobean) narrative structure and plays the gangster character as a tragic hero (Warshaw 1948). Chibnall shares Leigh's concern about the gender-political underpinnings of the postmodern gangster genre, claiming that, "both [Ritchie's films] evoke a world of masculine competitive sociability we might call 'Ladland'", which he describes as a "Hobbesian jungle of ruthless competitors" (ibid. p3) in which male bullying, homophobia and misogyny are normalised and celebrated rather than explored. Although he acknowledges that the films are intended to be read as decontextualised appropriation, fantasy and performance, and is cognisant of the way in which inauthenticity and masquerade are used to signal anxieties about male potency, he is nonetheless critical of their ideological underpinnings.

Debates about the moral and ideological ambiguities which underpin the neo-gangster are also highly prevalent in relation to American re-workings of the genre, most notably in relation to Tarantino's films and the cult television series *The Sopranos*. While discussions about the latter arguably do not relate to film, much of the academic writing on *The Sopranos* alludes to its intertextuality and to the increasing blurring of the boundaries between television and film aesthetics¹⁴. *The Sopranos* pays overt homage to classic gangster films and is, according to Glen Creeber (2002), widely referred to as the natural heir to the *Godfather* saga. Conversely, it is also argued (Spicer 2001, Chibnall 2001, Creeber 2002) that (gangster) films for theatrical release are becoming increasingly influenced by the styles and codes of television, evidenced by their use of close and medium shots, on account of the imperative to cater also to the video/DVD market.

¹⁴ For example, Joanne Lacey (2002 p98) claims that without *Public Enemy* (1931), *The Godfather* trilogy (1972, 1974, 1990), *Married to the Mob* (1988), *Goodfellas* (1990) and *Analyze This!* (1999), *The Sopranos* would not exist.

According to Creeber, "the phenomenal success of Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) on video is sometimes cited as evidence that the aesthetics of cinema and television are perhaps gradually beginning to merge" (Creeber 2002 p125). He also argues that the new gangster films such as *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction* and *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* have taken on the "cartoon style" and "high-concept aesthetics" (Hallam and Marshment 2000 p92) of the television action series, "replacing ethics with exhibition and personality with spectacle" (Creeber 2002 p125) and maintains that *The Sopranos* implicitly critiques the "televisionisation" of the gangster genre, manifest in the series' predilection for self-referentiality and in Tony's nostalgia for the 'golden era' of the gangster. In the same way that Tony struggles to justify his existence within the limitations of the New Mafia, the television series is constantly pushing at - and thereby consciously drawing attention to - the limits of the medium in terms of its ability to foster the "classical" gangster film's aesthetics and moral exploration of violence (ibid.).

The debates about *The Sopranos* are of interest to this study, not only because they raise important questions about violence, hypermasculinity and irony but also because they have made small but important inroads into the areas of spectatorship and reception. According to Martha Nochimson, *The Sopranos* functions as a male soap opera in which the melodrama is 'masculinised' to give "male viewers access to emotional situations they need not see in directly emotional terms" (Nochimson 2002/2004 p4). She claims that, like the classic gangster genre, the television series reverses customary patterns of identification by inviting the audience to engage and identify with career criminals. However, rather than encouraging direct empathy with gangsters, she contends that this device enables the viewer to contemplate the characters' self-referential negotiation of "the strains modern life has placed on the macho code" and "to acknowledge, despite its power over us, the insufficiency of Tony's charm in the face of murder and other forms of social devastation" (ibid. p7). Nochimson's claims are largely supported by Joanne Lacey's (2002) empirical study of the show's British male audience, which reveals that *The Sopranos* gives men "a way into owning a drama and at the same time marking it as masculine TV territory" (Lacey 2002 p101). Lacey's findings, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, also support Nochimson's assertion that the series invites

audiences "to be very adult in our consideration of the crime culture and very sophisticated about its role as a metaphor for the tangled desires of our daily lives" (Nochimson 2002/2003 p13). Although Lacey's interviewees were attracted to the Otherness of the Italian-American gangster and to the drama's escapist appeal, they also identified with Tony as a working man who has to deal with the pressures of everyday domestic life and is often unsure as to how he should behave. This was especially the case with Lacey's older interviewees, who "connected to the representation of generation and work and family responsibilities shown in *The Sopranos*" (ibid p104.).

In the past seven years, a significant number of Irish films have emerged, which focus on crime and the criminal underworld. These include *I Went Down* (1997), *Crush Proof* (1999), *The General* (1998), *Flick* (2000), *Saltwater* (2000), *Ordinary Decent Criminal* (2000), *When the Sky Falls* (2000), *Accelerator* (2001), *The Actors* (2002), *Dead Bodies* (2003), *The Halo Effect* (2003), *Veronica Guerin* (2003), *Intermission* (2003), *Man About Dog* (2004), *Headrush* (2004) and *Freeze Frame* (2004). Some of these films, such as *I Went Down*, *Flick* and *Headrush*, bear strong elements of the iconography and generic conventions of the British gangster film, while others, such as *Veronica Guerin* and *When the Sky Falls*, have more in common with the British television cop/crime thriller genre (Pettitt 2004). As well as considering the significance of these films as social commentaries on poverty, crime and gangland criminality in Ireland of the 1990s and 2000s, Chapter 3 focuses on their representation of and discursive constructions of masculinity, and extends Collins'/Pettitt's concept of genericity to show that they are heavily influenced by contemporary American and British invocations of the gangster genre as well as by the widespread - and associated - impact of Lad Culture in Ireland.

2.4 'Hipster Anomie' and the Fucked-by-Fate Masculinities of American 'Smart Film'

Jeffrey Sconce (2002) has recently identified a new school of American filmmaking, which, he contends, "survives (and at times thrives) at the symbolic material intersection of 'Hollywood', the 'indie' scene and the vestiges of what cinephiles used to call 'art' films" (Sconce 2002 p351)¹⁵. According to Sconce, smart films are defined by a particular set of themes and styles, and manifest a "predilection for irony, black humour, fatalism, relativism and, yes, even nihilism" (ibid. p350). While critics have been quick to dismiss these films as apolitical, nihilistic or "pointlessly and simplistically grim"¹⁶, Sconce defends the detached irony and "hipster anomie" of the films and their characters against charges of amoralism, arguing that they represent a new form of attack on bourgeois individualism and consumer capitalism. Although Sconce does not foreground gender in his analysis, a significant number of the films he identifies are studies in male angst and feature white, predominantly middle-class, men whose attitudes toward the social spheres they inhabit are characterised by disaffection, nihilism and anomie. Both the American smart films and the British underclass films feature male protagonists who live on the margins of a society for whose laws and conventions they have little or no regard. Deeply cynical, amoral and highly articulate, they appear to challenge consumer capitalism's slavish devotion to the acquisition of wealth and the hypocritical moralism of the ideologies which support it.

Many of the features that define the smart film are becoming increasingly visible in contemporary Irish cinema, in particular in recent films such as *Intermission* and *Adam and Paul*. Finally, smart films are of interest because they display characteristics that are

¹⁵ The films discussed by Sconce include *Storytelling* (2001), *Happiness* (1995), *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1995), *Your Friends and Neighbours* (1997), *In the Company of Men* (1997), *Election* (1999), *Citizen Ruth* (1996), *The Unbelievable Truth* (1990), *Trust* (1991), *Henry Fool* (1998), *Very Bad Things* (1999), *Go* (1999), *2 Days in the Valley* (1996), *Bottle Rocket* (1994), *Rushmore* (1998), *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), *Magnolia* (1998), *Boogie Nights* (1997), *The Ice Storm* (1997), *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997), *Safe* (1995), *Being John Malkovich* (1999), *Donnie Darko* (2001), *Slacker* (1991), *American Beauty* (1999), *Ghost World* (2001) and *Fight Club* (1999).

¹⁶ Kenneth Turan claims that a new generation of misguided filmmakers have produced an onslaught of "pointlessly and simplistically grim films" in the name of "the new nihilism", a phrase coined by *LA Weekly* film critic, Manohla Dargis, cited in Sconce (2002 p349).

not only associated with postmodern but also with postfeminist sensibilities, most notably in their use of irony. In the debates about British Lad Culture, the use of irony has perhaps been the most contentious issue: while it is perceived by some (Walter 1998, Gauntlett 2002) as a means of articulating male anxieties and insecurities in response to changing constructions of masculinity, it is viewed by others as a means of reinforcing dominant ideologies of gender by deflecting political critique (Monk 2000, Whelehan 2000). According to Sconce, smart films embrace a number of shared elements, including a 'blank' style and incongruous narration, narrative structures that are underpinned by chance and 'synchronicity', a thematic interest in random fate, a preoccupation with the white, middle-class family as the locus of dysfunction and an interest in the politics of taste, consumerism and identity. Although not all of these elements are present in the films discussed by Monk or indeed in the Irish films analysed in Chapter 3, a number of them are becoming increasingly evident. In particular, the "overarching belief in the fundamentally random and yet strangely meaningful structure of reality (even if that 'meaning' is total absurdity)" (ibid. p363), the "fucked by fate" attitudes of the protagonists and a sense of alienation within contemporary consumer culture are strongly evident in British films such as *Trainspotting* and *Shopping* and Irish films such as *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof*, *Adam and Paul* and *Intermission*. Some of these elements also overlap with the "male rampage films" (Pfeil 1995) described below.

Sconce argues that those who castigate the contemporary films (those who equate art with sincerity, positivity, commitment, action and responsibility) and those who embrace the 'structure of feeling' that regards everything as provisional or, as he describes it, "in giant quotation marks", are effectively divided by the "semiotic chasm of irony" (ibid. p358). Challenging both the Right and Marxist critics of postmodernism's mobilisation of irony, he argues that it "is not a passive retreat from politics but a semiotic intervention within politics" (ibid. p369), and contends that "many of these films suggest the futility of pure politics or absolute morality, concentrating instead on the prison-house habitus and the politics of postmodern paralysis" (ibid. p368). Thus, for Sconce, the disengagement from belief, politics and commitment that is highly visible in these films is not synonymous with apathy but is rather an act of strategic disengagement from what is seen

as a now-obsolete terrain of belief, politics and commitment. He perceives irony as "the most compelling voice through which to intervene in the contemporary cultural, artistic or political terrain" (ibid. 353).

However, whether the irony of smart films operates successfully depends on the supposed hyperconsciousness of the audience. It must therefore be considered not only as a textual feature but also as a reading strategy (Hutcheon 1994) or question of reception. According to Sconce, "these films assume a culture (or, more to the point, an audience) of master semioticians, hyper-aware of how and what objects (clothes, cars, colas) signify" (ibid, p358). If audiences do not 'get the point', they may be offended or they may understand the film's cynicism, violence or nihilism as a literal endorsement of those positions. When analysed specifically from the perspective of gender, however, irony can be seen to perform a somewhat more contentious and precarious role. If, for example, the macho posturing and amoral violence of *Reservoir Dogs*, the ruthless misogyny of *In the Company of Men* or *Fight Club's* mythopoetic, anti-feminist soliloquies are understood not ironically but rather as sympathetically invoking extant social discourses on gender, these films can also be seen to operate as endorsements of regressive male images, behaviours and political positions. David Fincher's *Fight Club* is an interesting example of such an ideological conflict. According to Sconce, "*Fight Club* reminds us (à la Bourdieu) that IKEA signifies more than inexpensive functionality in home furnishings, emblematising as it does an entire structure of class identity, desire and social mobility" (ibid. p366). However, while Tyler's assaults on IKEA, corporate culture and liposuction clinics are easily identified with as critiques of the absurdity and narcissism inherent in commodity fetishism, the specifically masculinist rhetoric within which they are embedded is potentially less cohesive, offering the audience a more ambiguous range of pleasures and meanings.

Indeed, *Fight Club's* gender-political ambiguity can be attributed specifically to its capacity to be read ironically. Although the film and, more specifically, the character of Tyler explicitly mobilise the rhetoric of Robert Bly's *Iron John* (1992), it is never entirely

clear whether the tenets of the mythopoetic or masculinist men's movement¹⁷ are being expounded or lampooned. Tyler effectively functions as Jack's (Ed Norton) mythopoetic 'wild man': like Bly, he complains that western men have lost their 'masculine essence' because women have become too involved in the 'civilising' process, and because their fathers and male elders no longer actively initiate them into the spirit of masculinity. If contemporary social ills are to be tackled, Bly (and Tyler) claim, it is necessary that men reclaim their lost power by initiating boys into manhood, by rejecting feminine influences such as excessive emotion, sensitivity and indecisiveness and by reasserting their innately masculine characteristics of strength, courage and love of adventure. The perception that men are becoming increasingly feminised and disempowered is thus central to a politics of gender that is underpinned by strict sex-role stereotyping based on biological difference.

Tyler's function in the narrative is to restore Jack to his innate masculine self, by embracing an exclusively homosocial world of fighting and rebellion against the *status quo* and by rejecting consumerism, narcissism, the post-industrial / soft-skills corporate world and therapy culture, all coded as signifiers of femininity. This rejection of bourgeois lifestyles is thus a highly gendered one, in which post-industrial capitalism is seen as a feminising force that has alienated men from their 'true' or 'essential' selves. The corporate world is framed as an emasculating space in which workers have become alienated and distracted by unmanly trivia: when one of Jack's colleagues ask if he can order the new company screensaver in cornflower blue, Jack grimaces to reveal a mouthful of bloodied and broken teeth. This trope is also apparent in Tyler's efforts to liberate Jack, a self-confessed "slave to the Ikea nesting instinct", from the feminising forces of commodity fetishism ("We used to read pornography. Now it was the Horchow collection"), and in his disapproval of Jack's addiction to support groups, which rely on

¹⁷ The mythopoetic tradition, made famous in the early 1990s by Robert Bly's *Iron John* (1992), is based on Jungian psychology and is concerned with individual male identities as opposed to the formation of a political movement. While not explicitly anti-feminist, this strand has met with negative criticism from feminists (Hagan and Steinem 1992). Bly's account of masculinity and manhood looks to mythology as a source of contemporary psychoanalytic knowledge, and adopts a structuralist or Proppian approach to folklore, which suggests that myths contain deep structures which reflect 'truths' about the human condition today.

'feminine' activities such as talking and crying (the first rule of Fight Club, on the other hand, is that you don't *talk* about Fight Club). The testicular cancer survivor group, populated by men like Bob, who lacks testicles and has grown "bitch tits" due to hormone treatment, seems to function as a metaphor for male emasculation.

Fight Club also attacks the feminisation implicit in advertising's objectification and commodification of the male body. In a key scene in the film, when Jack's liberation is complete, Tyler points to an advertisement for Gucci underwear, featuring a man's naked torso and asks, "Is this what a real man looks like?" At this point, Jack's voiceover monologue takes over: "I felt sorry for guys packed into gyms, trying to look like how Calvin Klein or Tommy Hilfigger said they should." However, capitalism is critiqued only insofar as it is seen to impact negatively on men, which suggests that it is not capitalism per se but rather the incursion of a female gaze economy into (post-industrial) capitalism that is the real cause of the film's/Tyler's disgruntlement. The idea that men are now victims, as opposed to drivers, of the cosmetics industry is also reinforced by the gendered undertones of Jack and Tyler's attack on the liposuction clinics, from which they steal female fat and sell it back to women as expensive soap. Yet, in spite of the film's ostensible rejection of male consumerism and objectification, the camera's fetishisation of Brad Pitt's ultra-toned and sculpted body as well the narcissism and homoeroticism that underpin the fight club's homosocial spaces, create substantial slippages in terms of how Tyler's designer rebel chic can be understood. Tyler/Pitt both rails against and epitomises the objectified male body.

The revelation at the end of the film that Jack is in such a deep state of crisis that he has imagined his alter-ego, forces the viewer to reconsider the events with only Jack in the picture. The narrative can thus be re-read as the story of an anxious, delusional and self-destructive young man who is not actually named until he discovers a series of old medical magazines that are written in the first-person ("I am Jack's medulla oblongata, I am Jack's colon") and adopts this form of speech for the remainder of the film ("I am Jack's complete lack of surprise", "I am Jack's wasted life"). Moreover, the degeneration of the fight clubs into Project Mayhem can be read as an allegory of the dangers of

patriarchy, thus facilitating a reading of *Fight Club* as satire on modern man's emotional bankruptcy and inability to adapt to the post-industrial world order. According to Guardian journalist Dave Hill (2000 p4), "David Fincher's funny and powerful film version of *Fight Club* was denounced in some quarters as an advertisement for fascism when, if anything, it might be read as a warning about how a certain form of idealised masculinity can manifest itself in slavish, martial forms." However, while Jack succeeds in killing off his alter ego and is reconciled with Marla, it is questionable whether the film's romantic closure can easily negate the charismatic presence of Tyler or the cathartic allure of its fight scenes, and the spectator is left wondering whether Jack ultimately accepts the 'civilising' effect of women and rejects his inner masculinist, anti-consumerist 'wild man' or whether he has been partly transformed or 'enlightened' by the events of the film.

Interestingly, Chuck Palahniuk's original novel appears to be truer to the spirit of reactionary masculinity politics than Fincher's filmic adaptation, which accommodates more nuanced and ironic readings. Palahniuk believes that contemporary men are deprived of pleasures to which they are innately predisposed and has argued that, if male violence is suppressed, it will re-emerge in hyper-violent ways. He also argues that modern men suffer because they are no longer initiated into manhood by their fathers: "Fight Club came out of something that all my peers talked about...It is that their fathers had never taught them what they needed to know about becoming men" (Palahniuk cited in Hill 2000 p4). As Hill points out, these sentiments are "consistent with the mantras of the American men's movement and the mytho-poetic prescriptions of its patron saint, Robert Bly, the author of *Iron John*. Palahniuk also seems in sympathy with the argument that conventional manly virtues have been done down in the keyboard-driven, postindustrial economy, and he has not missed the irony that while men's interest in violent sports today causes concern, women's incursions into the same territory are often applauded" (Hill 2000 p4).

According to Giroux and Szeman (2001), a substantial number of films made in the 1990s which purport to tackle serious social issues relating to capitalism, and many of

which fit the category of "smart film", including *Fight Club*, *American Beauty*, *Rogue Trader* (1999), *American Psycho* (2000) and *Boiler Room* (2000), espouse a reactionary politics of gender. They contend that, "*Fight Club* understands consumerism, which it takes to be the defining problem of contemporary politics, primarily as an attack on masculinity...By trying to think about consumerism and masculinity as phenomena that are linked - a notion of the reigning cultural *Zeitgeist* that it shares with books like Susan Faludi's *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* - *Fight Club* manages to create a narrative centered around the kind of hip, stylishly violent action that is so attractive to today's filmgoers" (Giroux and Szeman 2001 p99). Echoing Monk's analysis of the British underclass films, Giroux and Szeman contend that *Fight Club's* critique of capitalism is unconvincing because it fails to address the structural causes of unemployment and job insecurity. They argue that the tendency to scapegoat feminism as the source of contemporary discontent with (post)modernity and to posit urban, upper-middle class, white, male technocrats as disempowered effectively masks the real (class-based) circumstances and causes of social inequity and injustice. According to Giroux and Szeman, *Fight Club* "inaugurates a new subgenre of film narrative that combines a fascination with the spectacle of violence, enlivened through tired narratives about the crisis of masculinity, with a superficial gesture toward social critique designed to offer the tease of a serious independent / art film...rather than turning a critical light on important social issues, such films often trivialise them within a stylised aesthetics that revels in irony, cynicism, and excessive violence" (ibid. p96- 97). Insofar as gender is concerned, they thus reject the emancipatory potential of irony in 1990s cinema, concluding that most of these critiques of capitalism are driven by ostensibly subversive, anti-authoritarian masculinities, which are more likely to reinforce dominant ideologies rather than to challenge them.

What is of particular interest to this study is the way in which Sconce, Monk and Giroux and Szeman implicitly speculate about the cultural competencies of their interpretive communities with regard to their decodings of irony. For Sconce, the (non gender-specific) audience is hyper-aware and colludes politically in the smart film's ironic disengagement from politics. For Monk, the (male) audience is post-political and

identifies with the British films' marginalised male characters as a subcultural lifestyle that offers refuge from the responsibilities of adulthood. For Giroux and Szeman, the audience is endangered by the powerful pedagogical influence of the current "culture of cynicism and senseless violence" (ibid. p102). Crucially, these diverse theoretical standpoints indicate that different (postmodern, Marxist, feminist) textual analytical approaches produce significantly different conceptualisations both of the audience and of film reception. It is therefore useful to turn to Fiske and Dawson's (1996) empirical audience study of homeless men watching *Die Hard* (discussed in detail in Chapter 4), in which the researchers suggest that hypermasculinity and violence in action films can be partly read in subversive or anti-hegemonic ways by socially-excluded men. Although concerned with a different genre, these findings partly support the claim, implicit in Sconce's analysis, that certain members of the audience prioritise class over gender to read particular masculinities as (anti-hegemonic) critiques of class ideology and consumer capitalism rather than as (hegemonic) endorsements of dominant gender ideologies. However, Fiske and Dawson also make the crucial point that, "Representations of violence may well offer potentially progressive meanings in class or racial politics but repressive ones in those of gender" (1996 p308). In Chapter 3, similar considerations are used to analyse the violent, criminal, rebellious, disaffected and socially excluded masculinities of recent Irish cinema.

2.5 Reflexive Sado-Masochism and the Angry White Masculinities of the 'Male Rampage Film'

The classic action genre has been widely understood as endorsing and perpetuating the hegemony of white, middle-class masculinity (Hanke 1998). For Donald (1992), Jeffords (1994) and Faludi (1991), the Hollywood action hero of the 1980s is symbolic of a backlash against the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s, which threatened to destabilise traditional masculinity and the economic and political systems that supported it. However, iconic action heroes such as Rocky as well as John McClane and Martin Riggs in the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* series have been (re)considered by theorists such as Yvonne Tasker (1993), Fred Pfeil (1995) and David Savran (1998) as less unequivocal endorsements of male power and privilege than conventional feminist analyses suggest. Their readings draw attention to more complex elements at play in these films, such as their anxious, self-knowing responses to social and political change and their mobilisation of postmodern self-reflexivity. Tasker, for example, contends that the films draw critical attention to the 'musculinity' of their working-class heroes by foregrounding these displays of excessive physicality as redundant and decorative rather than naturalised or essentialised.

In Fred Pfeil's detailed analyses of the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* films, he observes stylistic and narrative elements of a postmodern aesthetic, as well as considerable ideological ambiguity. He claims that it is essential to regard this "newest crop of mainstream rampagers" against the backdrop of the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism, whereby the de-industrialising 1980s affected the middle of the labour market, causing a deepening gulf in the division of labour within the working-class. While most of the low-paying jobs that resulted from these transformations were taken up by women and people of colour (Pfeil 1995) and the resultant redistribution of wealth has primarily benefited middle-class men at executive level, it is men who have felt themselves to be most adversely affected by these changes. According to Pfeil, the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* series represent a complex renegotiation of class and gender politics, which is typically postmodern in its ability to offer the audience both left-populist and right-populist pleasures and affiliations. Much of this ambiguity arises from a deep sense of anxiety

about white masculinity's relation to the *status quo*: the hero is constrained by the need to endorse conservative social values, on the one hand, yet is conflicted and marginalised by what he perceives to be a contamination of the *status quo* (by feminism, consumerism, technology, bureaucracy and/or corruption) that he has, in the past, so vehemently defended. According to Pfeil, the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* films are riven with multiple conflicts and contradictions in terms of their protagonists' attitudes toward the State and authority, toward women and the institution of marriage and toward the corporate world. He argues, however, that even when the nominal dichotomy seems to be good versus evil or working-class versus ruling-class, gender is the fundamental medium of exchange in these films.

Both Savran (*ibid.*) and Pfeil identify substantial evidence of masculinist-inflected disaffection throughout these films. For example, in spite of their ostensibly pro-family agenda, Pfeil argues that the hero's relationships with women and family are deeply contradictory. In both the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* films, failing or dysfunctional marriages constitute the hero's personal problematic (while the battle against conspiracies and corruption provides his public or external quest). Although the manifest content of the films supports the domesticating influence of female love and the family home, Pfeil argues that the "underlying dream logic" (*ibid.* p15) of the *Lethal Weapon* films suggests otherwise. He notes that in *Lethal Weapon I* and in both of the *Die Hard* films, it is Christmas and that all three endings "predominantly feature an ironic play between the visions of domestic coziness conjured up by familiar renditions of canonical Christmas songs on the soundtrack, and the disordered or ravaged landscape presented to our eyes" (*ibid.* p16). This ambivalence toward family life is further supported by the films' marginalisation of women and their intense focus on homosocial bonding and all-male spaces. Although the audience is not overtly invited to disapprove of McClane's career wife and, in some instances, is encouraged to sympathise with her against McClane's anachronistic sexism, Pfeil maintains that "the film actively subverts its own lip service to this bourgeois feminist ideology" (*ibid.* p18) by discrediting her corporate world and its impotent male professionals, who are unable to save either themselves or women-in-distress in the face of real danger.

In *Die Hard*, the ultra-modern corporate world, portrayed as amoral, cold and sterile, is juxtaposed with the grittier underworld of disused industrial areas, which connote male survival, moral certainty and nostalgia for a time in which 'men were men'. Although Gruber and his terrorists are narratively pitched against the hero and against the ruling class, they are also portrayed as socially continuous with their corporate-professional hostages. According to Pfeil, the battle against emasculated men in suits accommodates not only sexist pleasures but also class-based ones, whereby a regular guy gets to put professionals and business executives in their place. In relation to the hero's attitude toward the State, Pfeil argues that a range of hostilities are simultaneously discharged and disavowed by portraying State institutions not as bad or weak per se, but because they lack male/phallic leadership and authority. Thus the anti-institutionalism and anti-politicism of the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* films accommodate both anti-authoritarian pleasures as well as fears about the loss of (male) authority. The State in these films "is weakened by both its domestication and by the subversion of patriarchal-male authority that contemporary domestication brings in its wake" (ibid. p25). Male fears about the loss of paternal authority are also central to Savran's (ibid.) analysis of the *Rambo* and *Die Hard* films which, he claims, articulate anxieties about the loss of patriarchal authority in a feminised post(modern) society. Savran draws on Christopher Lasch's (1979) critique of capitalism which, he argues, is capable only of producing narcissistic male subjects who lack what he refers to as "respected models of social conduct" (Lasch 1979 p41 cited in Savran 1998 p168). According to Savran, the conflicted, masochistic male hero of American culture represents a new hegemonic masculinity, profoundly informed by the politics of Robert Bly's *Iron John* and the American mythopoetic men's movement.

Pfeil concludes that while these (post-feminist, post-industrial) images of masculinity are by no means symbolic of a progressive politics of gender, they nonetheless signal a new self-reflexivity toward and anxious negotiation of change. Like Tasker (1993), who maintains that McClane's muscularity and machismo in *Die Hard* are both an affirmative last stand as well as a commentary on the dysfunctional, decorative and obsolete body of the white, working hero, Pfeil sees the formulations of the *Die Hard* and *Rocky* films, like

their *Rambo* and *Top Gun* predecessors, as expressions of a "paradoxical intensification and erosion" of male power and authority. Fears about male powerlessness, he suggests, are partly negated and partly given vent through excessive and parodic displays of male violence and machismo: "If the results of all these constructions and operations are scarcely to be extolled as examples of radical or liberatory cultural production (and who would have ever thought they could be, given the economics and social relations of blockbuster film-making?), they nonetheless suggest a new and vertiginous psycho-social mobility, a moment of flux" (ibid. p32).

Savran's (1998) analysis of the same cycle of films adds a psychoanalytical dimension to the motivations behind and enactment of white male rage in American culture. He asserts that the "*Brudderbund* of rampagers" described by Pfeil is an overt manifestation of the libidinal logic of reflexive sadomasochism which, he argues, has been produced in response to feminism, the loss of the Vietnam War, the limited success of the civil rights movement, the emergence of the gay rights movement and the end of the post World War II economic boom. Savran makes explicit the connection between the iconic figures of American action movies and the "little brotherhood" of men rhetoric that underpins the mythopoetic movement as well as the right-wing Patriot movement, which have effectively constructed this discourse of white, male victimhood, described by Pfeil as "the new subaltern subjects of domestic post-Fordism" (ibid. p7). As if in response to Pfeil's question, "What [...] is the boundary line between the diehard assertion of rugged white male individualism and its simultaneous feminization and spectacularization?" (ibid. p29), Savran argues that contemporary action heroes attest to "the emergence of a particular kind of masochistic male subjectivity - dubbed reflexive sadomasochism by Freud - which has become hegemonic in American culture over the course of the past twenty years" (ibid. p). He maintains that the highly influential men's movement, epitomised by the writings of George Gilder (1973) and Robert Bly (1992) has, in spite of its homosocial and homophobic bravado, failed "to produce anything resembling a stable, integral, and full male subject, one based on presence (as opposed to absence), on hardness (as opposed to flaccidity)" (ibid. p174). Postmodern masculinity, according to

Savran, is expressed as lack and can therefore only be validated in action and in a capacity to endure pain and suffering.

Indeed, the mythopoetic project to rediscover pain and sensitivity as innate, pre-cultural essence of manhood is strikingly reminiscent of some biological-essentialist and eco-feminist strands of the women's movement, which emphasise women's reproductive biology and connection to nature as paths to empowerment. Coward (1999 p125) describes the "masculinist reaction" as the male equivalent of womanism, while, according to Schwalbe (1996 p119), the bonding rituals performed by these groups enable them "to reinterpret their feminine traits as 'deep masculine'". Similarly, Savran contends that Bly's positioning of woman as civilising force and of man as instinctive and pre-cultural effectively reverses the male-culture/female-nature dichotomy of post-Enlightenment thinking, and he argues that Bly's rhetoric of warrior imagery and the focus on action and power fails to conceal a preoccupation with pain and the feminine, masochistic part of the self. Pfeil also describes Bly's concept of masculinity as "defined by its perpetual oedipal oscillations between rebellion, submission, and emotional pain..." (ibid. p174). It is this motif of the male at war not only with the external world but also with himself and his contradictory positioning as violent warrior (sadist) and internally conflicted object of desire (masochist) that, according to Savran, underpins the *Rambo* films. The dual identification of Rambo as both hypermasculine and feminised (as both "having" and "being" the phallus) is elaborated through his extreme masochistic suffering, his alliance with nature rather than culture, his opposition to modernity and consumerism and the mythic, instinctive concept of masculinity upon which his survival depends.

Both Pfeil and Savran include *Falling Down* (1993) in their analyses. Like Pfeil, who contends that "it is a rampage film that comes wrapped in its own critique" (ibid. p239), Savran also draws attention to the film's ideological ambiguity. For Savran, Michael Douglas is the most emblematic of the masochistic, white male victims. While cognisant of the need to distinguish between fictional masculinities and real events, he nonetheless perceives in the character of D-Fens a set of discourses on masculine disempowerment that

are pertinent to contemporary America, and he argues that "recent events, from the Oklahoma City bombing to renewed attacks on affirmative action, have demonstrated the unpredictability and potentially dire consequences of this newly hegemonic masculinity" (ibid. p209). Similarly, Michael Kimmel (2004) has argued that the impact of global economic restructuring on working-class and lower middle-class American men has enabled them to develop a discourse of resentment and disenfranchisement that is frequently manifested in the form of anger against their fathers, the government and, in particular, women. He contends that the rhetoric of the Patriot movement, with its critique of the State and the American military as weak, feminised and run by 'gender inverts' is remarkably similar to that of Al Ka'eda, which rails against the feminising and decadent forces of (post)modernity. Kimmel also attributes the recent popularity of white supremacist groups such as 'Stormfront' to lower middle-class men's sense of disempowerment. He claims that these groups re-work class-based inequities in racialised and gendered terms, mobilising a politics of emasculation to problematise the Other. They thus conflate their racist agenda with the rhetoric of (white) male victimisation and offer their adherents the promise of re-empowerment through the reclamation of white masculine supremacy.

Thus, in spite of *Falling Down's* attempt to produce "white men as exemplars of the nation and critics of commodity culture" (Savran 1998 p208), it proves unable to distinguish between the beleaguered D-FENS and super-Patriot, neo-Nazi Nick. Like Pfeil, who maintains that the film is intended "to 'out' and exacerbate our mixed feelings towards this failed and flailing protector-provider gone wild" (ibid. p238), Savran claims that the film simultaneously invites and denies a view of white straight men as "pathogenic fascist monsters" (Pfeil 1995 p241). According to Pfeil, the film's thematic incoherence deliberately replicates and appeals to the confusion that male viewers are presumed to experience about their own masculinity, in other words the victim-oppressor, sadist-masochist, feminine-masculine tensions described by Savran. His analysis predates the appearance of *Fight Club*, which is arguably a more overt exploration of these tropes, in which the motif of the divided self is made explicit in Tyler (hypermasculine and masochist) and Jack (feminised and sadist). *Fight Club* is both a smart film and a male

rampage film. Even more so than the *Rambo*, *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* films, it self-consciously articulates the class-based and gender-based responses to post-feminism and post-Fordism described by Pfeil and Savran, including resistance to the feminisation of labour, a rejection of consumerism and the corporate world, the celebration of innate male wildness and male ritual, nostalgia for pre-modern masculine skills (machinery, combat, working the earth), a simultaneous rejection of and craving for male/phallic authority, a deep preoccupation with the self and a masochistic conceptualisation of masculinity that is measured not in terms of how much pain the hero can inflict but rather how much suffering he can endure. According to Kaja Silverman, reflexive sadomasochism "is ideally suited for negotiating the contradictions inherent in masculinity. The male subject can indulge his appetite for pain without at the same time calling into question his virility" (Silverman 1992 cited in Savran 1998 p326).

In *Fight Club*, Tyler's submission to physical pain and injury is manifested as an excoriation of the feminised self, a desire to expunge the narcissistic, self-help-addicted, competitive individualist whom he perceives, along with writers such as Robert Bly and Christopher Lasch, as a direct product of post-modernity's feminising project. The polarisation described by Lasch between the schizoid, feminised, narcissist who seethes "with an inner anger for which a dense, overpopulated, bureaucratic society can devise few legitimate outlets" (Lasch 1979 p40 cited in Savran 1998 p167) and the authoritative, imperial "rugged individualist" is most perfectly embodied in the Jack / Tyler character(s). However, whereas novelist Chuck Palahniuk's take on the rugged individualist or wild man of *Fight Club* appears to express genuine nostalgia for a bygone masculinity, director Fincher's choice of the spectacularly beautiful, designer-dishevelled Brad Pitt to represent the repressed Other of the self appears to signal a deep sense of irony about the pseudo-essentialism of the mythic men's movement, whose desire to reconstruct male identity based in ancient mythology is arguably as self-conscious and as self-reflexive as any postmodern bricolage of the self.

However, even if *Fight Club* is read as a critique of male self-obsession, it is difficult to ignore the overtly anti-feminist rhetoric and discourse of (white, male) entitlement and

deprivation that underpins the film's narrative logic. The establishment of the fight clubs and, ultimately, of Project Mayhem, bears striking witness to the emergence in the United States of both Jungian-influenced men's groups as well as right-wing rural militia groups described by Kimmel. While John McClane in *Die Hard* and Tyler in *Fight Club* do not overtly espouse white supremacy, they embody the pro-capitalist and producerist yet anti-corporate and anti-consumerist ethos of the organisations described by Kimmel, which oppose what they perceive to be an emasculated and emasculating 'Nanny State'. Finally, even more so than *Falling Down*, *Fight Club* is riven with multiple contradictions. An interview with Ed Norton bears witness to the deliberate deployment of polysemy that characterises not only contemporary cinematic explorations of masculinity but postmodern texts in general:

I hope it rattles people. I hope it dunks it very squarely into your lap because I think one of the things we strove very specifically to do with this was on some levels retain a kind of moral ambivalence or a moral ambiguity - not to deliver a neatly wrapped package of meaning into your lap. Or in any way that let you walk away from the film like this, comfortable in having been told what you should make of it " (Ed Norton cited in Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002 p21).

It thus remains unclear to what extent *Fight Club* endorses the white-male-as-victim project and to what extent it lampoons male self-obsession, narcissism and the inevitable self-destruction of a masculine order predicated upon exclusive homosociality.

Much of this ambiguity arises from the contradictions embodied in the split masculine self¹⁸. In spite of Tyler's aversion to therapy and the 'talking cure', overtly coded as feminised pursuits / solutions to modernity, *Fight Club* is a highly articulate film which

¹⁸ It has been argued by Kane (1999) that the motif of the double or alter-ego in German and English literature at the end of the 19th Century signaled a crisis of male identity, whereby "all those qualities traditionally deemed to belong to 'another world', another social class (the proletariat), another race (foreigners), another gender (the feminine) – are discovered to be a repressed part of the self which had been projected onto others, but which has come back to haunt that self (Kane 1999 pvii.)". Kane examines the *leitmotif* of the double in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and claims that the abject or Other represented by the alter-egos in these works hint at the unraveling of a male identity previously assumed to be unified and complete. Interestingly, the trope of the (male) double has emerged in numerous recent Hollywood films including *Fight Club*, *Se7en*, *Alien3*, *Face/Off*, *The Game*, *The Matrix* and, to a lesser extent, *Adaptation*, while *Being John Malkovich* explores the possibility of multiple personalities and identities within the one body.

depends on its witty, ironic and ultra-smart voice-over to create a sense of knowing complicity with the audience. In much the same way as Tyler's hypermasculine bravado conceals a conflicted, masochistic, objectified self, the masculinist, anti-intellectual rhetoric of the fight clubs and Project Mayhem ("you don't talk about Fight Club") is at odds with the smart, angsty existentialism of Jack's voiceover. Similarly, in British films such as *Trainspotting*, *Naked*, *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* and *Snatch*, it is the hip, witty and ultra-smart voice-over and dialogue that, paradoxically, draw us into a diegetic world in which language, therapy, analysis and the talking cure are dismissed as feminine. The confusion about the culture-nature dichotomy that surfaces in these films thus encapsulates many of the paradoxes of contemporary masculinity politics, which fails to reconcile biodeterminist theories of an innate masculine self with the constant cultural reconfiguration and reconstruction of hegemonic masculinity that has sustained the patriarchal order.

According to Savran, the supposedly new postmodernist subject does not herald the emergence of a new species of man: "The only thing truly new about the new narcissist (or new sadomasochist - take your pick) is that he represents a now dominant figure on the U.S. cultural scene, no longer relegated to the margins" (Savran 1998 p168-169). While much of the literature on mediated masculinities suggests that patriarchy merely reforms masculinity to meet the next historical turn (Hanke, 1998), it is also possible that the masochistic male subjectivities described by Savran signal an important renegotiation of masculinity, or what Connell (1995) describes as a crisis in the legitimation of patriarchy. Although Irish cinema lacks the spectacular heroics associated with Hollywood masculinities, strong elements of male masochism - manifest in a fascination with the 'mortified', working-class male body and a preoccupation with the pain and suffering of the underdog - are highly prevalent in the contemporary cycle of films under analysis in this study. Moreover, the motif of 'rampage' can be applied to a wide range of antisocial or 'protest' behaviours that form the thematic basis of these films, including joy-riding, drug-taking and dealing, bare-back horse-riding in urban spaces and involvement in crime. These masculinities and their relation to prevailing economic and social trends in modern Ireland are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

2.6 Adolescent Masculinities in the American Teen Comedy

Also referred to as 'gross-out comedy' (Greven 2002) and 'American dude cinema' (Troyer and Marchiselli 2005), this genre originated with *Porkys* (1982) in the 1980s. However, the late 1990s and 2000s have effectively been the 'golden era' of the male-oriented American teen comedy with films such as *American Pie* (1999), *There's Something About Mary* (1998), *Dude, Where's My Car?* (2000), *Loser* (2000), *Road Trip* (2000), *Tomcats* (2001), *Say It Isn't So* (2001), *Shallow Hal* (2001), *American Pie 2* (2001), *Saving Silverman* (2001) and *Stuck on You* (2003) making huge returns at the box office. The extra-filmic popularity of the 'slacker' or white male 'loser' in American culture is evidenced by his recent incursion into beer and alcohol advertising (Messner and Montez de Oca 2005). While in Lance Strate's (1992) analysis of American beer advertising, beer was found to be strongly associated with traditional male labour, the 2002 and 2003 beer ads examined by Messner and Montez de Oca have moved away from depictions of leisure as a reward for hard work and instead feature leisure as a lifestyle in itself (ibid. p1886). This mirrors trends that have been prevalent in British and Irish beer advertising for some years, epitomised by the recent 'Carlsberg Don't Do...' campaign¹⁹.

Although the teen or gross-out movie is a genre strongly associated with American cinema, there are clear continuities between British Lad Culture's self-consciously dumbed-down preoccupation with 'booze and birds' and the hapless heroes of Dude Cinema. While most teen comedies are aimed at the teen market, the empirical findings of this study and the age profile of contributors to Internet Movie Database discussion boards indicate that they are also popular with men in their 20s and 30s. Variants of these masculinities are also increasingly evident in popular television programmes such as *Jackass*, *Dirty Sanchez* and *Brainiac Science Abuse*, whose blokeish pranks and

¹⁹ The Carlsberg 'Don't do...' ads are enactments of a series of male fantasies about the ideal nightclub (filled with beautiful women who want action and have no interest in small talk), the ideal flat (replete with female flatmates who insist on cooking and love football), the ideal holiday (where the apartments overlook a building site full of female construction workers wearing tight, revealing jeans) and the ideal job (promotion to global staff entertainment manager).

endurance tests exhibit a fascination with male masochism. As such, they can be understood as comic evocations of the postmodern masculinities theorised by Lasch and Savran, which are expressed as lack and can therefore only be validated in action and in a capacity to endure pain and suffering. At a time when male-bonding rituals have achieved notoriety in the news media, most notably regarding the practice of 'fraternity hazing'²⁰ on college campuses throughout the United States, they have surfaced in the entertainment media as unthreatening, good-humoured expressions of male camaraderie.

Like British Lad Culture, the Dude Film or Gross-Out genre is characterised by an inability or unwillingness to grow up. Michael Bracewell describes the appeal of *loaded* magazine to its readers as "a regression to an infantile state of 'behaving badly' by fetishising the behaviour and culture of their adolescence" (Bracewell cited in Southwell 1998 p209). According to Julie Burchill (1999), commercially driven laddism is, "a pleasure-crazed capitulation to the sensual pleasures of infantilism". Both Lad Culture and the Gross-Out comedy are spaces in which adolescent hypermasculinities, manifested in an obsession with bodily fluids and sex and a rejection of the responsibilities of adulthood, can flourish without being taken too seriously (Greven 2002). Other common features include the rejection of work, the pursuit of 'getting laid' while avoiding any form of relationship commitment, a rebellion against paternal authority, engagement in ostensibly anti-social behaviours and a fascination with "grotesquerie" (Attwood 2005). Elements of this (sub)genre, which intersect with many of the (sub)genres outlined above, are evident in the Irish films *Peaches*, *Man About Dog*, *Spin the Bottle*, *Intermission* and, in particular, *Headrush*.

Most theorists have analysed the various cultural manifestations of adolescent masculinity as attempts to reinforce sexist, misogynistic and homophobic ideologies of gender (Whelehan 2000, Attwood, 2005, Messner and Montez de Oca 2005). Imelda Whelehan (2000) argues that Lad Culture actively colludes in constructing images of men as useless homemakers, childminders or lovers because ultimately these stereotypes

²⁰ Hazing refers to a ritual or series of rituals used to initiate new members of the social group in academic fraternities on US college campuses. The initiate is frequently harassed, abused or humiliated by being

afford them the last laugh. She claims that if men are being portrayed as simple, lager-swilling creatures, there are more complex motives underpinning these representations: "Somewhere along the line it is as if 1.5 million men are basking in reflections of their own dumbing down as part of a refusal to examine their most deep-seated prejudices against women" (Whelehan 2000 p66). However, it has also been argued that these images are part of a misandrist cultural discourse which constructs men as disparaged and incompetent (Beynon 2002). According to Ros Coward (1999 p91), "Traditional masculinity has been rendered at best absurd and at worst something menacing", and she goes on to argue that "the once desirable attribute of masculinity is now seen as absurd, fair game for humour and sometimes disgust" (ibid. p94). Katz et al. also claim that:

Images on television show men as 'joke bloke', the butt of the joke whether in advertisement or sitcom. Depicted as inept, incompetent and doing worse than girls at school, boys argue that society marginalises them, fears them and restricts the options open to them (Katz et al. 2000 p6).

Greven's (2002) analysis of masculinity in American teen comedies provides some useful insights into how the alleged infantilism and dumbing-down of masculinity functions within this particular (sub)genre. While the teen 'gross-out' movies he has studied are dominated by the heteromasculinist concerns of male friendship and the pursuit of sex, he argues that they also accommodate elements of sexual and political noncompliance that reflect the impact of the feminist and gay rights movements. In *American Pie 2*, for example, Stifler, Jim and Finch are asked to engage in homoerotic contact in exchange for observing 'lesbian' sex which, according to Greven, "implies an interest in pushing past the borders of straight male sexual taste" (ibid. p19). However, while the films' preoccupation with sex and bodily functions and fluids occasionally pushes them into potentially transgressive territories of homosexuality and female power, their representations of gender and sexuality "simultaneously evince a deep hostility to these changes" (ibid. p14). Similarly, even though the confident, sexually powerful women of these films contrast with the gauche, innocent and anxious males, Greven makes the point that they constitute little more than a backdrop to the male characters' personal growth and development: the "depiction of strong women concedes the legitimacy of the

forced to perform various tests of endurance.

advances of feminism, while the relegation of these strong women to the sidelines allows men to maintain preeminent control" (ibid. p18).

Greven evokes Rotundo's (1993) study of nineteenth-century American boy culture as "a distinct cultural world, with its own rituals and its own symbols and values" to argue that the transitional state of teen manhood provides a space in which white manhood, under assault from the forces of feminism, homosexuality and multiculturalism, can be (re)negotiated. He thus asserts that contemporary teen movies represent an infantile stage in American manhood: because the protagonists are boys they can accommodate more than the average level of sexual transgression, since the implication is that these perversities are necessarily evacuated in the transition to manhood. Greven concludes that teen comedies, by suggesting that feminism and homosexuality are forces that have been ideologically mastered through rites of puberty, serve as "consolatory catharses for white manhood" and amount to "little more than a yearning for a discarded, amorphous age in the development of white manhood" (ibid. p21). His argument that the transitional nature of adolescence offers a discursive space in which threats to hegemonic masculinity can be more effectively or more freely challenged, renegotiated or neutralised may, to some extent, explain lad culture's fascination with adolescent masculinities and/or masculine representations in which adolescent behaviours are celebrated. By acknowledging homosexual threat rather than ignoring it, these texts articulate anxieties about what masculinity and male friendship mean in a changing 'genderscape'. Such a counter-reading is supported by Gauntlett's (2002 p169) analysis of British lad magazines, in which he maintains that the sexist and homophobic jokiness of *FHM* is a self-referential acknowledgement of the fact that blatantly sexist and homophobic assumptions are no longer credible, and the humour is about the "silliness of sexism".

The interpretation of displays of machismo or hypermasculinity as expressions of insecurity and/or of a perceived sense of loss of power and privilege are strongly evident in the psychological literature on masculinity (Horrocks 1995, Clare 2000). Read in this way, the fascination with immature and irresponsible behaviours that characterises both the teen comedy and the British underclass films might be understood as a self-conscious

or subversive response to pathologising discourses in the wider news media, which frame working-class male youth, in particular, as aggressive, irresponsible and a threat to the social order (Mariani 1996, Pollack 1999, Devlin 2000). Even though the protagonists of Dude Cinema are predominantly middle-class, they display a fascination with the “protest masculinities” (Connell 1995) more readily associated with socially-excluded males. This raises the question as to whether such images might function as a cipher for other, non-class-specific anxieties that are experienced by modern men. If claims that audiences are becoming increasingly sophisticated and media-literate are to be taken seriously, it is necessary to interrogate more rigorously the way in which contemporary cinema actively plays on the stereotype of the lad as boorish, immature and emotionally simple, and the ways in which such ostensibly negative representations of masculinity are received by their male audiences. The perceived impact of Lad Culture on contemporary cinema and the meanings and pleasures associated with the discursive constructions of masculinity that it has produced thus form an integral part of the empirical reception element of this study.

2.7 Conclusion

The new articulations of masculinity described in this chapter signal important developments in the cinematic representation of men. They are particular to the last ten to fifteen years and to the significant social, political and cultural changes which have taken place within this timeframe. They can thus be understood as a set of (sub)genres and male types which address the changing meanings ascribed to masculinity, even when the 'hard' masculinities on display ostensibly work to disavow such changes. In narrative and thematic terms, many of these films demonstrate a shift from a concern with external to internal motivations (Kirkham and Thumim 1993), which is frequently manifested in their preoccupation with male suffering (Savran 1998). These films feature predominantly working-class and underclass characters and are characterised by a marked change in attitudes toward work and their protagonists' position in relation to society and the forces of law and order. From the point of view of style and tone, they are heavily underscored by polysemy and the conscious deployment of irony, thus accommodating a postfeminist politics of gender that is central to Lad Culture. Finally, many of these films conflate, both explicitly and implicitly, resistance to consumer capitalism, the State and authority with gender-based critiques of (post)modernity, which renders their ideological functioning highly ambivalent in the absence of concrete ethnographies of reception.

The (anti)heroes of the new male-oriented (sub)genres and the discourses on masculinity that they produce depart significantly from conventional cinematic heroes. In the light of the recent proliferation and popularity of working-class, unemployed, criminal, socially-excluded, beleaguered, victimised and nihilistic male anti-heroes, this study (re)considers assumptions about the middle-class, pro-social status of hegemonic masculinity in mainstream cinema. It explores the nature, motives and ideological functioning(s) of these manifestations of male discontent by considering socially-specific readings of the films by young Irish men. Ultimately, the study aims to establish to what extent these cultural displays of transgression and protest signal a crisis in the legitimisation of patriarchy (Connell 1995) and thus an acknowledgement, however reluctant, of the

redistribution of power within the gender order or, as Hanke (1998) has suggested, the conscious reconfiguration of hegemonic masculinity merely to reinforce the norm and thus to ensure men's continued stake in the "patriarchal dividend" (Connell 1995).

A significant number of the Irish films made in the late 1990s and 2000s display remarkable continuities with the generic styles, character types and discourses on masculinity discussed in this chapter. However, contemporary Irish cinema has not yet been analysed in these terms. The purpose of Chapter 3, therefore, is to explore the new masculinities that have been emerging in contemporary Irish cinema and to analyse these films and character types in the context of the limited literature that is available on the subject. The Irish texts, in turn, form the basis of the empirical audience strand of the study, which explores how working-class and middle-class male audiences respond to the specific articulations of masculinity and class that characterise a new, male-themed and male-oriented cycle in contemporary Irish filmmaking.

Chapter 3 -

Cool Hibernia?: the Masculinities of the New Crime/Underclass Cycle in Contemporary Irish Film

3.1. Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, a significant cycle of Irish films has emerged, whose character types, narrative themes, generic influences and mode of address signal an important break with the past, particularly in terms of their representations and discursive constructions of masculinity. This cycle includes *I Went Down* (1997), *Crush Proof* (1999), *Vicious Circle* (1999), *Flick* (2000), *Saltwater* (2000), *Accelerator* (2001), *The General* (1998), *Ordinary Decent Criminal* (1999), *Veronica Guerin* (2003), *When the Sky Falls* (2000), *Last Days in Dublin* (2001), *Headrush* (2002), *Intermission* (2003), *The Halo Effect* (2004), *Adam and Paul* (2004) and *Man About Dog* (2004). Films such as *Dead Bodies* (2003) and *Freeze Frame* (2004), though preoccupied with the trope of accidental involvement in crime, tend more toward the psycho-thriller genre, while *The Actors* (2003) and *Spin the Bottle* (2002) lampoon, rather than celebrate or investigate, gangster and working-class male identities. Taken together, these films exhibit an unprecedented fascination with urban, working-class masculinities and, in particular, with the criminal underbelly of Ireland's Celtic Tiger economy. This chapter charts the emergence of indigenised versions of the gangster, underclass and male rampage (sub)genres outlined in Chapter 2 and of the working-class, unemployed, criminal, socially-excluded and often disaffected male protagonists they feature. It examines these films not only in relation to their articulation of the economic *zeitgeist* in Ireland, as both Pettitt (2004) and Barton (2004) have done, but also in terms of how they represent and construct discourses about modern Irish and transnational masculinities.

Although, in recent years, a number of films have been produced which chronicle the experiences of urban Ireland's cosmopolitan middle-class, including *November Afternoon* (1996), *When Brendan Met Trudy* (2000), *About Adam* (2000), *Goldfish Memory* (2003) and *Cowboys and Angels* (2003), it is notable that so many of the youth-oriented films released during the Celtic Tiger years, rather than reflecting Ireland's newfound

prosperity, revolved around socially-marginalised male characters and aspects of urban Ireland's less celebrated 'underworld'. Much like the new masculinities discussed in Chapter 2, the representations of masculinity which have come to dominate contemporary Irish cinema are characterised by a number of key features, including their self-reflexivity, their re-negotiation of work as a signifier of masculinity, their relation to society and the forces of law and order and their referencing of masculinities which have become prevalent across a wide range of other media texts and forms. Compared with the discursive constructions of masculinity that dominated Irish cinema in the 1970s and 1980s, the new masculinities of the 1990s and 2000s signal a radical break with the past. The primary focus of this chapter is to consider the origins and significance of this representational shift, as well as the various discourses on gender and class that it can be seen to represent and, in turn, partly construct.

That traditionally male-oriented themes and genres such as crime, thriller or gangster have become increasingly dominant in Irish cinema is not, of itself, especially remarkable, given that these genres are popular in a global market in which the Irish film industry is under increasing pressure to remain competitive. As Andrew Higson (2000 p65) argues, there is an artificiality inherent in the concept of a national cinema as a "tight-knit, value-sharing collectivity, sustaining the experience of nationhood", given the fundamentally transnational nature of film production and distribution. Moreover, in spite of the emergence of new female filmmakers such as Kirsten Sheridan, Liz Gill and Orla Walsh, the Irish film industry remains heavily male-dominated. Nevertheless, the discursive constructions of masculinity that characterise contemporary Irish cinema constitute a significant departure from those that dominated Irish filmmaking in the 1970s and 1980s. Not only has the focus shifted from a concern with rural male characters in distinctively Irish contexts to a growing preoccupation with urban, working-class masculinities in more universal settings; there has also been a distinct ideological trajectory, whereby an unequivocally critical approach to patriarchal masculinity has given way to more ambiguous portrayals of machismo. While the core concern of this study is to investigate how (male) audiences understand and engage with these new masculinities, it is first essential to define and describe them, to explain how they depart

from previous cinematic explorations of the masculine and to analyse them in the context of wider social and economic developments, as well as in the context of the literature outlined in Chapter 2.

It is unlikely that the emergence and popularity of the genres, narrative themes and character types that underpin much of contemporary Irish cinema can be attributed to any one factor but rather to a myriad of economic, cultural and demographic influences. According to Andrew Spicer (2001), recent transformations in the representation of masculinity in contemporary British cinema are attributable not only to the post-industrial re-structuring of the gender order but also to the increasingly decentered and eclectic nature of British film-making, whereby elements of the literary adaptations and social realism of the 1980s survive alongside a more commercial, populist cinema encouraged by the growth of the multiplexes. Although Spicer examines dominant male character types¹ in nationally-specific terms, claiming that "representations of masculinity derived from successful British feature films contribute to a national 'image culture'" (ibid. p185), his exploration moves beyond the parameters of textual analysis and of the gender-as-national-allegory paradigm to acknowledge the significance of film-viewing practices, and take into account the influence of global cultural forces as well as the increased interdependency of the media and leisure industries in the intertextual construction of male typologies. Given that many characteristics of Spicer's new male types are evident not only in Irish cinema but also in other national cinemas and other media forms, the typological approach facilitates an analysis of gender that does not presuppose an exclusive visceral link with national identity or which, at least, enables gender identity to be re-considered in the context of both national and transnational influences.

Given that media reception and use are central concerns of this study, a focus on characters is considered to be a particularly useful means of exploring the various ways in

¹ Spicer (2001) uses Richard Dyer's (1993) distinction between a stereotype (a rigid and reductive label which serves to stigmatise the group it describes) and a type (a more fluid, varied description which can perform a range of narrative functions). Spicer's 'cultural types' include both social types specific to an historical moment and archetypes, which may recur over a longer time period, as well as types involving overlap between the two. He describes types as "overlapping and competing constructions which struggle for hegemony, the version of masculinity that is most desirable or widely acceptable" (ibid. p2).

which audiences relate to on-screen masculinities. Given the increasing number of contemporary films that reject the single male hero in favour of multiple protagonists, coupled with an increasingly ambiguous audience positioning or mode of address (Monk 2000), the significance of audience identification with on-screen male characters provides important insights into how different audiences relate in different ways to the same film. This is particularly pertinent to the film *Intermission*, which is central to the audience reception strand of this study and whose randomly interconnected subplots (Sconce 2002) allow the audience to focus on the character and subplot that interests them most. However, it is not proposed here to examine the Irish films exclusively from the point of view of male character types. As is evidenced by the debates outlined in Chapter 2, narratives, genres, style and tone also play a crucial role constructing particular discourses on masculinity. Given that so many recent Irish films are preoccupied with the criminal underworld and with working-class masculinities, it is necessary to consider the popularity of the (sub)genres from which these character types originate by regarding them in relation to the gender-based frameworks reviewed in Chapter 2 as well as in the context of the predominantly national-identity-based analyses that have appeared in Irish film studies. The 'cycles' and (sub)genres identified in Chapters 2 and 3 are thus considered to be of interest not because they adhere rigidly to particular sets of generic conventions but because they are "paradigm films" which, according to Spicer, are those which "establish, reinforce, or significantly modify, an important male type, including those that initiated a cycle of films" (Spicer 2001 p3).

This chapter thus overviews a body of 'paradigm films', which have emerged in Ireland in the mid-1990s to early 2000s and which represent an important transformation in dominant representations of Irish masculinity. It is proposed that these developments are closely related to, and therefore must be discussed in the context of, the discursive constructions of masculinity outlined in Chapter 2. While the Irish films demonstrate the strongest continuities with the British underclass films and the crime / gangster genre, elements of the male rampage film, the teen comedy and the smart film are also evident in many of them. Taken together, they are regarded as "paradigm films" in the sense that

they both reflect and construct a new set of discourses about contemporary Irish masculinity, which relate not only to national identity and culture but which must also be considered in relation to the transnational, post-industrial, postfeminist and postmodern contexts in which they have emerged. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate these films from a specifically gendered perspective and to consider, in the light of a number of theoretical frameworks, some of the possible meanings and discourses which they accommodate and/or articulate.

3.2 The Lads from Old Ireland

To date, the changes which occurred in Irish filmmaking in the mid-1990s have not been theorised in gender-specific terms but rather in the context of wider economic, cultural and industry-related shifts. It is generally accepted that Irish filmmaking since the 1990s has largely abandoned the dominant themes of earlier cinema, most notably the struggles of rural life, the Northern-Irish conflict, the family, the Church and Ireland's colonial history, to embrace more youth-oriented, urban-based narratives (McLoone 2000, Ging 2002, Barton 2004). Many of the films made under the first Film Board, or what is commonly known as Irish cinema's "First Wave"², have been criticised for being inaccessible, unentertaining and overly preoccupied with parochial, inward-looking concerns, despite the fact that they were relentlessly critical of the nuclear family, patriarchal masculinity, the Catholic Church, and the ideological strictures of State nationalism. There is a general consensus among filmmakers and audiences alike that the transition from national to universal styles and themes signals a progressive development, which reflects Ireland's development as a more open, tolerant and diverse society and according to which any engagement with national identity is considered parochial and politically regressive (Ging 2002). As both Barton (*ibid.*) and Ging (*ibid.*) have commented, First Wave Irish cinema's intense preoccupation with Irish identity has led to a tendency in contemporary Irish filmmaking to consciously disavow the culturally specific in favour of more universal narrative themes and genres.

Given that the First Wave was a consciously political, non-commercial and formally experimental body of work, influenced by the social movements of the 1970s and by the tenets of Third Cinema, it is unsurprising that this period of filmmaking produced such radical critiques of hegemonic masculinity. The unequivocally negative light in which the traditional Irish male was framed during this period is clearly indebted to the influences of feminist and Marxist thinking and to the radical identity politics of the time. However,

² The term First Wave Irish cinema generally refers to the work, dating from the mid-1970s to the closure of the first Film Board in 1987, of a group of filmmakers including Joe Comerford, Bob Quinn, Cathal Black, Kieran Hickey and Pat Murphy, who were concerned not only with exploring complex narrative themes but also with challenging conventional cinematic forms.

while this body of work was undoubtedly "born into a highly politicised social arena" (Barton 1999 p40), a sustained critical response to the hegemony of nationalist, Catholic, heteronormative masculinity survived into the more commercial, less political climate of the late 1980s and 1990s: remnants of the tyrannous patriarchs, ineffectual fathers, abusive priests and sexually repressed males that dominated earlier films such as *Pigs* (1984), *Maeve* (1982), *Our Boys* (1981) *Poitin* and *Exposure* (1978) were still evident in much later films such as *Korea* (1994), *The Field* (1990), *Broken Harvest* (1994), *The Butcher Boy* (1997), *Guiltrip* (1995), *A Soldier's Song* (1995), *Country* (2000) and *When Harry Became A Tree* (2001). Most of these films were set in the past, and they continued to portray oppressive, autocratic and unchanging masculinities as symbolic of Ireland's backwardness and resistance to change, and to criticise the dysfunctional and misogynistic nature of the Church, the traditional family and the military.

It was not until the mid-1990s that these images of Irish masculinity began to be upstaged by the emergence of a range of contemporary, urban-based narratives featuring masculinities that had much in common with the themes, characters and (sub)genres discussed in Chapter 2. According to Rod Stoneman (2005), Chief Executive of the Second Irish Film Board (1993 – 2003), there was a conscious attempt during this time to make Irish filmmaking more commercially viable by encouraging filmmakers to think of their audiences at every stage of the production process and to challenge the national and international perception of Irish filmmaking as preoccupied with historical and rural subjects, and aimed exclusively at an arthouse audience. Stoneman states that:

In 1998 we commissioned a fast-cut, ninety-second cinema trailer about new Irish cinema to shift these residual perceptions and transmit a sharper sense that many of the new films were more urban, comic, violent, sexual. This was part of a small-scale attempt to intercept and shift audience desire through our own direct marketing in the multiplexes (Stoneman 2005 p254).

However, rather than adopt the purely commercial approach of making a smaller number of larger films, Stoneman tried to encourage a larger number of smaller films, with those that succeeded commercially returning enough to cover the rest. He argues that, in the new political, economic and cultural context of 1990s Ireland, an uncritical notion of national cinema did not seem viable:

With unparalleled speed the country ingested the reverberations of economic flux, the complex and wide-ranging effects of a belated ideological secularisation, changing gender relations, and decisive shifts in the armed conflict in Northern Ireland (ibid. p251).

Given that the motif of patriarchal masculinity had long functioned to explore all that was wrong with pre-modern Ireland, it is not surprising that it was largely abandoned when the focus shifted to more universal, modern and urban-centered narratives. As commentators such as Coulter (1993), Gibbons (1996), McLoone (2000), Pettitt (2000) and Barton (2004) have variously testified, the effects of colonisation, the Catholic Church and nationalism on gender relations in Ireland have, until recently, been strongly prevalent in our national cinema. According to Barton, this critical approach is largely shaped by the tendency within cultural representational practices to access a highly defined set of emblematic relationships which are used to articulate recurrent national concerns:

Too often, women and men in Irish films seem burdened by symbolism and lack any organic relationship to the lived experience of their real life prototypes in and outside of Ireland, historically and in the present (Barton 2004 p114).

As a consequence of this, Barton claims, contemporary filmmakers and other artists have consciously striven to unburden their characters of these specifically Irish representational tropes and motifs. When Timmy, the protagonist of Frank Stapleton's *The Fifth Province* (1997), attends a workshop for Irish screenwriters, he is told:

What we don't want is any more stories about...Irish mothers, priests, sexual repressions and the miseries of the rural life. We want stories that are upbeat, that are urban, that have pace and verve and are going somewhere (cited in McLoone 2000 p169).

This preoccupation with urban narratives and shift away from national concerns toward individual ones is becoming increasingly evident in recent Irish films, a trajectory which has been attributed by Martin McLoone (2000) to the problematisation of identity politics articulated in many theories of postmodernism, coupled with the move toward an increasingly post-nationalist concept of identity.

This conscious desire to cast off the old shibboleths of Irish cinema or what Barton (2004 p112) refers to as "the culturally specific desire not to be culturally specific" in itself provides insights into changing concepts of Irish culture and identity, and into Ireland's experience of and response to modernity. However, questions about male representation and masculinity, to the extent that they feature in these debates at all, tend to remain subordinated to questions of Irish national and cultural identity in the context of globalisation, modernity and the Celtic Tiger. Irish film studies thus lacks the type of gender-based frameworks and approaches that are emerging from American and British film theory and criticism, which are outlined in Chapter 2. Although Gibbons and Barton have addressed gender in the context of post-colonialism and nationalism, there is virtually no Irish film scholarship that focuses exclusively on masculinity³. With the exception of Ging (2004, 2005), the impact that key changes such as postfeminism, postmodernism, the demise of identity politics and cultural globalisation have had on representations of Irish masculinity remains largely unexplored. To the extent that gender is addressed in relation to contemporary Irish films, it tends to be almost exclusively in the context of Irish youth culture's sexual liberation from an oppressive past. Barton (2004), for example, maps her discussion of gender in contemporary Irish cinema through a trajectory of sexual liberation, whereby individual characters are freed from the sexual repression of the Church and the conservatism of the post-independence project⁴. Similarly, Pettitt (1999) and Murphy (2003) have examined the emergence of gay Irish masculinities in the context of a cinema and of a society that is becoming increasingly free from legal, religious and moral constraints.

However, these analyses do not account for other radical changes in the articulation of masculinity that have accompanied the rural-urban, national-universal shift, which extend far beyond the increasing visibility of homosexual, sexually confident and liberated men on Irish screens. Not only are Irish men being represented in more diverse ways but contemporary cinema is also participating in new discursive constructions of masculinity,

³ A short article by Martin McCabe (1993) entitled 'The Irish Male in Cinema' was published in the *Irish Reporter*, No. 14.

⁴ See Chapter 7, 'The Deflowering of Irish Cinema' in Barton (2004).

which depart radically from those that dominated Irish films in the 1970s and 1980s. The sheer number of Irish films that have emerged in the past ten years which feature working-class, underclass, marginalised and/or criminal male protagonists is, in itself, an indicator of a widespread preoccupation with masculinities that have been extensively theorised in other academic fields as signaling important developments in gender relations. Rather than indicating that men and masculinity no longer preoccupy Irish filmmakers as overt themes or tropes, therefore, it is suggested here that the recent emergence and popularity of certain (sub)genres and characters indicates that Irish cinema has much to say about Irish men's experiences and identities in a changing social and economic order. However, the conscious move away from the 'old themes' - "the culturally specific desire not to be culturally specific" (Barton 2004) - has moved Irish cinema into new, more global terrain, where it is considerably more open to the influences of other Anglophone, most notably British and American, cinemas. These influences have, in turn, opened up a complex new set of concerns about men and masculinity, which respond to a number of national and global discourses on gender. This Chapter thus contextualises the changes that have occurred in the representation of masculinity in Irish cinema within a wider gender-political framework than has previously been attempted in Irish film studies.

3.3 Irish Cinema's New Anti-Heroes: the 'Protest Masculinities' of the Celtic Tiger Era

The prevalence of low-budget, non-generic, arthouse cinema and the influence of Leftist identity politics on the earlier films ensured that, until recently, Irish cinema was characterised by a lack of conventional male heroes. Indeed, to the extent that national cinema can be understood as articulating a collective set of national concerns, the prevalence of oppressive, abusive and damaged men would suggest that Irish masculinity has long been in a state of crisis. It is only in recent, large-budget productions such as *Michael Collins* (1996), *This Is My Father* (1998) and *Song for a Raggy Boy* (2003) that male characters approaching the classic heroic male figure have begun to emerge. In the 1990s, a range of more sensitive and conspicuously middle-class male protagonists also appeared in films such as *Last of the High Kings* (1996), *About Adam* (2000), *Ailsa* (1994), *On the Edge* (2001), *Disco Pigs* (2001), *Goldfish Memory* (2003) and *When Brendan Met Trudy* (2000) as well as gay, bi-sexual and other non-normative male characters in *November Afternoon* (1996), *The Last Bus Home* (1997) and *Cowboys and Angels* (2003). Even Dessie in *The Snapper* (1993) attested to the influences of feminism and New Mannism in his rediscovery of fatherhood – and his wife's sexuality - through his daughter Sharon's pregnancy. Ruth Barton has commented that in this new, more gender-equal era, films such as Kevin Liddy's *Country* (2000) appeared anachronistic:

...by the time this narrative of abusive and domineering patriarchs was released, the cinematic exploration of masculinity had pushed towards a new desire to depict a more sensitive male hero and Liddy's feature seemed to belong to an earlier era" (Barton 2004 p122).

However, while the disappearance of the traditional patriarch and the increasing visibility of the New Man attest to important developments in gender relations, other manifestations of modern masculinity have emerged, which appear to consciously resist or (re)negotiate this shift. Over the past ten years, a number of new (anti)heroes have become increasingly evident in films such as *I Went Down* (1997), *Crush Proof* (1999), *Vicious Circle* (1999), *Flick* (2000), *Saltwater* (2000), *Accelerator* (2001), *The General* (1998), *Ordinary Decent Criminal* (1999), *Veronica Guerin* (2003), *When the Sky Falls* (2000), *Last Days in Dublin* (2001), *Dead Bodies* (2003), *Spin the Bottle* (2002),

Headrush (2002), *Intermission* (2003), *The Actors* (2003), *The Halo Effect* (2004), *Freeze Frame* (2004), *Adam and Paul* (2004) and *Man About Dog* (2004). Characterised by their increasing focus on male youth, their rejection of work, the family and other signifiers of middle-class respectability and their preoccupation with criminality, these films appear to respond to a number of key discourses on masculinity that have been topical in public debates and the news media in recent years. Significantly, however, they reference not only those discourses which have tended to pathologise male youth as anti-social, deviant and criminal (Katz 2000, Devlin 2000, Hoff-Somers 2001) but also those which posit men as victims of change, by exploring their susceptibility to depression, substance abuse, poverty, criminal involvement and marginalisation from the family. This seminal shift in the discursive framing of masculinities in Irish cinema has turned the spotlight away from dominant men as oppressors to focus instead on more nuanced and ambivalent accounts of 'hard' masculinity, which accommodate readings of men as both victims of and resisters to change.

Significantly, these films chart an ambivalent course between inviting audience sympathy and identification with their protagonists, while at the same time critiquing the behaviours in which they engage. Although they are often violent, causing pain and destruction around them, they are also constructed as victims of circumstance or as romantic misfits who interrogate the supposed normality of the *status quo* by resisting (aspects of) modernity in ways that are frequently portrayed as politically subversive. This recourse to the codes of traditional masculinity as a means of resisting or rejecting consumerism and articulating class-based concerns, already discussed in relation to films such as *Trainspotting* and *Fight Club*, is strongly prevalent in contemporary Irish cinema. In the considerable number of films which feature disaffected or socially excluded young men from the working class, it is possible to discern a collective and volatile response to mainstream society, with which the audience is invited, through various stylistic and narrative codes, to identify. Like many of the masculinities discussed in the context of the British underclass films, the American "smart films" and the "male rampage" films, the protagonists of *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof*, *Last Days in Dublin* and, to a lesser extent, *Adam and Paul* are portrayed as members of male subcultural groups which have been

excluded from the benefits of the Celtic Tiger and which are positioned in opposition to bourgeois lifestyles and the forces of law and order. The significance and appeal of these working-class and underclass masculinities to members of the Irish male audience is the key concern of this study.

The proliferation and popularity of gangsters and criminal males in recent Irish cinema raises a similar set of issues about contemporary masculinity, and there is a substantial degree of overlap between films that feature working-class masculinities and those that deal with crime and the criminal underworld. The latter category, which includes *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof*, *Headrush*, *Flick*, *Intermission*, *Saltwater*, *I Went Down*, *The General*, *Ordinary Decent Criminal*, *Vicious Circle* (for television), *Veronica Guerin*, *When the Sky Falls*, *Last Days in Dublin*, *The Actors*, *Dead Bodies*, *Spin the Bottle*, *Freeze Frame*, *The Halo Effect*, *Adam* and *Paul and Man About Dog*, are all action-driven narratives with male protagonists, in which women play peripheral roles. Like their counterparts in British and American cinema, the (anti)heroes of these films differ significantly from the conventional cinematic male hero in terms of their socio-economic status, their position in relation to mainstream society and their reappropriation of the conventional battle of good versus evil. This chapter demonstrates how they have emerged not only from a set of national concerns but also from a complex culmination of trans-national political, cultural and economic change over the past decade. It also illustrates that they operate at a highly intertextual level with other media images and that they employ a typically postmodern mode of address.

Thus, while disaffected or resistant masculinities are by no means the only or even the dominant masculine types in contemporary Irish cinema, they occupy a sufficiently prominent position to warrant further, more detailed analysis. Given that many of these male characters can be seen as composite or hybrid versions of the masculinities discussed in Chapter 2, they are analysed in the context of the relevant Irish, British and American literatures on masculinity in contemporary cinema. In the sections below, these character types and the (sub)genres from which they have originated are discussed in relation to national and global concerns and influences. This analysis and categorisation

of the films maps out the terms of reference for the subsequent audience-analysis strand of the study. As well as interrogating the genesis, nature and significance of the male character types discussed, this discussion also considers how the films discursively frame issues around masculinity and how their often ambiguous modes of address facilitate a broad range of responses to and readings of the masculinities on display. It thus sets out the core, reception-related questions concerning the films' interpellation of the audience, their deployment of irony and the potential identifications and pleasures which they offer to different male spectators.

3.4 From Working-Class to Underclass Masculinities

A key debate in discourses on the disempowerment of men has been about male unemployment and the 'feminisation' of labour. In the industrialised nations of the west, the changes wrought by the post-industrial era have effectively done away with unskilled workers and middle-management, areas that were almost exclusively dominated by men. In the United States, Susan Faludi (1999) has documented the demoralising effects of industry cutbacks and military downsizing on American men, many of whom have attributed these changes to women's liberation and compensated for their loss of breadwinning power by joining anti-feminist groups such as the Promise Keepers⁵. While such discourses of male crisis evade the structural causes of unemployment and job insecurity by shifting the focus onto gender, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge the centrality of work in the social construction of hegemonic masculinity and the fact that men, who often have thinner "networks of emotional support" than women (Katz et al. 2000 p25) and who have a more restricted range of accepted gendered behaviours at their disposal (Pollack 1999), have tended to suffer more from the emotional effects of unemployment. The research in Ireland also indicates that the most adverse effects of the decline in traditional male work are felt by men from lower socio-economic groups (Cleary et al. 2004 p53). Crisis in this sense, according to Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003 p23), refers to the fact that "key material resources used to forge masculinities are becoming scarce (Willis 2000)".

This theme has been explicitly addressed in British films such as *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off*. Although, unlike Britain and the United States, pre-1970s Ireland was a predominantly rural economy, and therefore lacked the long industrial traditions associated with British miners or steelworkers, a significant number of working-class Dublin male types emerged in the early to mid-1990s which bore striking similarities to Spicer's (2001) "Underclass Everyman", whom he describes as an eloquent testimony to Thatcherism. These memorable characters came almost exclusively from filmic adaptations of Roddy Doyle's novels, and included Jimmy and Bimbo in *The Van* (1996),

⁵ See <http://www.promisekeepers.org/>

the band members from *The Commitments* (1991) and Dessie in *The Snapper* (1993). Although the Irish films addressed the erosion of male confidence through unemployment, they were essentially uplifting tales of working-class camaraderie and resourcefulness overcoming hardship. In this sense, they had much in common with British films such as *Brassed Off* (1996), *Up 'n' Under* (1998) and *The Match* (1999), which Spicer (2001 p190) describes as "overtly sentimental, reviving an Ealingesque whimsy to deal with the problems of unemployment and the breakdown of communities." In this context, *Family* (1994), also written by Roddy Doyle, stands out as an exceptionally social-realist piece of television drama which, unlike the other films discussed here, presented a complex analysis of the causes and effects of unemployment, and was realistic about the limited possibility for transformation.

With the exception of *Family*, however, the influences of the British social-realist tradition, evident in First Wave films such as Joe Comerford's *Down the Corner* (1977) and *Withdrawal* (1982), have all but disappeared from contemporary Irish cinema. Although a proportionally vast number of the new films feature socially-marginalised men, these masculinities speak from a different discursive space and address a broader, more commercial audience than Comerford's and Black's earlier work did. The mundane experiences of working-class male youth in Dublin's inner city that are explored in *Down the Corner* contrast starkly with the high-octane, fast-cut action of 1990s films such as *Accelerator* and *Crush Proof*, whose protagonists' experiences are far from mundane. Most importantly, while previous explorations of working-class masculinity have focussed on the significance of work as a key identifier of masculinity and on the alienating and emasculating effects of unemployment that have been well documented in the sociological literature (Whelan, Hannan and Creighton 1991), recent cinematic treatments of working-class culture in Ireland paint a more ambiguous picture of male unemployment and exclusion. Like many of the British "underclass films" described by Monk (2000), films such as *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof* and *Last Days in Dublin* portray social exclusion not only as a social problem but also as an alternative subcultural or counter-cultural lifestyle to the cappuccino culture of the Celtic Tiger.

R.W. Connell (1995) contends that, while marginalised masculinities are excluded from most of the patriarchal dividends, they may benefit in the sense that they are used as exemplars of masculine authorisation. White working-class masculinity has long been a potent signifier of masculine virility and virtue in the western popular imaginary, from the iconic figure of The Marlboro Man to the way in which American journalists wrote about the firefighters and construction workers who responded to the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center⁶. What is becoming increasingly apparent, however, in recent male youth-oriented cinema in America, Britain and Ireland is a rejection of this traditional, working-class hero in favour of a new underclass antihero whose ostensible politics of anti-conformism is not so easy to decode. One of the most notable features of the new working-class masculinities of Irish cinema is their diminishing regard for the significance of work: in the absence of employment as an available signifier of masculine identity, they turn to marginalised or illicit activities such as twoccing⁷, joyriding, stealing horses, hare coursing, drug-taking, drug-dealing and drinking on the streets as a way of expressing their collective identity as men.

This trajectory from working-class hero to underclass (anti)hero is most evident in contemporary Irish films such as *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof*, *Last Days in Dublin*, *Adam and Paul*, *Man About Dog* and *Headrush*. With the exception of *Adam and Paul*, liberation from conventional employment appears to masculinise rather than emasculate these young men: like Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*, their rejection of consumer capitalism and involvement in dangerous or illegal activities serve as symbolic male rituals or rites of passage through which they achieve recognition and respect from their male peers. Given the often fatal outcomes of such rituals, these narratives appear to warn about the dangers of “men running wild” (Beynon 2002 p113), while simultaneously adopting a celebratory tone that suggests rebellion, liberation and political protest. As such, they

⁶ See Bruce Nussbaum, ‘Real Masters of the Universe’ in *Business Week*, 1st October 2001 (http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/01_40/b3751740.htm), accessed 12.12.05, and Verlyn Klinkenborg in *The New York Times Magazine*, cited in Freeman, J.B. ‘Working-Class Heroes’ in *The Nation*, 12th November 2001 (<http://www.thenation.com/doc/2001/11/12/freeman>), accessed 12.12.05.

⁷ ‘Twoccing’ refers to car-theft or ‘taking without owner’s consent’

reference a diverse and often conflicting range of discourses on marginalised masculinities that circulate in the public domain: the left-leaning social critiques of state institutions whose lack of intervention and support has both fostered and failed to address a cycle of poverty, crime and violence among young men; the fatalistic Social Darwinism of the Right, which posits the underclass as incapable of social mobility, and the biodeterminist discourses often associated with the (anti-feminist) men's movement, which claim that young men, in the absence of institutional discipline and masculine initiation by their male elders, will 'naturally' turn to more dangerous activities in a bid to achieve validation of their manhood. In Ireland, the recent announcement by the Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to introduce anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) has elicited harsh criticism from various groups and commentators, who view the measure as a means of scapegoating socially-excluded groups for the problems caused by social inequity⁸. Elsewhere, men's rights groups such as *The Manhood Project* in Britain directly attribute increasing levels of crime and delinquency to the lack of a distinctly masculine socialisation for boys, associated with the decline of the Scouts and the Armed Forces Cadet organisations, and call for the introduction of formal initiatives in education to ensure that young men are socially initiated into manhood.⁹ In Ireland, journalist John Waters has been to the fore in drawing public attention to society's negligence of boys' needs, claiming that the lack of paternal authority inherent in the feminising of boys' upbringing and education results in their 'natural' male aggression finding dangerous and anti-social outlets.¹⁰

Of the contemporary male-oriented films that feature men engaged in non-criminal employment, the working world is presented as dull and unrewarding. In *Intermission*, John and Oscar's job of stacking shelves in the local cash-and-carry is a drudgery that comes to an abrupt end for John when he concusses the store manager with a tin of peas. Not only does this earn him 15 minutes of fame among his co-workers, it also liberates him to pursue his joint mission of robbing the bank and winning back his girlfriend

⁸ See Fintan O'Toole, 'A cynical political gesture', *The Irish Times*, 14.06.05 and Joe Humphreys, 'Hypocrisy of McDowell's anti-social behaviour plan', *The Irish Times* 15.03.05.

⁹ See the Manhood Project (<http://www.ukmm.org.uk/camp/manhood.htm>), accessed 12.12.05.

¹⁰ See John Waters, 'Horrors of Feminised Education' in *The Irish Times*, 27th August 2001.

Deirdre from the bank manager. For both John and Oscar, who negotiate the territory between New Man and New Lad, giving up work is an essential part of achieving happiness. For bus driver Mick, the sole purpose of work is to finance his wife's domestic projects, such as renovating the kitchen and equipping the garden shed. He is not respected by his clientele or by his employers and is unfairly dismissed for an accident that he did not cause. While these characters are not socially marginalised in the same way as Lechiff, they become involved with him and thus temporarily enact forms of masculine protest in order to stake out lives and identities for themselves outside the *status quo*. As is the case in British films such as *Twin Town* and *Trainspotting*, aspirations to education and gainful employment are portrayed as predominantly female activities, whereas for young men work is underpaid, exploitative and degrading, succinctly summed up by Mick and John when they complain, "It's all shite man".

Headrush is something of an exception in this respect. Although T-Bag and Charlie's adventure in drugs-running is also played out as a dangerous and rebellious form of protest against social conformity, the film ultimately recuperates this into the competitive individualist logic of late capitalism. Like the protagonists of the American teen films, the hapless stoners of *Headrush* occupy a transitional, adolescent space in which certain transgressions are permissible. Although their foray into the criminal underworld is condemned as immoral and corrupt, it is also the seductive *raison d'être* of the film and functions as the rite of passage through which they accede to manhood. While overt borrowings from "gangster light" (Chibnall 2001) inform the film's narrative and aesthetic drive, it lacks the amorality that underpins many of the new British gangster films. Charlie and T-Bag's 'loser' status is thus a temporary phase at the end of which drugs are rejected in favour of enterprise. According to film critic Gerry McCarthy:

If this is youth rebellion, it wants to have things both ways: lampooning society's failures, but not being too serious; brandishing the perennial bogeymen of sex and drugs, but not really meaning to shock; aiming for artistic integrity while collaborating with the marketing machine; being just radical enough to reach an audience" (McCarthy 2004 p7).

The widespread popularity of Irish films which feature images of underclass masculinity suggests that they reach audiences from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Set in the context of a wider media culture in which such images proliferate, from rappers such as Eminem and 50 cent to television ads for Sony Playstation, it is reasonable to assume that this new repository of signifiers of hard masculinity appeals to both working-class and middle-class male audiences. Monk (2000) has suggested that the subversive, anti-authoritarian masculinities of the British underclass films perform different affective functions: as a source of re-empowerment and validation to those who feel genuinely dispossessed and marginalised, on the one hand, and as a reassurance of the hegemony of straight, white masculinity to those whose anxieties may have nothing to do with poverty, drugs or unemployment on the other. Monk's comment suggests that films featuring working-class or underclass characters may hold significantly different meanings and pleasures for different audiences, divided along the axis of class. The key question posed by the audience reception strand of this study is how working-class and middle-class men understand and identify with such images, and whether these masculinities function primarily as exemplars of masculine authorisation or as validations of particular working-class identities.

3.5 Marginalised and Socially-Excluded Men

One of the earliest Irish films to deal with socially marginalised characters was Cathal Black's second feature *Pigs* (1984), which provided alternative visions of masculinity, including gay, black and mentally ill, to the hegemony of the wholesome, white Catholic (McCabe 1991). Similarly, in *Reefer and the Model* (1987) Joe Comerford sought to deconstruct the invisible 'naturalness' of traditional masculinity by creating male characters who were troubled, insecure and politically and sexually ambiguous, thus challenging normative concepts of Irish masculine identity. Indeed, most of Comerford's work has been preoccupied with outsiders (*Traveller*, *High Boot Benny*), and his earlier studies of urban alienation, such as *Withdrawal* (1982) and *Down the Corner* (1977), provided a powerful social critique of the creation of a new underclass in Irish society. These films emerged during a period in Ireland that was marked by economic depression and emigration, and filmmakers such as Comerford and Black were unequivocally critical of the State's refusal to acknowledge homelessness, drug addiction and poverty as problems of the new Ireland.

In spite of the recent economic upswing in Ireland, a substantial body of research indicates a widening of the gap between rich and poor (O'Hearn 1998, Cantillon et al. 2001, Kirby 2002). According to Cleary et al. (2004), social inequality, unemployment, the decline of organised religion, the re-conceptualisation of community and the family and rising levels of crime have had a particularly negative impact on young, working-class men. Given this situation, it is unsurprising that images of socially excluded men have become increasingly visible in recent Irish cinema. However, the new films featuring unemployed and socially-excluded masculinities, which include *Last Days in Dublin*, *Crush Proof*, *Accelerator*, *Intermission*, *Headrush*, *Spin the Bottle*, *Adam and Paul* and *Man About Dog*, represent a significant departure from the social-realist tradition that influenced Joe Comerford's work. This is most evident in their eschewal of overt political comment and context, coupled with many of the stylistic devices cited by Chibnall (2001) in his definition of postmodern British gangster films (or "gangster light"). While the films are clearly set in recognisable Dublin locations, they do not

engage with the specific realities of these communities, using them instead as metonyms for social disadvantage generally. This tendency toward lack of social and historical context, combined with the films' discursive configuration of social exclusion as both social problem and seductive protest lifestyle facilitates a high degree of ideological polysemy. In films such as *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof* and *Last Days in Dublin*, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the characters' marginalised status functions as a (class-based) critique of consumer capitalism or as a (gender-based) marker of resistance to social change, or both. According to Claire Monk (2000), the plethora of British films in the 1990s that featured socially-excluded males were less concerned with the problem of social exclusion than they were with selling subversive or subcultural images of men to a "post-political male audience" (ibid.).

In Ireland, the findings of a recently published report entitled *Young Men on the Margins* (Cleary et al. 2004) indicate that, even though there is widespread change in masculine roles, the majority of men appear to be adapting to these changes. However, the report notes that for young, working-class men, these changes are considerably more difficult, given that it is this socio-economic grouping which has been most adversely affected by Ireland's recent social and economic transformations. According to the authors, low levels of education and income as well as problems in family life mean that these men are often psychologically ill-equipped to embrace change. Homeless men are particularly at risk of psychological as well as social marginalisation, and are therefore more prone to suicide and drug abuse. The report also indicates that there is evidence "of the increasing isolation and alienation of a particular grouping of men who are in this situation due to a combination of structural, familial and personal factors" (Cleary et al. p16). Ruth Barton (2004) reads the recent preoccupation with social exclusion in the narratives of the 1990s as critical responses to an increasingly prosperous yet decreasingly diverse or tolerant society. She contends that, "A slew of such works, *Crush Proof*, *Accelerator*, *Disco Pigs*, *On the Edge* have explored issues of youth and disaffection in the context of a society that is unable to deal with social disadvantage or accommodate non-conformity" (Barton 2004 p186). Although many of the films under analysis here provide a corrective of sorts to the brash, upbeat hedonism of Celtic Tiger Ireland, their complex mobilisation of class

and gender reflects a wider set of discourses on modern masculinity that is not considered in Barton's analysis. While she discusses these films in the context of (gender-unspecific) disaffected youth and social exclusion, this study considers social exclusion and disaffection to be specifically gendered tropes in recent Irish cinema.

Rather than lamenting the loss of work or exploring the emasculating effects of unemployment on the male psyche in a society which still equates masculinity with breadwinning, the male-oriented Irish films which have emerged over the past five years appear to be (re)negotiating this relationship between work and masculinity. While much of the research stresses the emasculating effect of unemployment (Marsden and Duff 1975, McKee and Bell 1986), other work points to the reconfiguration of new modes of masculinity among unemployed, working-class men. For example, Campbell (1993) argues that the men affected frequently re-present their powerlessness as a threat, by exaggerating elements of hegemonic masculinity. According to Connell (1995), in the absence of a gendered claim to power, unemployed men frequently take up "protest masculinities" as a way of reclaiming male power. This often takes the form of drinking, violence and other anti-social or disruptive behaviour. The performance of a "tense, freaky façade" described by Connell (1995 p111) and the "frenzied and showy" nature of this protest is especially evident in Irish films such as *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof* and *Last Days in Dublin*. However, the extent to which "protest masculinities" are understood as politically reactionary or progressive, depends to a large extent on whether they are considered from a primarily gender-based or class-based perspective. Although "protest masculinity" is understood as anti-hegemonic by the individuals and groups who perform it, Campbell contends that such behaviour effectively reinforces hegemonic masculinity by replicating dominant gender codes (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2003 p39). This analysis explores the extent to which the new masculinities in Irish cinema can be understood as "protest masculinities", and to what extent they articulate with the 'men-behaving-badly' discourses of New Laddism. As the empirical audience research indicates, performances of male aggression and bravado can offer significantly different pleasures to unemployed, working-class men than they do to middle-class men in stable employment.

Valerie Walkerdine, whose (1986) study of a working-class family watching *Rocky* is described in detail in Chapter 4, challenges the liberal anti-sexist discourse which views male violence and fighting as displays of machismo in favour of a more sympathetic, class-based reading, whereby fighting is understood both as an expression of oppression and of the desire to overcome it: "Fighting is a key term in a discourse of powerlessness, of a constant struggle not to sink, to get rights, not to be pushed out" (Walkerdine 1986 p182). Alternative means of reclaiming masculine valorisation through the body are evident in the contemporary culture of bodybuilding. In a study of young unemployed men from the West Midlands in England, Haywood and Mac an Ghail (1997c) found that, although unable to work with their bodies, their respondents could validate their masculinities by working on their bodies:

What is important is that by simply working on the body, young unemployed men (in our own study) had the potential to gain social status without working in the labour market (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2003 p40).

The sociological research suggests therefore that the involvement of Irish cinema's (anti)heroes in illicit activities such as drug-dealing, theft, substance abuse, joy-riding and other 'anti-social' behaviours can be understood as articulating a sense of alienation felt by urban working-class youth who have few resources beyond physical strength and the body with which to reclaim a sense of masculine power.

Of the abovementioned films, *Last Days in Dublin*, *Crush Proof* and *Accelerator* best exemplify the ideological ambiguities outlined above. Like *Headrush* and *Intermission*, which have both been compared to *Trainspotting* in press reviews, these exhibit precisely the kind of polysemy which, Monk (2000) argues, underpins British youth films such as *Trainspotting*, *Twin Town* and *Shopping*, in their capacity to be read as critiques of class oppression as well as vehicles for the commodification of male social exclusion. Of the three, *Accelerator* was by far the most popular, showing on 15 screens in its opening week and grossing 177, 845 Euros in the Republic of Ireland. *Last Days in Dublin* played on 2 screens for 1 week and grossed 10,296 Euros, while *Crush Proof* played on 4 screens for 2 weeks and grossed 10,449 Euros. It is important to note, however, that

while box office figures are a useful indication of the popularity of these films, they do not account for video/DVD rental and sales. The findings of the reception strand of this study suggest that *Accelerator* and *Crush Proof* have a cult video audience among young, working-class men, reflecting a shift away from theatrical viewing toward collective video/DVD viewing in domestic contexts, as has been documented by Spicer (2001), Creeber (2002) and Chibnall (2001).

Accelerator addresses the highly topical issue of joy-riding in Ireland from the perspective of two groups of disaffected teenagers from North and South of the border. In brief, a dispute between Belfast car thief Stuart and Dublin joyrider Gavin Kelty results in a car race from Belfast to Dublin, involving six stolen cars, with disastrous consequences. In recent years, a significant number of road safety campaigns in Ireland have been targeted specifically at young men, who account for the vast majority of road accidents in this country. According to Harry Ferguson, "masculinity in Ireland is characterised by risk taking, especially for younger men (in terms of smoking, alcohol and drug taking, unsafe sexual practices, road accidents, lack of awareness of risk)" (Ferguson 2003 p18), while Deyner (1998) reports that boys aged 5-18 are twice as likely to attend Accident and Emergency services. However, while the manifest content of the film can be understood as a timely warning about the dangers of reckless driving and excessive drinking and drug-taking by young males, its stylistic overtures evoke earlier explorations of disaffected youth culture such as *Trainspotting* and *La Haine*, both of which arguably romanticise their characters' marginalised states by using good-looking, well-known actors, and through highly stylised cinematography, editing and music.

This apparent inconsistency between the upbeat, almost celebratory exploration of 'twoccing' and joyriding as an urban subculture and the darker, more socially-conscious message delivered by the film's narrative closure renders its mode of address difficult to determine. Like *Trainspotting*, whose witty, intelligent and incongruously articulate voiceover conceals the atrophy of real-life heroin addiction, much of *Accelerator's* ambiguity stems from an ideological clash between the narrative logic of the film and the way in which its central tragedy is actually translated into sounds and images. According

to Irish film critic Harvey O'Brien (2000), it is "propelled by rapid editing, a pulse-pounding techno score and more fast and slo-mo than Guy Ritchie could shake a stick at". While reviewer Rachel Andrews (2000 p59) commented that, "Joyriding is not a sexy topic, dealing as it does with bored and disaffected teenagers looking for ways to get their fix", she went on to praise the film's "thumping soundtrack throughout" which adds "strength to a fast-paced film that moves at top gear" (ibid.). It is precisely this ideological contradiction between the film's form and content that raises the most interesting question about its reception, namely whether it is understood as critique of social alienation or modish subculture, or both. The portrayal of crime and violence, for example, as tragic but inevitable consequences of male social exclusion, rather than historically and culturally constructed behaviours that might be transformed in a more egalitarian class or gender order, arguably runs the risk of essentialising working-class masculinity as simultaneously appealing and pathological. Viewed in terms of their opposition to bourgeois values and the law and authority, *Accelerator's* characters can be understood as anti-hegemonic, yet to the extent that they valorise the codes of dominant masculinity, they can also be interpreted as pro-social. According to Monk (2000), this ambiguity arises by virtue of the fact that many contemporary male-oriented films address men and the male audience as a social problem, a political interest group *and* a consumer market, often simultaneously within the same film. Whether *Accelerator's* protagonists are read as "protest masculinities", urban heroes or social deviants thus raises important questions about spectatorship, which are best addressed in the context of qualitative audience research. Precisely how the film's various class-based and gender-based constellations are understood by different audiences is explored in detail in the empirical strand of this study.

Following a remarkably similar narrative trajectory to that of *Accelerator*, Paul Tickell's *Crush Proof* (1999) tells the story of the last of Dublin's 'urban cowboys'. These are groups of young men who keep and ride horses in the large green areas of the city's high-rise flats and council estates, mostly on Dublin's northside. *Crush Proof* is strikingly similar to *Accelerator* in its treatment of urban alienation as both social problem and resistant subculture, and in its simultaneous problematisation and romanticisation of

marginalised male youth. The film begins when “charismatic sociopath”¹¹ Neal is released from prison and hooks up with his old friends from the ‘pony club’. Soon they are in trouble again with the law and are pursued by a creepy, obsessive Guard with a personal vendetta against Neal. Scenes of violence are counterpointed with fast-paced music and flashback intercuts, culminating in a cop-chase scene evocative of *Trainspotting*. Cowboy images are also fetishised to connote a hard, tragic beauty, and frequent allusions to ancient Irish warriors are used to suggest the boys' sense of connection with a primal masculine identity. However, whether this symbolism is to be read literally, critically or ironically is left open, so that *Crush Proof* can be understood as a film which problematises male youth and a film *about* the problematisation of male youth, as well as a more straightforward celebration of hard masculinity.

The attitudes, good looks and charisma of the characters, combined with the editing, soundtrack and immersion of the viewer in these boys' world, all work to interpellate the audience to identify or sympathise with their plight. However, these characters also reveal deeply ambivalent attitudes towards women. Neal's mother is a lesbian who has rejected him, the mother of his child will not allow him access and his half sister, whom he rapes at a drunken rave, is portrayed as dangerous and deviant. At the end of the film, she attacks the men physically, leaving them lying injured and concussed on the bog. The film's closing line "Fuckin' birds" is also deeply ambiguous. Thus, although the film elicits sympathy for their plight, it also suggests a certain romanticised fatalism by refusing to contextualise their situation or to offer any kind of explanation as to how it came about. Conversations between the boys and between Neal and his drunken father all allude to a cycle of unemployment, crime and violence among working class males that simply cannot be broken. As Neal says, "There's nothing waiting for you when you grow up, just the dole, then a hole for your knob, then another one in the nut and then another fucking hole in the ground for your corpse" to which his friend replies, "So until the inevitable, smashing and shagging". This resigned fatalism, which characterises not only

¹¹ See the plot summary for *Crush Proof* on Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0177668/plotsummary>), accessed 21.12.05.

the protagonists' attitudes but also appears to underpin the authorial voice of the film, is explicitly reinforced in the poetic quote used to close the film:

“Right now I'm cursed and I hate my country, so the best bet is to get pissed and fall asleep on the beach. Arthur Rimbaud, 1873.”¹²

A similar exploration of male, social exclusion and disaffection underpins Lance Daly's *Last Days in Dublin*, in which anti-hero Monster dreams of escaping the seedy, yet elegantly filmed, black-and-white Dublin underworld to travel to glitzy cities such as New York and Paris, which are shot in hand-held, grainy colour video. In a recent review of the film, critic Donald Clarke drew attention to the recurrence of social marginalisation as a trope in recent youth-oriented, male-directed films:

As is the case with most Irish scripts written by men under 30, the story concerns the picaresque adventures of a collection of drunken layabouts, each of whom answers to a jovial nickname (Hanno, Toenail, Lanky and, inevitably, Anto) (Clarke 2002 p8).

Monster and his comrades inhabit a world of gangsters, gamblers, money-lenders and drug-pushers from which there is, apparently, no escape. Robbed, beaten and narrowly escaping sexual abuse, he exhibits elements of the masochistic masculinities analysed by Savran as well as the nihilistic, "fucked by fate" attitudes described by Sconce (2002). As is the case with many of the other Irish films under analysis, the extent to which *Last Days in Dublin* presents male social exclusion as a consequence of modernity, as a form of male disaffection to which similarly disaffected (male) viewers can relate or as a subcultural identity, which accommodates fantasies of masculine empowerment through its tropes of downward mobility, is difficult to determine. Although the film's contemporary score, stylish cinematography and use of montage editing might be seen as inconsistent with its theme, its ironic tone helps to close this gap. According to Harvey O'Brien (2003), "Lance Daly's no-budget feature benefits from an ironic sense of humour about itself which helps to smooth over the lack of niceties." However, the mock sincerity of the voiceover, a parody of the colonial adventurer's travelogue, can be understood both as ironicising and romanticising the protagonist's alienated status

¹² The quote is paraphrased from a translation of Rimbaud's cycle of prose poems entitled *A Season in Hell*, which he wrote at the age of 19. The original text in French reads, "Maintenant, je suis maudit, j'ai horreur de la patrie. Le meilleur, c'est un sommeil bien ivre, sur la grève."

("Monster's log: day 67. Today we journeyed west by locomotive") by simultaneously sending him up as a hopeless dreamer as well as portraying him as an authentic, modern-day urban adventurer.

Like the protagonists of the British underclass films, *Monster* is both a victim of circumstance and a creator of his own destiny. By rejecting conventional work, he succeeds in carving out a new identity based on drinking, betting and involvement in various scams in exclusively homosocial spaces. The scenes in which he engages in drinking binges with his homeless acquaintances, in particular, capture a sense of desperation and hopelessness, yet simultaneously showcase the appeal of reckless abandon and irresponsibility. This vision of masculinity embodies the key elements of the mythopoetic concept of masculinity as "defined by its perpetual oedipal oscillations between rebellion, submission, and emotional pain" (Pfeil 1995 p174). Raised by an ineffectual father, *Monster* turns to his grandfather for comfort and advice, yet his efforts to take control of his life are constantly thwarted by forces both beyond and within his control. He is thus constructed as a victim of the system as well as an agent of resistance against the system. Audience sympathy for his plight is most poignantly evoked in the film's closing scenes, in which he continues to be pursued by the Baroness's henchmen after his grandfather dies. In the end, the sound of a plane taking off suggests that his travel plans will never materialise, and *Monster* returns to where he started: a likeable loser whose fate is sealed in a cycle of poverty, unemployment and unfulfilled dreams.

Lenny Abrahamson's *Adam and Paul*, the most recent Irish feature film to deal with male social exclusion, represents a significant departure from films such as *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof* and *Last Days in Dublin* in the sense that its protagonists' experience of drug abuse and marginalisation is a predominantly emasculating one. The working-class male body is a site of anxiety and struggle in this film (Walkerdine 1986 p182), and there are none of the high-octane sequences common to the other films, which signal moments of empowerment or pleasure. In terms of style and pace, *Adam and Paul* evades the fast-cutting and thumping soundtrack of *Accelerator* and *Crush Proof* in favour of long shots, realistically inane dialogue and an Eastern European instrumental soundtrack. While it is

not an overt critique of modern Ireland's failure to deal with its social problems, focussing instead on the aimless, soul-destroying and, at times, comic realities experienced by individual drug users, this critique is nonetheless implicit. Unlike *Trainspotting* or *Twin Town*, *Adam and Paul* does not present its protagonists as members of an all-male subculture who have consciously decided not to 'choose life', but rather as victims of a corrupt drug culture over which they have neither control nor understanding. However, it is feasible to suggest that its representation of marginality and drug addiction may offer significantly different pleasures to those who have experience of such marginalisation and those who do not.

3.6 Criminal and Delinquent Masculinities

Although, according to Beynon (2002 p128), the news media frequently "expresses a fear of a rampant, untamed masculinity, of men running wild", criminal and delinquent masculinities have become increasingly visible in recent Irish films including *I Went Down*, *Flick*, *Saltwater*, *The Halo Effect*, *Dead Bodies*, *Intermission*, *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof*, *Headrush*, *The Actors*, *Freeze Frame* and *Man About Dog*. While the increase in gangland murders and robberies in Ireland in recent years has sparked public fears about crime rates and policing, gangsters and criminals have come to achieve iconic status in contemporary Irish cinema and in the entertainment media generally. Real figures such as Martin Cahill and John Gilligan have been the subject of several films (*The General*, *Ordinary Decent Criminal*, *Vicious Circle*, *When the Sky Falls*, *Veronica Guerin*), echoing British cinema's fascination with the Kray twins and Glaswegian gangster Jimmy Boyle in films such as *The Krays* (1990) and *The Debt Collector* (1999). Elements of the new British gangster cycle and of Tarantino's work are also strongly evident in fictional films such as *Headrush*, *Man About Dog*, *Last Days in Dublin* and *The Actors*.

Given the absence of employment as a defining feature of working-class masculinity, the increase in gangland crime in Ireland and the widespread revival of the gangster genre and iconography in the global media, it is unsurprising that criminality has become a central trope of contemporary Irish cinema. According to Tudor (1974), the popularity of earlier gangster cycles, such as the American classics of the 1930s and the British gangland films of the 1960s, was attributable to their portrayal of 'real' gangster activities which dominated the news headlines at the time. Similarly, Lance Pettitt (2004) argues that the crime/gangster genre has been appropriated in contemporary Irish cinema to tell stories about crime in Ireland in the 1990s:

The 1990s indigenous productions strove to capture the look, sounds and emotional landscape of people's experience of the organised crime world as it had been mediated through television and the press, whilst also recalling earlier cinematic images of the Irish and other ethnic gangsters. They did so through 'borrowed' generic conventions that had already been thoroughly indigenised, *pace* Jameson, at the margins of postmodernity (Pettitt 2004 p27).

Pettitt argues that this genre has been transposed or 'indigenised' in order to articulate nationally-specific concerns:

Just as the first major sound cycle of 'classical' Hollywood gangster films was derived from newspaper coverage, pulp fiction and theatrical sources in the 1920s, the Cahill films amplified and re-mediated an already existing 'mythic' figure generated by the Irish print and broadcast news media (ibid. p25-26).

These analyses differ considerably from those of Chibnall (2001) and Leigh (2000), who maintain that the (postmodern) reappropriation of the gangster genre in British cinema (*Lock Stock, Snatch, Fast Food, Circus*) has little to do with the realities of modern-day crime in Britain and more to do with the perceived threats of multiculturalism, political correctness and the gains of feminism. According to Chibnall and Murphy, the popularity of gangster iconography in cinema is part of a wider cultural phenomenon, whereby certain images of hypermasculinity have become popular on account of the moral and social certainties that they are assumed to symbolise:

When we assemble the evidence from a range of media, it points pretty unerringly to a preoccupation with nostalgic representations of a kind of masculine essentialism - a time and a setting in which men knew how to perform masculinity, the rules of male association were clear, and the penalties for their infraction were draconian (Chibnall and Murphy 1999 p2).

This study examines the films belonging to the Irish crime (sub)genre not only in the context of national crime but also in relation to the wider social changes described by Chibnall. In addition to the films discussed by Pettitt, which document real events, a significant number of other Irish films mobilise gangster-related themes, narratives and iconography and/or feature male characters and storylines centered around crime or the criminal underworld. These films exhibit many of the features of "gangster light" described by Chibnall, and are therefore considered to be equally subject to the type of "indigenisation" described by Pettitt.

Many of the recent debates on masculinity in Britain, Ireland and the United States have been particularly concerned with male violence, aggression and involvement in crime. According to Jeff Hearn (1998), debates about troubled masculinities inevitably involve a

discussion of crime, while Gavan Titley (2003 p1) contends that, "it would seem as if young men and violence are rarely out of a certain kind of awareness." In Ireland, Devlin's (2000) findings support the argument that young men, in particular male working-class youth, are consistently portrayed as a social problem, demonstrating that in newspaper reporting, the term "youth" is almost always connected with the categories "male" and "criminal". This echoes Katz et al.'s (2000 p6) claim that, in Britain, "In public images, the message is 'boys are bad news'...News headlines paint a picture of violence, aggression or stupidity" and Pollack's (1999) assertion that, in the United States, contemporary discourses posit male youth as "toxic". While these debates tend to focus on socially excluded men, the recent Brian Murphy case in Ireland has raised awareness of the fact that violent crime traverses class boundaries and has re-focused public attention on masculinity as the key variable in the debate¹³. Responding to the Brian Murphy case, Irish psychologist Maureen Gaffney (2004 p3) contends that increasing levels of violence and suicide among young middle-class males are attributable to the lack of civilising influences in their lives: as society becomes more affluent and individualistic, she argues, the loosening of societal, familial and religious constraints on young men results in their 'natural' aggression going unchecked.

While most sociologists and (pro)feminist theorists of gender perceive male violence and criminality as socially learned behaviours that are exacerbated by social exclusion, many masculinist men's groups and some post/anti-feminist theorists, such as Christina Hoff-Somers, contend that young men are being unduly problematised and pathologised by feminism as anti-social, deviant and criminal. In the United States, Mariani (1996) draws attention to the paradoxical nature of the latter claim. Far from discrediting men and male power, Mariani sees the pathologising of male criminality and anti-social behaviour as part of a conservative political agenda, which reinforces patriarchal authority by advocating tougher policing, longer sentences and more severe punishment and which abnegates governments of social responsibility for the damage caused by inequitable systems of gender and class oppression, since the problem is presented as one of biology.

¹³ In 2000, Brian Murphy was beaten to death outside a nightclub in the prosperous suburb of Dublin 4. His four companions were charged with his death.

In a society in which recent social developments have been perceived as a threat to the hegemony of white, bourgeois, heterosexual masculinity, she contends that biobehaviouralism and biocriminology serve to secure the patriarchal *status-quo* and to abnegate both the state and parents of responsibility for the social formation of young men.

According to McCullagh (1996), there has been a considerable increase in crime in Ireland over the last three decades. However, he rejects the argument that the increase in crime is due to the undermining of traditional systems of control, suggesting instead that social change has increased the opportunities for criminal activity as well as the number of potential offenders. O'Mahony (1997) has found that crime is concentrated among men from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who have low levels of education and vocational training. According to the authors of *Young Men on the Margins*:

The reason working-class men are more likely to become involved in crime may be related to the economic marginalisation of some working-class men resulting from labour market changes. In this perspective, crime is a form of adaptation to marginalisation as well as an attempt to overcome it (Cleary et al. 2004 p43).

Given increasing crime levels among socially-marginalised men in Ireland, it is unsurprising, as Pettitt suggests, that the issue has been explored through the medium of cinema. With the exception of *The Courier* (1988) which, according to Pettitt (1999 p62), "attempted unsuccessfully to transplant the contemporary crime movie genre to 'modern' Dublin", there were no examples of the crime, thriller or gangster genre prior to the 1990s. This phenomenon thus clearly reflects a set of changing social realities in modern Ireland, whereby robberies, gangland shootings and drug seizures are a regular feature in the news media. However, although the recent preoccupation with criminal themes clearly articulates these aspects of the new Ireland, the Irish crime / gangster films must also be considered in the context of wider public debates on masculinity, as well as in relation to the widespread popularity of criminal masculinities in the global entertainment media.

Pettitt identifies five films in his discussion of the gangster genre in Irish cinema. However, only those which deal with the life of gangland criminal Martin Cahill (*The*

General, *Ordinary Decent Criminal* and *Vicious Circle*) invite the spectator to view events from the perspective of the gangsters. *Veronica Guerin* and *When the Sky Falls*, on the other hand, position the spectator in sympathy with Veronica Guerin's crime-fighting character, and therefore cannot be classed as gangster films in the strict sense of films which focus on the perpetrators of organised, violent crime (Smith 2004). In this sense, they have more in common with the crime serials of British television, although *When the Sky Falls* also draws on the British crime film tradition, to which director John McKenzie's own *The Long Good Friday* (1980) is a significant contribution (Pettitt 2004 p35). In addition to these films, however, are a number of recent Irish films, including *Flick*, *Saltwater*, *Dead Bodies*, *Intermission*, *Headrush*, *The Actors* and *Freeze Frame*, which draw heavily on the features of British "gangster light". While these films reappropriate stylistic elements of the British films, they tend to evade the moral seriousness of the classic gangster genre and strongly disavow the homoerotic in favour of the homosocial. As is the case with the British films described by Monk (1999 p173), women are marginalised in most of these films, "in which male rituals, hierarchies and rivalries often seem to take precedence over gangland's ostensible business of illegal money-making." Similarly, the Irish films appropriate the more superficial elements of the gangster genre, while often (self)consciously distinguishing themselves from their progenitors. In *The General*, when one of Martin Cahill's henchmen attempts to embrace him, he responds by saying, "We're not fucking Eye-talians", thus "simultaneously referencing and disavowing the classic ethnic screen gangster" (Pettitt 2004 p33).

While these features suggest a regressive or reactionary politics of gender, the trope of criminality as a means of critiquing capitalism renders the gangster film less ideologically clear-cut. According to Pettitt (2004 p25-26), "The politics of popular representation demonstrate the capacity for gangster films to appropriate and rehearse neo-conservative ideologies as well as their potential to offer more searching critiques of crime and its causes." Pettitt argues that the gangster embodies the ideological position of the populist/individual, who opposes both the liberal/humanist ideology of the middle classes and the ideology of the authority/state, yet retains strong elements of consumerism:

Existing at the margins of the working class and an underclass, it is ruthlessly acquisitive of material wealth and displays status symbols that

are otherwise earned 'legitimately' or achieved through 'time served'...The populist/individual embodies on screen in the 'gangster hero' who 'speaks, if contradictorily, for the status quo, for its buried underside as well as its affirmative goals' (Gledhill in Cook 1999:177) (Pettitt 2004 p27).

Thus, while the genre's valorisation of individual values above the Law of the State and democracy facilitates (the illusion of) a subcultural politics of resistance, its "alternative ethic of clan/extended family loyalty" (ibid), based on a homosocial and patriarchal gender order, appeals to a conservative gender-political position. In *The General*, this transgression of the *status quo* and simultaneous consolidation of patriarchal power is partly articulated through Martin Cahill's (re)negotiation of sexual boundaries, whereby he is portrayed as embodying the hypermasculine sexuality of the archetypal gangster, played out through his *menage-à-trois* arrangement with his wife and her sister.

The contemporary gangster film might thus be understood as appealing to a consumerist, post-political (male) audience in need of conservative values with regard to gender but simultaneously seeking a sense of subcultural or anti-authoritarian identification which positions them in opposition to the conventional male responsibilities of work, family and relationships. Collins (1993) argues that cinematic "genericity" or the appropriation of genres from their original context to a new one, tends to produce films that exhibit the characteristics of either "eclectic irony" or "new sincerity" (Collins 1993 cited in Pettitt 2004 p26) that co-exist in postmodern popular culture. While new sincerity attempts to recreate a mythical nostalgia, "a cinematic 'pure' past in the face of anxieties about social miscegenation and cultural multiculturalism" (ibid.), eclectic irony refers to the explicit self-referencing of narrative and stylistic codes and conventions as well as the conditions of production. This dovetails significantly with Chibnall's (2001) distinction between "gangster heavy", which he describes as a search for "unvarnished authenticity", and "gangster light", which he claims is characterised by distancing, irony, self-conscious intertextual borrowings and an awareness of the artifice of film-making. According to Pettitt, *The General* and *Veronica Guerin* exemplify "new sincerity", while *Ordinary Decent Criminal* embodies the features of "eclectic irony".

In recent years, the appropriation of the gangster genre in an Irish context has become increasingly characterised by “eclectic irony” or “gangster light”. This is particularly evident in films such as *I Went Down*, *The Actors*, *Intermission*, *Headrush*, *The Halo Effect* and *Man About Dog*. The latter, in particular, is highly evocative of the themes and stylistic devices that underpin Ritchie's *Snatch* and *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*. Thus, although these films feature characters that are recognisable as Irish, their commercial success must also be understood in the context of a wider preoccupation with the crime/gangster genre and criminal masculinities in the western entertainment media. As Pettitt (2004 p25) comments in relation to the Cahill and Guerin films, "These films were all released at a time when Irish cinema, television and video audiences were highly culturally competent to enjoy the axial pleasures of gangster films and British television crime thrillers." With the exception of *The General*, which Pettitt claims is underpinned by a bio-pic tragic structure, echoing Chibnall's analysis of “gangster heavy” as (Sheakespearean / Jacobean) tragedy, most of the Irish films lack the “new sincerity” described by Collins. Instead, they resituate the gangster genre in an Irish context, often to comic effect, borrowing heavily from both “gangster heavy” and “gangster light” sources. In many of these films (*I Went Down*, *Saltwater*, *Intermission*, *The Actors*, *Headrush* and *Man About Dog*), improbable hard men become seduced into the criminal underworld, whereby much of the humour derives precisely from their flirtation with real danger. Like the characters in Guy Ritchie's *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, which carried the tagline “A Disgrace to Criminals Everywhere”, these hapless and often desperate “losers” are hybrid composites of the conventional British “wide boy” or spiv (Spicer 2001), the underclass (anti)hero and the adolescent dude of the teen comedy. Meanwhile, in films such as *Flick*, *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof*, *The General*, *Ordinary Decent Criminal*, *Dead Bodies* and *Freeze Frame*, involvement in crime is played out in more serious terms, and affords the protagonists the kind of street credibility more readily associated with “new sincerity” or “gangster heavy”.

Intermission is a particularly interesting film in this regard, not only on account of its transposition of British and American generic conventions and characters into an Irish context but also because of the diverse range of masculine identities and discourses to

which it makes reference. Irish Film critic Michael Dwyer explicitly acknowledges the film's continuities with American "smart film" (Sconce 2002) and British underclass cinema in a recent review of the film:

Imagine a multi-charactered narrative odyssey such as *Magnolia*, shot through with the visceral energy of *Trainspotting* and laced with rich, dark Dublin humour, and you begin to catch the essence of *Intermission*, the sharpest, most entertaining Irish movie in years (Dwyer 2003 p2).

Intermission differs from other films in the Irish 'crime cycle' by virtue of its self-referentiality and confident re-appropriation of smart film's narrative techniques, most notably the presence of multiple characters and randomly interconnected subplots (Sconce 2002). Thus, although a botched bank robbery is at the centre of the film's narrative action, and the antagonistic relationship between repeat offender Lehiff and Detective Lynch is a key sub-plot, the film deals with an eclectic range of masculine identities and discourses, which can be read as a study of competing masculinities in modern Ireland. Remnants of the tyrannous patriarch, embodied in the characters of Detective Lynch and the supermarket manager, contrast with filmmaker Ben's portrayal as middle-class, thirty-something "new man as narcissist" (Beynon 2002), Sam as middle-aged married man in crisis and Colin Farrell as unreconstructed New Lad. Significantly, these types are treated primarily as comic caricatures, who do not change, evolve or achieve emotional fulfillment throughout the narrative. By comparison, the characters of John and Oscar, which negotiate the territory between New Lad and Beynon's (2002) "new man as nurturer", finally opting for the latter, are treated with more subtlety and complexity: their small but hugely significant emotional trajectories are developed with a social-realist attention to the subtler details of human transformation. It is this multiplicity of masculinities, coupled with the film's use of irony, which renders it highly polysemic. Although the Lehiff (Colin Farrell) character can be read as a tragic repeat offender whose inability to break the cycle of crime and violence in which he is trapped leads to his eventual downfall, he can also be interpreted as the film's hero, as is supported by the empirical findings documented in Chapters 6 and 7.

The film's treatment of violence against women is also a key feature of the empirical audience study. Lehiff's attack on the café cashier in the opening scene, his punching Deirdre in the face when he holds her hostage, and Sally's history of being bound, gagged and defecated on by her previous boyfriend are scenes that have evoked considerable commentary in reviews, on internet message boards and among audiences. According to Maureen Buggy (2003 p34), "Colin Farrell's star quality comes fluttering out at you in the first scene, where he talks a sales assistant gooey-eyed only to smack her in the face and grab her takings." Noleen's violence toward Sam, on the other hand, is played out in purely comic terms, although whether this is intended to trivialise or highlight the significance of female violence is open to diverse interpretations. While there is sufficient violence, action and celebration of hardcore, working-class masculinities to qualify *Intermission* as a youth-oriented tale of male (mis)adventure such as *Trainspotting* or *Twin Town*, it is also a much more self-conscious exploration of the paradoxes and inconsistencies that underpin contemporary performances of masculinity. The juxtaposition of the brash, parodic machismo of Lynch and the supermarket manager with moments of surprising tenderness, such as Mick's paeon to true love as himself, John and Lehiff prepare to rob the bank, calls attention to the conflicts that men experience in attempting to reconcile what is socially expected of them with how they really feel. Only John and Oscar achieve happiness through their liberation from the emotional and sexual constraints imposed by patriarchal norms. Oscar gives up on casual sex as means of curing his inability to masturbate, suggestive of both sexual and emotional impotence, and acknowledges his desire for a loving and meaningful relationship with Sally. Similarly, John finally overcomes his emotional autism and finds the courage to tell Deirdre that he wants her back for good.

Intermission can thus be understood as a complex, self-referential and frequently ironic exploration of diverse masculinities in crisis. In spite of its slick, stylish cinematography, the film frequently draws comic attention to Irish men posing as gangsters and bankrobbers, explicitly acknowledging the performative nature of stereotypical male roles. Moreover, the film-within-a-film device hints at the constructed nature of the filmic image, while filmmaker Ben's obsession with the underworld of Dublin crime lampoons

the middle-class male's fascination with criminal and underclass masculinities. Both Lynch and the supermarket manager perform parodies of hypermasculinity, supporting Maureen Buggy's (2003 p34) claim that the film draws attention to its own arch commentary: "You can't help feeling that you are meant to be aware of the film's unreality, that these are actors playing out a script and that you the audience should know that this is just a movie." Masculinity as performance is also made explicit when Lynch prepares to fight Lehiff, and turns to speak to both the intra- and extra-diegetic camera. Compared to more serious, realistic characters such as John and Oscar, Lynch's consistently hyperbolic displays of nationalism, vigilantism and machismo suggest that his exclusively homosocial existence and his obsession with violence, discipline and tradition, expressed in a passion for boxing and celtic mysticism, are not only being lampooned but also relegated to the vaults of history.

Thus, while *Intermission* offers ample potential for literal, celebratory readings of and wishful identification with hegemonic masculinities, it also articulates some of the wider discourses that currently frame Irish masculinity. Responses to social change, whether they manifest themselves as self-reflexive explorations of gender identity or attempts to reassert a revamped traditional masculinity, might thus be understood as ways of (re)negotiating the material and the perceived changes that are occurring in men's lives. Monk's (2000) thesis that the new criminal masculinities function as signifiers of rebellion and subversion, a means of positioning men outside an economic or gender order that they perceive to have been corrupted by consumerism, technological change, political correctness or female power, deserves serious consideration in the context of new Irish cinema. However, given that most of these films operate a highly ambiguous mode of address, textual analysis offers limited potential for determining how members of the male audience engage with the masculinities on display and to what extent the films are understood as referencing wider discourses on masculinity. On account of the diversity of its character types, its masculinity-related themes and its cross-generic borrowings, *Intermission* is used as the core text for the audience reception studies whose findings are discussed in chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Another recent film that is pertinent to this analysis is *Headrush* (2002), which tells the story of two disillusioned male youths who become involved in drug-running for a local gangster. Like Jack in *Flick*, who rejects the trappings of middle-class identity to live a life of drug-dealing, Frank in *Saltwater*, who turns to bank-robbery in an attempt to solve his father's financial problems, and Ben in *Intermission*, whose fascination with the dark underbelly of Dublin life leads to his eventual involvement in Lehiff's shooting, Charlie and T-Bag are 'tourists' in the criminal underworld. However, as is the case with British films such as *Shopping* and *Twin Town*, "the activities of the (relatively powerless) lawbreakers are presented as legitimated by the power abusers and/or organised corruption of the law" (Monk 1999 p176). Although this world is shown as ugly and dangerous, it is also the endurance test by which male characters achieve peer- and, by extension, audience approval. However, while earlier cinematic studies of the British gangster were concerned with tracing pathological male violence to complex social and personal causes (Leigh 2000, Spicer 2001), the new gangster films tend to present de-contextualised pastiches of these complex characters, and to treat psychotic and violent masculinities with the same kind of detached irony that underscores Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs*.

As is the case with many of the other films discussed here, the reappropriation of non-indigenous genres, or what Collins (1993) terms "genericity", leads to tonal and ideological inconsistencies, which might be regarded either as intentional or accidental. Outlandish pastiches of British gangster figures, such as The Uncle, whose accent alternates between Mockney and Glaswegian, with an occasional hint of New Jersey mobster, and the psychotic, Amsterdam-based drug baron played by Huey Morgan sit uneasily with the film's more serious, moral undercurrent, whereby drugs are rejected in favour of enterprise (McCarthy 2004). *Headrush* is thus a key example of an increasingly globalised gangster aesthetic comprised of hybrid British and American influences. Described by director Shimmy Marcus as "an Ealing comedy with drugs" (ibid.), the film is replete with British cultural influences. Charlie's evocation of the clean-cut, boy-next-door spiv of 1950s British cinema (Spicer 2001) contrasts with T-Bag's coding as the archetypal North Dublin underclass male. Similarly, The Uncle is a reworking of the

stereotypical British neo-gangster, borrowed directly from films such as *Trainspotting*, *Lock Stock* and *Snatch*, whose own gangster figures are self-referential homages to the hard men of 1960s films such as *Get Carter*, *The Long Good Friday* and *Performance*.

In spite of *Headrush*'s moral closure, in which Charlie and T-Bag use their ill-gotten gains to set up a legitimate chauffeur business, it is ultimately a crime caper film that is predominantly informed by the amoral and apolitical tone of "gangster light", whereby images of "olde gangland" (Monk 1999 p174) appear out of their original context. Referencing the comic grotesquerie of *Trainspotting*, there are at least three 'shock scenes' for which there is no apparent narrative justification, including a detective spitting food on a dead, black man's face, an elderly woman being viciously head-butted and T-Bag's attempting to strangle a woman in a night-club. As well as exhibiting influences from the British crime and underclass films, *Headrush* also appears to borrow from the American teen movie, in which drugs and sex are key adolescent male rites of passage. This is particularly evident in a sequence which uses superimposition to draw a visual analogy between Charlie's girlfriend's naked body and a joint being rolled. Another, more direct reference to the genre appears in the club scene, in which a cartoon penis appears on one side of T-Bag's head and a brain on the other. This is strongly evocative of a scene from the first of the American teen movies, *Porky's* (1982), in which a cartoon devil and angel disagree about whether a character should have sex with a girl who is unconscious. *Headrush* thus indulges the perceived desire of the youth audience for crime, violence and laddish humour but, unlike *Trainspotting* or *Lock Stock*, both films to which it makes stylistic and narrative references, it departs from its laddish influences towards the end to endorse a more conventional, pro-social message.

The proliferation of crime-based and gangster-inflected narratives in contemporary Irish cinema raises important questions regarding the meanings and pleasures that criminal narratives and identities offer the male audience. The extent to which Irish cinema's new gangsters and criminals are understood as working-class heroes who present a political challenge to what Martin Cahill in *The General* calls the "oppressors of the poor. Civil fucking servants, Garda fucking Siochána, parish fucking priests" (Pettitt 2004) or as

desired possible selves who enact fantasies of male empowerment remains unclear in the absence of empirical audience studies. While Chibnall, Monk and Leigh have theorised the revival of the British gangster film as indexing male anxieties about the threat, posed by feminism and multiculturalism to the hegemony of white masculinity, Pettitt (ibid.) attributes the recent popularity of the genre in Ireland to increasing crime levels and to a cultural shift which addresses crime in predominantly apolitical terms. However, while Pettitt acknowledges the potential of these generic reappropriations to demystify gangland mythology, he also acknowledges their potential ability to invoke the 'moral certainties' of a bygone era, suggesting that:

...the Cahills and the Gilligan figures call for the reinstatement of conservative values at odds to the rest of society, which has become liberal and tries to promote 'new' standards. We may ask whether this in turn expresses an underlying dissatisfaction with the new liberal consensus in a manner comparable with the equivalent British crime cycle (Pettitt 2004 p32).

3.7 Conclusion

Since the 1970s, Irish cinema has undergone a number of key transitions, many of which can be understood within the broader context of the nation's cultural trajectory from a rural to a postmodern urban society. Coterminous with Ireland's transformation from post-colonial state to first-world nation has been a shift from politically-motivated filmmaking, inspired by the tenets of Third Cinema, to a more populist aesthetic that is increasingly open to transnational influences and more constrained by the imperative to appeal to markets outside Ireland (Ging 2002, Stoneman 2005). These changes have occurred in concert with the demise of identity politics, the increasing commodification of images in a market that sells lifestyles rather than products and a shift in popular consciousness from feminist to post-feminist concepts of gender relations and gender identity. The past decade has also seen a growing concern, in Ireland and elsewhere, with the changing nature of men's roles and the emergence of a range of new masculine identities, which variously challenge and reinforce traditional thinking about gender.

Irish national cinema has reflected, commented upon and, in turn, partly (re)conceptualised many of these changes. Irish masculine types have been renegotiated in a number of significant ways: in the shift from locally-based negotiations of gender to more transnational themes and concerns; in the move away from modernist, avant-garde and overtly political styles of filmmaking toward more universal, postmodern and, arguably, post-political narratives, styles and characterisations; and in the increasing supplanting of feminist with post-feminist outlooks on gender. While the diminishing preoccupation with national identity and rural themes and concerns has facilitated a diverse range of modern masculinities in Irish cinema, working-class, marginalised and criminal male types have come to occupy an important position in this representational typology, while the 'subcultures' or 'lifestyles' associated with subordinated masculinities, which include fighting, joy-riding, bareback horse-riding, drug-dealing, dope-smoking, twoccing, betting and greyhound-racing, have become recurring narrative themes.

In the majority of these films, social exclusion and criminality appear to be closely bound up with notions of resistance and rebellion against the *status-quo*. This resistance to authority, whether legal, paternal or corporate, is manifested across a broad spectrum of behaviours, from violent and dangerous acts to indulgence in illicit, adolescent thrills. However, the extent to which these rebels, criminals, gangsters and rogues symbolise for their audiences a class-based rejection of middle-class consumerism and the extent to which working-class masculinity is being commodified along gendered lines as a response, whether playful, ironic or genuine, to the demonstrable gains of feminism remains unclear. As Beynon comments:

...if for most laddism is just another clever way of making money out of young male consumers by resurrecting the appeal of the working class jack-the-lad, hell bent on having a good time, others still regard it as a genuine rebellion, a reassertion of something 'fundamentally masculine' (Beynon 2002 p114).

According to Fiske and Dawson (1996 p304), certain symbolic representations of violence "enable subordinated people to articulate symbolically their sense of opposition and hostility to the particular forms of domination that oppress them." What pleasures, however, these masculinities offer to audiences who are not oppressed or subordinated remains unclear. The discursive construction of resistance and protest in these films raises important questions about the relationship between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities, most notably in terms of whether the subordinate masculinities portrayed are seen as resisting or colluding with hegemonic masculinity.

Implicit and explicit in all of the literature on 'resistant' masculinities are assumptions about the appeal and significance of these representations, as well as the cultural competencies of audiences. The ideological diversity of the textual analyses and the often radically different ways in which they conceptualise the male audience suggest that empirical audience research could offer useful insights into socially-specific practices of reception. As well as addressing the hitherto largely unexplored area of masculinity in Irish cinema, this study aims to make an important contribution to the debates about Lad Culture, spectatorship and reception by examining the viewing preferences and engagements of different groups of Irish men. It illustrates that the dichotomies which

have tended to underscore the film studies debates about 'hypermasculinity', whereby such representations are read by feminists as reinforcing patriarchy, on the one hand, and by postfeminists as signaling male anxiety and crisis, on the other, frequently ignore the multiple meanings, pleasures and identifications that these genres and representations offer. Chapter 4 maps out the theoretical terrain which underpins this empirical audience research by presenting a comprehensive overview of the literature on the male (film) audience. It also takes many of the theoretical concerns about irony and gender representation discussed in Chapter 2, and re-addresses these in the context of reception.

Chapter 4 -

Men Watching Men: Investigating the Male Audience

4.1 Introduction

According to Michael Kimmel, "Images of gender in the media become texts on normative behaviour, one of many cultural shards we use to construct notions of masculinity" (Kimmel 1987d p20). Kimmel's claim is instructive in that it acknowledges the powerful role played by mediated images in naturalising and reinforcing certain gendered behaviours but also because it highlights media reception and identity construction as active, heterogenous and complex, as well as contingent upon a range of other contextual factors. In much of the literature on cinematic representations of masculinity, there are hidden assumptions about media effects, whereby it is implied that boys unquestioningly accept and emulate patriarchal role models. According to John Beynon:

...it is obvious that cinematic masculinity comes in visually crafted, carefully packaged and frequently idealised forms. These representations often have a more powerful impact than the flesh-and-blood men around the young and with whom they are in daily contact. Screen images are likely to be far more exciting and seductive than fathers, teachers, neighbours and older brothers (Beynon 2002 p64).

While many screen images of masculinity are undoubtedly more spectacular than real men, such claims tell us little about why such figures are appealing to audiences or how audiences situate their engagements with these images against the wider backdrops of their lives. Most importantly, they fail to qualify what is meant by 'impact'.

Often overlooked in "hypodermic needle" discourses are the social contexts in which mediated images of gender are consumed and understood, and the enduring influence of home and school in the ideological construction of gender. In Ireland, the findings of a recent *Irish Times* / TNS mrbi poll (2003) on Irish youth were summarised by journalist Ian McShane (2003) as follows:

With regard to this generation's "heroes", a majority look to the type of people who have direct influence on their lives on a day-to-day basis,

including their parents (35 per cent), other family members (15 per cent) and friends and neighbours (26 per cent). Pop/rock stars (31 per cent) and sports stars (25 per cent) also elicit some admiration, with Bono/U2 and Roy Keane each mentioned by 8 per cent.

The results of the poll call into question some of the commonly held assumptions about media influence, which tend to posit celebrities at the centre of young people's spheres of influence and to assume a unilateral model of cause and effect. In much feminist and Marxist textual analysis, dominant or stereotypical images of masculinity are assumed to function as socialising agents, whereby media messages and mediated masculinities are unquestioningly accepted, identified with or internalised by their audiences. Lance Strate (1992), for example, has argued that American beer advertising provides men with a rulebook for heteronormative masculinity. Similarly Ralph Donald (1992) claims that Vietnam War movies legitimate patriarchal domination through their logic of ritual initiation which, he contends, extends to the male viewer. Implicit in these claims, however, is the notion that ideological messages are not only successfully and uniformly interpreted by their consumers but also that they are successfully and uniformly acted upon.

Donald claims that the shift in popularity from westerns to war movies has entailed a parallel shift in children's role-play, from emulating characters such as Hopalong Cassidy and the Lone Ranger to the modern soldier in combat. Implicit in his concern with this development, however, is the assumption that only boys engage in such activities, and that emulating warfare impacts upon adult (male) behaviour and attitudes. By accepting Komisar's (1976) account of role-playing as primarily and necessarily instructive as opposed to recreational or escapist, he is able to conclude that war films play a key role in masculine socialisation. Donald's contention that media-inspired role play performs a vital role in the social construction of modern masculinity does not account for the possibility that mediated images and narratives are used in the enactment of fantasy, escapism or performance (Tobin 2000, Newkirk 2002) or that mediated violence can be understood as a cipher for other struggles (Walkerdine 1986, Fiske and Dawson 1996). Thus, while hegemonic or stereotypical images of masculinity do not appear to threaten or disrupt the patriarchal order, 'dominant-ideology' accounts such as those advanced by

Donald and Strate do not account for the diversity, contingency and context-specific nature of film reception. Indeed the notion of reception is itself limited by its implication of a passive, one-way sender-receiver relationship, which fails to account for the complex uses to which individuals and groups put mediated texts as part of everyday cultural and social practices. Nor do such accounts allow for the presence of irony, either as a textual device or as a reading strategy. More recent hypotheses, on the other hand, which attribute the emergence of the new hegemonic masculinities to a self-conscious backlash against feminism, consider the possibility that excessive displays of bravado, machismo and male suffering in the media might be operating in more complex ways than merely encouraging imitation.

This is not to say that concerns about the persistence of ostensibly anachronistic images of masculinity in the media are not understandable, since it is reasonable to assume that the ubiquity of such images means that they infiltrate a wide range of social and cultural practices and thus impact upon wider social processes (Couldry 2004). However, there is little convincing empirical evidence that these images have any direct effect on individual men's concept of their masculinity (Fejes 1992 p22). Donald's observation that regressive media images of gender persist *in spite of* widespread social change frames the media as an autonomous, regressive force that lags behind a more progressive 'reality'. Of the outmoded images that persist in American war films he says:

If half-century-old governments and political philosophies can give way, if all the world is changing and adapting, perhaps the macho, uncommunicative, unemotional, pseudo-athletic misogynists America seems intent on turning out should also consider some fundamental alterations (Donald 1992 p136).

This tendency to foreground mediated images as masculine role models overlooks the role played by other social institutions, such as education, the family, the military and religion, in and through which hegemonic masculinity is constructed and sustained, and the possibility that violent societies engender a taste for violent images in the media (Fiske and Dawson 1996).

Effects models have thus tended to overlook the possibility that films and their male characters are understood, used and enjoyed by audiences in ways that do not fit easily into a unilateral schema of cause and effect. By focusing either exclusively on the text or exclusively on the audience, film and media theorists have evaded the possibility that meaning resides in more than one source (Mayne 2002 p40) and that media production and consumption are not isolated, self-contained systems but rather practices or sets of practices that are deeply enmeshed in the wider social and cultural order. As the empirical audience studies described below demonstrate, discrepancies in how ideological messages are received, while they are substantially influenced by factors such as class, gender, age, ethnicity and sexuality, do not always neatly correlate to these categories but are always informed by what Walkerdine (1986 p182) describes as "the interminable intertwining of present and past, of material conditions and psychic relations." In a similar vein, Mayne argues that, rather than taking non-preferred readings as evidence of ideological resistance, negotiated readings should be regarded as the norm. She claims that:

It may well be more useful to designate all readings as negotiated ones, to the extent that it is highly unlikely that one will find any 'pure' instances of dominant or oppositional readings. In other words, a purely dominant reading would presume no active intervention at all on the part of the decoder, while a purely oppositional reading would assume no identification at all with the structures of interpellation of the text. In that case, some notion of textual determination must still be necessary in order for the negotiation model to be useful (Mayne 2002 p39).

Thus, unlike some active-audience theorists (Ang, 1985, Brown 1994, Lull 1995), who locate the making of meaning with the reader and tend to equate non-preferred readings with ideological resistance, Mayne's understanding of interpretation as multiple and contingent does not occlude structural agency, nor does it posit audiences as impervious to ideological influence. She argues that much active-audience research work "has led to a peculiar reading of the reception of mass culture, whereby any and all responses are critical ones" (ibid p31) and insists that "Some sort of understanding of the non-coincidence of address and reception is required in which power is analysed rather than taken for granted" (ibid.). Fiske and Dawson (1996 p314-315) further develop this argument by claiming that context-specific practices of culture are *systemic*, meaning that

they are concrete instances of a system in practice and can thus be generalised out to the structural forces that shape the social order. Indeed, the value of the audience studies described below is that they locate mediated fictions within wider “gender scripts” (Nixon 1996) as well as within wider class scripts, which both inform and are informed by the social structures within which audiences are immersed. They thus help to move beyond the text-context dichotomy by considering media not as texts or as structures of production but rather as practice (Couldry 2004).

4.2 Approaching the Male Audience

Whether cinematic heroes function as symbols of patriarchal oppression, “desired possible selves” (Gash and Conway 1997 p351), parodies of machismo or combinations of these depends largely on the interpretive strategies employed by spectators as well as their levels of “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1986), which are in turn influenced by a complex combination of social and economic factors. Given that this study is concerned with a range of masculinities, which appear to challenge the patriotic and pro-social ideologies of the conventional hero, yet do not necessarily depart from, and indeed often appear to reinforce, patriarchal codes, coherent and consistent readings are even less likely to occur. While box office figures for the new (sub)genres under analysis indicate that these films are hugely popular, there is a dearth of empirical research in any of the literature that investigates the nature of their appeal. In Irish film studies, the reasons why socially-marginalised, criminal and disaffected masculinities have become prevalent in recent years and the ways in which audiences engage with such themes and images remain, as yet, unexplored.

Marketing strategies can provide useful insights into how films construct and interpellate their audiences. According to Paul Bettany, who plays the young gangster in *Gangster No. 1* (2000), market research conducted by the film's distributor, FilmFour, indicates that men between the ages of 15 and 28 are avid fans of gangster-related texts and iconography.¹ However, although it can establish whether or not certain styles and genres are appealing to specific psychographic profiles or categories, this type of market research elicits only very superficial insights into why this is the case. In spite of this, there is evidence that market research is becoming an increasingly important feature in the Irish film industry, which has to compete not only with high-concept American blockbusters but also with the increasingly commercial cinema of Great Britain. In August 2004, the Marketing Unit of the Irish Film Board announced plans for a new free Test Screening programme, which is available to producers, distributors and sales agents of BSE/IFB-backed films to assist them in conducting impartial test screening(s),

¹ See Ryan Gilbey. 'Dangerous Dandies' in *The Independent*, 03.05.04.

involving detailed questionnaires and focus groups, for their project at various stages during production.² In the case of many of the films analysed in this study, including *Headrush* and *Adam and Paul*, producers and distributors used concept testing (pre-production) as well as test screenings (post-production) in order to better define and cater to their audiences.

Adam and Paul's producer, Johnny Speers, for example, organised a reading of the script with a group of drug-users and ex-users. In an interview with Donald Clarke, he explains:

We did it just to make sure there were no clangers [...] So there would be nothing in there that junkies just wouldn't do, and also for the actors to be around people who had been users. We were very aware of the accusation of being middle-class boys who potentially didn't know what we were talking about. It was a really moving evening. They all took roles and they were constantly laughing or shaking their heads in recognition (Speers cited in Clarke 2004 p6).

While concept testing is clearly useful in terms of getting the details right, the majority of market research, in Ireland and elsewhere, occurs when production is complete (Wyatt 2002). In the case of *Headrush* (2004), test audience readings enabled the producers to identify their core demographic. According to director Shimmy Marcus:

We showed it to 15-year-olds and they went mad for it. It was the best reaction we had. The thing they loved most about the film was that it didn't preach to them. There was no moral at the end, it didn't try to tell them that drugs are bad. It let them make up their own minds (Marcus cited in McCarthy 2004).

Taken together, however, the market research conducted in relation to the films under analysis here tells us little more than the fact that young audiences, in particular young male audiences, are interested in drugs, fast cars, gangsters and crime. While transcripts of the focus groups conducted in the course of audience testing might present a rich resource for the ethnographer or qualitative audience researcher, the kind of data that is extracted by distributors as important may differ considerably by virtue of their concern with majority opinions and mass appeal. Moreover, although the fact that certain films

² See 'BSÉ/IFB Announce Free Test Screening Programme', Irish Film and Television Network (<http://www.iftn.ie/index.htm>), accessed 9th August 2004.

appeal to certain demographic profiles is undoubtedly an essential starting point, it tells us little or nothing about how audiences actually engage with the texts in question. Between the marketing data and box office ratings, which tell us that films are popular, on the one hand, and the textual analyses which theorise the motivations behind this appeal, on the other, there is a substantial lack of detailed, qualitative research data. According to Graeme Turner:

Whereas television studies and areas of cultural studies have been raiding ethnographic methodologies for years, film studies has been relatively slow to use these methods to approach the analysis of Kuhn's 'social audience' - the actual spectators in the cinema (Turner 2002 p379).

If real audiences are lacking in film studies, this is even more apparent in the case of male audiences. According to Hanke:

Apart from the tradition of film study which has theorized the male gaze and the male spectator, masculinity as a dimension to social audiences' reception practices remains invisible except in a few studies (Morley, 1986; Steinman, 1992; Fiske and Dawson, 1996) (Hanke 1998 p185).

Fred Fejes has also drawn attention to this gap in the research. He claims that:

The paucity of empirical media research on masculinity at this point represents a challenge and an opportunity to media researchers, but also to the examination and redefinition of one of the fundamental ways we define and act out our reality (Fejes 1992 p22).

Interestingly, much of the social scientific work that has emerged in relation to men and masculinity in cinema has been conducted from a qualitative interpretive perspective (Fejes 1992), yet film studies is characterised by a lack of this type of work. The present study attempts to step into this gap, by constructing epistemological links between the ideological analysis of film texts and the ways in which particular social audiences consume them. Given that the majority of studies on male audiences have emerged from academic disciplines other than film studies, this review of the literature also serves as an implicit commentary on the lack of and need for empirical research on male film audiences.

As Hanke has pointed out, the male audience has been theorised largely from the point of view of spectatorship and the gaze. While this approach is premised upon a primary

concern with the representation of women as spectacle and the male gaze (Mulvey 1975), and is limited by lack of empirical evidence, it is nonetheless important since it has continued to shape many of the debates about contemporary masculinities in popular culture. Much of the recent writing on Lad Culture, for example, implicitly speculates about the audience and the nature of interpretive processes and media effects (Whelehan 2000, Beynon 2002, Gauntlett 2002) as well as about the male gaze and masculine subjectivity (Nixon 1997). Given that the semiotic dynamics of Lad Culture, as its producers and originators claim, are dependent upon audiences' ability to understand irony, it is clearly inadequate that the study of irony remains so firmly rooted within the text. Indeed, references to irony, ambiguity and 'tongue-in-cheek' humour are highly evident in much of the promotional material and in the interviews which surround the films under analysis here. According to Shimmy Marcus, "If you take the film [*Headrush*] too seriously, you miss the point of it. It needs to be seen as tongue-in-cheek (Marcus cited in McCarthy 2004)." Of Guy Richie's *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, Steven Mackintosh, who plays Winston, claims, "it does contain all the elements of gritty reality, but there is a great sense of irony about the whole thing (Mackintosh cited in Chinball 2001 p2)."

While most theorists agree that intentional or textual irony (Hutcheon 1994) is a key feature of postmodern culture and of Lad Culture in particular, there is little consensus regarding how irony operates as a reading strategy. Feminist cultural theorists tend to perceive laddism's use of irony as an escape clause, whereby image-makers can produce and sell controversial gender stereotypes, yet claim to be making a political statement *about* gender-stereotyping. Postfeminist commentators, on the other hand, generally assume that the latter, 'preferred reading' is successfully achieved by the sophisticated and mediate-literate consumers of postmodern culture. Claire Monk (2000) argues that the 1990s male-oriented British films address men as a social problem, a political interest group and a consumer market, often simultaneously within the same film. However, there is no empirical research available to indicate the extent to which male audience members actually interpret these films as politicised critiques of bourgeois ideology, as statements

about young men's exclusion from the patriarchal dividend (Connell 1995) or as self-knowing celebrations of laddish pleasures (Whelehan 2000).

Given the dearth of empirical audience research on the reception of ironic representations of masculinity, therefore, there is a tendency in the literature to speculate on the cultural competencies of audiences. Sconce (2002), for example, configures the (non gender-specific) audience as hyper-aware and politically engaged through irony. For Monk, on the other hand, the (male) audience is post-political, irony-blind and in search of symbolic refuge from the responsibilities of adulthood. According to Giroux and Szeman, the audience is endangered by the powerful pedagogical influence of the current "culture of cynicism and senseless violence (ibid. 2001 p102)." To what extent films such as *Man About Dog*, *Headrush* or *Intermission* are engaged with as laddish capers or as (partly) serious commentaries about contemporary masculinity is effectively contingent upon the presence or absence of irony as a reading strategy. A key element of the audience reception strand of this study, therefore, is to determine how young Irish men engage with the new masculinities and narratives of Irish cinema, often described as ironic by their producers. This approach thus shifts the focus away from the text toward irony as an interpretive strategy (Hutcheon 1994), whereby the audience's ability to read irony is considered to be a crucial part of understanding the gender-political functioning of images of (hyper)masculinity in contemporary mainstream cinema. With the exception of a broad empirical study on media consumption among male teenagers in Ireland (Ging 2005)³ and a small number of e-mail interviews conducted by David Gauntlett (2002) with readers of *Loaded*, there is virtually no empirical audience research available in the literature on how men engage with the images, narratives and ideologies of contemporary Lad Culture. This chapter reviews the extensive literature on male spectatorship in cinema as well as the more limited qualitative work on male film audiences that has emerged primarily from other fields such as media and cultural studies.

³ The findings of this study, conducted with 15-17 year-old males, indicate that irony as an interpretive strategy is largely absent from participants' readings of men's magazines such as *Loaded* and *FHM*, digital games such as *Grand Theft Auto* and laddish advertisements.

4.3 The Male Gaze and Spectatorship

As Cohan and Hark (1993) have argued, film theory and criticism have, until recently, concentrated almost exclusively on the female body, whereby even the most insightful analyses of feminine representation "have ignored the problem of masculinity which motivates that system (ibid. 1993 p1)." Until recent years, the relegation of masculinity to discussions on spectatorship, based almost entirely on Laura Mulvey's (1975) analysis of visual pleasure in classic cinema, has had the effect of side-lining the male body and masculine representation, ignoring questions of female spectatorship and theorising the male audience as white, heterosexual and middle-class. According to Cohan and Hark:

Until recently, at least, it has been recognised that orthodox masculine subjectivity functions as the central problem raised by classic Hollywood film, the status of the male in both the cinema auditorium and on screen has also, oddly enough, been too eagerly accepted as the unproblematic given of the system (and of the theory, too) (Cohan and Hark 1993 p2).

Since the publication of Cohan and Hark's volume of essays, however, a number of important ontological and epistemological shifts have occurred, not only in cinema but also in advertising and other media forms, which make Mulvey's theory on the dynamics of spectatorship increasingly difficult to uphold. Some of the earlier responses to Mulvey's hypothesis, such as the important contributions of John Ellis (1982) and Steve Neale (1983), were both extensions and qualifications of her arguments, whereas much of the more recent writing on spectatorship draws attention to important cultural shifts affecting the nature of male representation in cinema. This literature also draws on the important work done on cultural audiences by theorists such as Stuart Hall and David Morley and on Queer theory, with its conceptualisation of gender identity and identification as fluid and performative. Although much of the latter work has originated outside film studies, in the context of advertising, fashion photography and men's magazines, it is nonetheless crucial to debates about male subjectivity and the gaze in film studies, in particular in relation to more recent films such as *The Full Monty* and *Fight Club*.

The basis for Neale's (1983) analysis is Mulvey's (1975) male gaze theory, which configures spectatorship of classic Hollywood film as necessarily phallogocentric. According to Mulvey, this is attributable to the fact that the male protagonist both directs the narrative action of the film and mediates the gaze of the (male) spectator onto the object of sexual desire, namely the passive spectacle of woman. The viewer is thus positioned as both narcissistic, on account of his identification with a more powerful, handsome and phantasmatic figure of masculinity than himself, and as voyeuristic, on account of his objectification of the film's female protagonist via the gaze of the male protagonist. Using Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Mulvey explains that the threat posed by the female's signification of the fear of castration is disavowed through the fetishisation of her body and/or the infliction of violence upon her. Mulvey thus contends that Hollywood's insistence on male agency versus passivity and its refusal to eroticise the male body engenders a phallogocentric economy of looking, which effectively disavows the possibility of a female gaze. Insofar as the female spectator can derive pleasure from classic cinema, she must identify with the passive object of desire in masochistic terms and/or perform an imaginary act of transsexual identification in order to sympathise with the male subject position.

Neale (1983, 1993), in response to Mulvey, has shown that the male body can be eroticised as the object, on condition that it is not marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look. He argues that the erotic component of the look must be suppressed or redirected via mutilation or sadism. For example, Neale contends that, in the films of Leone:

We see male bodies stylised and fragmented by close-ups, but our look is not direct, it is heavily mediated by the looks of the characters involved. And those looks are marked not by desire, but rather by fear, or hatred, or aggression...They thus involve an imbrication of both forms of looking, their intertwining designed to minimise and displace the eroticism they each tend to involve, to disavow any explicitly erotic look at the male body (Neale 1993 p18).

Similarly, Kirkham and Thumim (1993) contend that the male body cannot be admired as spectacle without the passivity of sexual objectification, arguing that signifiers of action such as sweat, scars and muscles must be mobilised to disavow this look. A significant

number of essays in Cohan and Hark's (1993) collection, which is prefaced by a reprint of Neale's original (1983) essay, operate upon Neale's basic premise: firstly, that the male gaze, which Mulvey has argued underpins Hollywood cinema, is unstable but, secondly, that the films find ways in which to disavow or compensate for this instability. For example, in Cohan's (1993) essay on Fred Astaire and male spectacle in the Hollywood musical, the author argues that the genre positions its male star as spectacle but that, by stopping and exceeding the narrative flow in order to do this, the films prevent the possibility of a sadistic or masochistic gaze. Similarly, Cynthia Fuchs (1993) claims that the homoeroticism implicit in the structure of the buddy film is disguised by the genre's tendency to foreground the erasure of racial difference to disguise this, in other words, by employing racial transgression to displace homosexual anxiety.

Ellis (1982) responds to Mulvey by challenging her premise that men can only successfully identify with male characters and women with female characters, arguing, in much the same vein as many contemporary postmodern and postfeminist theorists, that desire is dynamic and fluid, and can transgress gender(ed) identities. He claims that the process of cinematic identification is both narcissistic and motivated by fantasy:

The spectator does not therefore 'identify' with the hero or heroine...The situation is more complex than this, as identification involves both the recognition of the self in the image on the screen, a narcissistic identification, and the identification of self with the various positions that are involved in the fictional narration: those of hero and heroine, villain, bit-part player, active and passive character. Identification is therefore multiple and fractured, a sense of seeing the constituent parts of the spectator's own psyche paraded before her or him (Ellis 1982 p43).

Green (1984), who has also challenged the strict gender binarism implicit in Mulvey's analysis, argues that melodrama can enable male spectators to identify with female characters, and thus rejects the hypothesis that spectators are always forced into a masculine subject position.

Willemsen (1981) and Rodowick (1982) also challenge the assumption that male spectators necessarily and exclusively identify with powerful male characters by drawing attention to the presence and function of masochism in the gaze economy. According to

Rodowick, Mulvey's assumption that looking is active in its aims denies the possibility of masochistic identification, while Willemsen argues that the pleasures which male spectators derive from watching male bodies being mutilated is founded upon a "repressed homosexual voyeurism" (ibid. 1981 p16). This analysis is particularly relevant to David Fincher's *Fight Club*, in which Tyler is both object of desire and identification.

According to Amy Taubin:

Tyler represents some ideal of free-wheeling male power. [Jack] wants to become Tyler or to be taken over by Tyler. There's a blatant homoerotic charge to this identification which the film doesn't shy away from. As in Scorsese's films, the male body is feminised through masochism. You prove your masculinity not by how much pain you can inflict, but by how much you can endure (Taubin 1999 p17).

Taubin's suggestion of a homoerotic/masochistic gaze is supported by both Peter Lehman (1993) and Barbara Creed (1993), who have argued that the male spectator can identify with male characters in masochistic terms, thus challenging the assumption that viewing and the look necessarily entail agency or power. According to Lehman, female rape-revenge films are addressed primarily to a masochistic male spectator "who identifies with the gruesome mutilations of other men" (Cohan and Hark 1993 p5), while Creed (ibid.) contends that the abject and monstrous male bodies of the horror film address the masochistic desires of the (male) spectator.

Although Neale, Ellis, Willemsen and Rodwick concur with Mulvey's assertion that the dominant spectatorial look in mainstream cinema is implicitly male, and do not deny that most films "specify identification in accordance with the socially defined and constructed categories of male and female" (Neale 1993 p11), they suggest not only that the economy of looking is considerably more complex than is outlined by Mulvey but also that the erotic gaze, directed at the spectacle of the male body, is less successfully repressed than is frequently assumed. According to Neale, therefore, the issues that Mulvey considers in relation to women can and should be considered in relation to men with a view to deconstructing the gaze economy of a cinema which attempts to repress and disavow the erotic or masochistic elements which, unlike Mulvey, they claim exist in the relations between the male spectator and the male image.

In the ten years since Neale's essay was reprinted, a number of significant changes have occurred, both in terms of the cultural representation of men and in relation to how the gendered gaze has been theorised. Since Kirkham and Thumin proposed in 1993 that male bodies may be eroticised for the female gaze but are rarely displayed in homoerotic terms, the gaze economy of visual culture has become increasingly inflected by the imagery of gay culture. The most overt (homo)eroticisation of the male body is found in advertising, whereby recent magazine advertisements for Davidoff, Lacoste, Calvin Klein (Crave) and Yves Saint Laurent (M7) feature both semi and fully naked men in the type of erotic, expectant, passive poses traditionally associated with women. According to Greven (2002), however, there is still substantial resistance to the sexual objectification of the masculine body in mainstream American cinema in which, he argues, "white, heterosexual men remain – for all of the developments in male beauty culture, straight borrowings from gay culture, feminism and so forth – cut off from the multifarious gazes of culture" (Greven 2002 p21).

Given that the most dramatic changes in terms of male representation have occurred in the areas of advertising, fashion photography and, to a lesser extent, reality television, it is unsurprising that they have been theorised predominantly within the fields of media and cultural studies. Nixon's (1997) analysis of changing male subjectivities is a key text in this regard, in which he argues that the emergence of men's clothing stores in the 1980s, the arrival of men's style magazines and the type of advertising that was required to sustain these markets produced a "spectatorial look" as well as the formation of a new subject-position for men in relation to practices of fashion, style and consumption. According to Andrew Wernick (1991), increasing numbers of students, a tendency to marry later, increasing divorce rates and greater acceptance of openly gay households have contributed to the emergence of a specifically male target market for a wide range of consumer goods. As a consequence of these changes, advertising has "redefined for its own purposes the category of masculinity itself" (Wernick 1991 p 49), whereby more diverse and ambiguous images of masculinity now circulate, many of which challenge the gendered active/passive dichotomy that underpins Mulvey's analysis of the gaze economy.

According to Beynon (2002), the New Man of the 1980s and 1990s was constructed in two different ways. On the one hand, there was the “nurturer”, perceived as embodying a new masculinity which accepted women's rights, was gay-positive, could show emotion and sensitivity, was willing to play a more active and nurturing paternal role and to do housework and could tend to his looks without feeling emasculated. On the other hand, there was the “narcissist”, an advertising construct designed solely to sell cosmetics to men. Arguably, only the narcissistic dimension of new mannism has withstood the counter-force of New Laddism (Beynon 2002). This surviving strain of masculinity is now frequently referred to as Metrosexual Man, epitomised by the style-conscious figure of David Beckham. The advent of Metrosexual Man coincides with a number of television shows such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *How Gay Are You?*, in which unreconstructed straight men are encouraged to develop their 'gay' sides, configured in terms of fashion awareness, personal hygiene, good taste in furnishings and designware and a well developed sense of social etiquette⁴. According to Mark Simpson, who coined the term Metrosexual Man, metrosexuality is primarily identified by how men look, not what they do:

He might be officially gay, straight or bisexual, but this is utterly immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference (Simpson 2002).

All of these developments have led to an increasingly narcissistic and objectified construction of masculinity, whereby men are seen to be increasingly concerned with being looked at. Although Yvonne Tasker (1993) argues that the body of the male action hero has long been objectified and fetishised, more recent films such as *The Full Monty* and *Fight Club* are more overt in their subversion of Mulvey's traditional gaze economy by positioning men and the male body as the object of the gaze, mediated by the agency of intra-diegetic female onlookers. However, while the female gaze is often prioritised in analyses of such ‘reversals’, these shifts in the spectatorial landscape have implications for both heterosexual and homosexual male and female audiences. It has been argued that

⁴ See also Michael Flocker (2003) *The Metrosexual Guide to Style: A Handbook for the Modern Man*.

Lad Culture is primarily motivated by a rejection of the objectification, commodification and attendant feminisation/homoeroticisation of men (Beynon, 2002, Monk 2000) which, according to Attwood (2005), explains the absence of the male body from soft-core pornographic and men's lifestyle magazines. However, there is little empirical work that addresses the issue of how men watch other men. With the exception of Clay Steinman's (1992) analysis of the heterosexual male audience of the American sitcom *Evening Shade*, the eroticisation/objectification of the male body has been theorised almost exclusively in terms of the female gaze (Gamman and Marshment 1988). There is little or no work available on how members of the straight or gay male audience respond to these images.

Steinman's study is concerned with how images of Burt Reynolds in *Evening Shade*, eroticised for the female gaze, construct or position the male spectator. He claims that scenes or moments that might offer homoerotic pleasures are recuperated or "clawed back" (Fiske and Hartley 1978 p87) by the ideological-industrial complex, thus denying or disavowing the potentially unstable moments in the text. Steinman concludes that, "The show helps viewers in tune with patriarchy keep their gaze within bounds while allowing them the pleasure of its experience" (ibid. 1992 p213). While Steinman's hypothesis may be accurate, it relies exclusively on an analysis of the textual devices at work in the programme to speculate about the way in which heterosexual men engage with it. As is the case with other work on spectatorship, there is no empirical data to support his hypothesis and the "social audience" (Kuhn 2002) is overlooked in favour of the audience as "theoretical psychoanalytical construct" (Gauntlett 2002 p40). Many of the more recent debates about the role of irony in the mass media and in contemporary cinema are equally speculative with regard to the pleasures and meanings that images of hypermasculinity offer their (male) audiences. By offering detailed explanations for the popularity of men's magazines, gangster films or images of working-class machismo, these commentators make implicit assumptions about the pleasures, gazes and spectatorial positions taken up by their audiences. For example, both Edwards (1997) and Faludi (1999) suggest that laddism's near-pornographic depictions of women and sex serve as a kind of antidote to the homoerotic underpinnings of the 1980s New Man,

whose concern with classic beauty and style rendered the male body submissive and open to both a female and male erotic gaze. Faludi perceives this trend as compatible with similar shifts in US culture as a whole (Whelehan 2000 p67), while Ian Penman (2000) suggests the impetus behind new laddism was an ironic generational shift in the late eighties "to retrieve sex-as-fun from the shadowlands of HIV", which has since dissolved into soft porn.

David Gauntlett (2002) contends that the new men's magazines, and lad culture generally, which revolves around themes and images of sex, pornography, cars, violence, drinking and football, are an anxious response to the perceived advances of feminism and its attendant challenges to patriarchal masculinity. Since, he claims, lad culture operates in an antagonistic dialogue with feminism, it is only meaningful to a specific generation of men. According to Gauntlett:

...there is a generation of younger men who have adapted to the modern world (in a range of ways), who have grown up with women as their equals, and who do not feel threatened or emasculated by these social changes. These men and their cultures are largely ignored by the problem-centered discourse of masculinity studies. This is perhaps a relief, though, because they would almost certainly fail to understand the playful, humorous discourse about gender that circulates in men's magazines (Gauntlett 2002 p252-253).

In the absence of substantial audience research with men of different ages and from different socio-economic backgrounds, however, it is difficult to assess the generalisability of Gauntlett's claim. A recent Irish study (Ging 2005) indicates that most 15-17 year-old males are not conversant with the ironic sexism of lad culture. However, it also shows that male teenagers demonstrate considerable interest in the magazines (20% said they read *Loaded* and *FHM* regularly), that they are strongly resistant to the notion that their portrayal of women is sexist and that their concept of gender equality is heavily influenced by a 'men-are-from-mars-women-are-from-venus' understanding of the 'genderscape'.

Gauntlett (2002) contends that the very existence and popularity of men's magazines indicates that men are actively questioning and problematising their masculinity. Rather

than (re)asserting male dominance, he argues that Lad Culture is a recognition, albeit heavily cloaked in ironic sexism, of the advances made by feminism and that it signals male anxieties about what it means to be a man in a changing society. The humour derives from the fact that men are able to laugh at their own sexism and emotional immaturity because they know that this behaviour is not considered acceptable, as evidenced by *loaded*'s tagline "for men who should know better". This supports Richard Rorty's (1989) claim that people use irony to show that they are using contested, uncertain terms that are open to challenge. However, this "ideal scene of irony" (Hutcheon 1994) assumes that the semantic complexity of the message is successfully understood, in other words that the discursive communities addressed by the ironist 'get' its critical edge (Hutcheon 1994). In the case of Lad Culture, therefore, boorish portrayals of masculinity are assumed to be understood by audiences as a humorous commentary on the way things used to be and an acknowledgement of the extent of change, whereby pleasure is derived from self-knowingly indulging in and performing these outmoded forms of behaviour.

Such accounts of the interpretive dynamics of irony configure the audience (singular) and its cultural competencies in highly specific ways. However, it is possible that the irony at work in lad culture might accommodate other complex layers of meaning, whereby, for example, laddism's drawing attention to an ostensibly 'preferred' ideological reading and requisite cultural competence ("for men who should know better") becomes the premise for a secondary ironic reading, which allows consumers, by *pretending* to read the text ironically, direct access to the frowned-upon pleasures of objectification of women and machismo. Understood in this way, irony functions not as an intrinsic or integral feature of the texts themselves but rather as a means of subverting political critique (Jackson et al. 2001 p78). According to Imelda Whelehan (2000 p59), "*Loaded* in particular self-consciously establishes a masculine personal space which fences off feminist criticism and politics, delighting in its retreat from outside accountability." She goes on to argue that "part of the irony of laddish production is that they depend on a familiarity with feminist rhetoric whilst seeming to sidestep it altogether" (ibid. p59-60).

This analysis dovetails with Jackson et al.'s (2001) critique of lad culture's use of irony which, they argue, functions as:

...an ideological defence against external attack (only the most humourless do not get the joke) and an internal defence against more ambivalent feelings that render masculine experience less omnipotent and less certain than it is represented here (Jackson et al. 2001 p104).

Similarly, Gitlin (1989) suggests that the "total ironist's" use of what is interpreted as a mode of "monadic relativism" (Jameson 1991 p412) prevents taking a stance on any issue. The mobilisation and functioning of irony is thus best considered as "transideological" (White 1973 p38). Hutcheon asserts that irony can operate in the service of a wide range of political positions:

...irony can be provocative when its politics are conservative or authoritarian as easily as when its politics are oppositional and subversive: it depends on who is using/attributing it and at whose expense it is seen to be (Hutcheon 1994 p15).

According to Claire Monk (2002), the British male-oriented films of the 1990s are characterised by a reactionary politics of irony. Sconce (2002), on the other hand, perceives in the irony of the American "smart films" a means of subverting conventional political critique. Press interviews with the directors and producers of the Irish films analysed here frequently reveal that intentional or textual irony is a key feature of the texts. Ultimately, however, it is difficult to determine whether the 'knowing gaze', which allows male viewers to adopt Mulvey's classic male spectatorial position but in an ironic, performative or self-conscious fashion, is dominant or even present without observing and listening to real spectators. Taken together, the work on gender and spectatorship is characterised by its use of hypothetical psychoanalytical models of the audience and a lack of empirical research to support the arguments made. The empirical studies overviewed in the remainder of this chapter provide useful insights into the strengths and limitations associated with researching male interpretive communities and their reception practices. These, in turn, influence the research design of the empirical strand of the study, which is outlined in detail in Chapter 5.

4.4 Multiple Subject Positionings: Class, Age and Gender in Practices of Reception

The limitations associated with theories which posit spectators as uniform subjects who engage psychologically with films in uniform ways overlooks the diversity of audience members (in terms of class, age, ethnicity and sexual orientation), as well as the multiplicity of individual responses and engagements that texts can engender, which may intersect in multiple, simultaneous configurations. According to Diane Saco (1992), investments in multiple subject positions can help us understand how new conceptualisations of gender are realised. She cites Mercer and Julien's (1988) analysis of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of black male nudes, in which the authors point to a set of contradictions which emerge out of their multiple subject positionings as black, male and gay. According to Mercer and Julien (ibid. p101), "we need to re-think how boundaries of race, class, gender and sexuality are constantly crossed and negotiated in the commonplace cultural construction of one's social identity." Saco also makes useful reference to De Lauretis' (1987) discussion of Wendy Hollway's concept of investments:

What makes one take up a [subject] position in a certain discourse rather than another is an 'investment'...something between an emotional commitment and a vested interest, in the relative power (satisfaction, reward, pay-off) which that position promises (but does not necessarily fulfill) (De Lauretis 1987 p16 cited in Saco 1992 p35).

Fiske and Dawson's (1996) study of homeless men watching *Die Hard* serves as an important illustration of Saco's multiple subject positionings. Using qualitative reception methodology, the researchers sought to explore how representations of violent masculinity are understood by a subordinated group within the community. Fiske and Dawson's study is grounded in a critique of media research in the United States that confines itself to effects, yet ignores the conditions under which a "taste for violence" flourishes. The authors argue that the government agencies and social lobby groups which have funded most of this research have ignored the relationship between the circulation of violent images and socioeconomic policies. They contend that the society that produces the most violent images is the one with the least effective policies for equalising wealth: levels of mediated violence are thus seen to be directly related to the levels of real violence in the United States, which is caused by social inequity. Thus,

according to Fiske and Dawson, "Hollywood's production of a crop of violent movies in the late 1980s and early 1990s is conjuncturally related to the widening of the gap between the privileged and the deprived that Reaganism produced (ibid. 1996 p311). The researchers question the tendency to situate the "problem of violence" with media producers, images and audiences - with regulation and censorship offered as the solutions - as opposed to confronting it as a problem of the society itself.

Fiske and Dawson claim that in most mainstream movies, the hero is a white, middle-class male, in his sexual prime and handsome, while villains are statistically typified as non-white, alien, non-middle-class, younger or older than the hero and ugly. They maintain that this battle of good versus evil is the key defining factor of the prosocial text, whereby law and order must always prevail over social disruption. However, by observing homeless men watching *Die Hard*, they were able to conclude that another dimension of the struggles represented, namely social centrality versus social subordination / marginality, can offer antisocial moments in the text, in which subordinated characters take up positions of power or perform acts of physical aggression against the *status quo*. Fiske and Dawson's homeless men sought out these aspects of *Die Hard*, which they perceived as threatening the status quo (for example when the terrorists attack the corporation or the terrorists repel the police). However, as the hero became more closely aligned with the police force, the homeless spectators lost interest and even switched off the video. The researchers thus argue that there are potentially anti-social moments within this predominantly prosocial film, which show subordinate groups and individuals winning tactical battles, if not the final victory and that, for these men, who take refuge in a Catholic shelter where their reading material is policed, "The ability to read antisocial meanings against a prosocial text is the equivalent of reading pornography under the cover of a respectable newspaper (ibid. p306)."

Fiske and Dawson's findings challenge conventional feminist analyses such as that advanced by Susan Jeffords (1994), who has argued that the 1980s action heroes of Hollywood cinema are defenders of an unquestionably patriarchal and politically conservative *status quo*. In this sense, their empirical work supports Yvonne Tasker's

(1993) argument that John McClane's masculine status in *Die Hard* is considerably less stable than assumed by Jeffords. Tasker maintains that the excessive performances of masculinity which characterise the *Die Hard* films, *Lock Up* and *Tango and Cash* draw attention to the cultural construction of their stars as icons of machismo and, at the same time, attempt to reconstruct these characters by setting them up in dynamic relation to their old, more macho selves. She also claims that, for McClane, heroic action is only possible when he opposes state-sanctioned authority. According to Tasker:

By and large the hero of the recent action cinema is not an emissary of the State or, if he is, the State is engaged in a double-cross, as in *Rambo* (1985)...In the *Die Hard* films McClane, like so many action heroes, opposes himself to authorities that are both bureaucratic and duplicitous (ibid. 1993 p241)."

Thus, although there is little evidence to suggest that Fiske and Dawson's respondents distinguish "between a parodic performance of masculinity and the oppressive enactment of that performance" (Tasker 1993 p243), and might not demonstrate the necessary "awareness of performance that distinguishes the masquerade from sociological conceptions of social roles" (ibid.), they are nonetheless adept at identifying significant 'faultlines' in a supposedly cohesive, prosocial text. According to Tasker, the production of both struggle and labor as spectacle underpins the articulation of a class-based definition of masculinity in the action cinema:

If muscles are signifiers of both struggle and traditional forms of male labor, then for many critics the muscles of male stars seem repulsive and ridiculous precisely because they seem to be dysfunctional, 'nothing more' than decoration, a distinctly unmanly designation. The body of the hero may seem dysfunctional, given a decline in the traditional forms of labor that he is called on to perform, but also essential in a last stand, operating as both affirmation and decoration. A paradox is played out through the figure of the powerful hero who operates in a situation beyond his control, in which he is in many senses powerless (Tasker 1993 p239).

For Fiske and Dawson's homeless respondents, the muscular, working-class body of John McClane becomes symbolic of opposition to the *status quo*, since he is marginalised from his professional life and can only achieve his goals through unorthodox, physical means, by positioning himself outside and in opposition to it. This concept of physical violence in the film as symbolic of anti-oppressive struggle fits with Bourdieu's (1993) assertion

that labour-power and fighting strength are sometimes the only resources available to the dominated classes. Like Tasker, Fiske and Dawson argue that the representations of violent masculinity with which disenfranchised men can identify must contain markers of ethnic, class, age or national difference by which they are distinguished from the *status quo* and that these must be portrayed, not as natural essences, but as structural agents of power and disempowerment. They claim that:

Symbolic violence is a concrete performance of social inequality, and its popularity suggests that it can offer the subordinated both a representation of their own fighting ability and an articulation of their resentment toward the social order that oppresses them (Fiske and Dawson 1996 p304).

Fiske and Dawson point to other documented examples whereby the subordinate and marginalised "exploit the flexibility of the dominant system (linguistic, cultural, or social) and turn it, at times, to their own advantage" (ibid. p315). For example, similar engagements have been observed in the case of young urban Aboriginals in Australia watching old Westerns on television, whereby their viewing pleasures are derived primarily from scenes in which the Indians attack the homesteaders (Hodge and Tripp 1986). Likewise, African Americans have been observed to read the violence in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show as representing Indian genocide that paralleled their own history (Lipsitz 1990). In Fiske and Dawson's study, the shelter supervisor told of an almost identical practice among Homeless Native Americans: when watching Westerns in the shelter they would switch off the VCR at the moment of the Indians' victory.

In these examples, it is important to note that the temporary moments or scenes of violence that are read by certain audiences as symbolic of their own (people's) struggles operate primarily along the axes of class and ethnicity, as opposed to gender. Thus, while Fiske and Dawson's study supports Tasker's contention that heroic masculinities are not always or necessarily synonymous with power, McClane's positioning outside or in opposition to the *status quo* is understood by these men as subversive of class relations rather than of gender norms. Although the researchers show that male violence in action films can be read in subversive or anti-hegemonic ways by socially-excluded men, they make the crucial point that, "Representations of violence may well offer potentially progressive meanings in class or racial politics but repressive ones in those of gender

(ibid. p308)." This observation points to the importance of acknowledging Saco's multiple subject positionings and the sometimes ideologically contradictory ways in which they might operate. Fiske and Dawson's study thus begs important questions regarding how both working-class and middle-class men might engage with the working-class, criminal or socially-excluded masculinities analysed in this study, whereby the (anti)hero is still white but is no longer middle-class, positioned within the dominant society or on the 'right side of the law'.

Whether, like Fiske and Dawson's respondents, Irish working-class or unemployed male audiences identify in films such as *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof*, *Intermission* or *Adam and Paul* a sense of resentment toward and rebellion against the social order that oppresses them is thus a key question of this study. Cognisant of the claims made by Monk (2000) and Giroux and Szeman (2001), who argue that the ostensibly subversive or anti-authoritarian masculinities on display in films such as *Fight Club* and the British male-oriented films of the 1990s serve to reinforce rather than to challenge the *status quo* from the point of view of gender (relations), this study asks what pleasures the contemporary crime and gangster-themed films of Irish contemporary cinema produce for their young male audiences, and whether significant differences emerge in terms of the type of engagements observed among working-class and middle-class men. The study explores whether and how the masculinities on display are perceived as having relevance to or articulating the audiences' experiences as men (or as working-class men or middle-class men), for example whether they are understood as "protest masculinities" (Connell 1995), as self-knowing parodies of working-class machismo, as an ironic political response to consumer capitalism, as articulating anxieties about female power and masculine identity or indeed as something entirely different.

In Ireland, the recent under-performance of boys in the Leaving Certificate results has been attributed to the prevalence of the laddish culture to which young men are exposed⁵. Fiske and Dawson's study demonstrates that it is easy to be concerned about how laddish

⁵ See "'Lad' ethos blamed for gender gap in Leaving' in *The Irish Independent*, 16th August 2001.

images of masculinity affect young men but that such an approach situates the 'problem' with the media and the texts they produce, ignoring the fact that audiences are also part of the social world that produces these texts. As has been argued by a number of theorists (Gauntlett 2002, Beynon 2002), mediated laddism has evolved in tandem with a number of wider social and cultural shifts. Fiske and Dawson claim that studies which seek to determine the effects of media violence on audiences ignore the fact that inequitable social policies produce violent societies which, in turn, produce and create a demand for violent entertainment media. In the same way, to examine the *effects* of images of criminal, socially-excluded or anti-authoritarian masculinities on the young male audience is to overlook the social discourses on masculinity that currently circulate in the public sphere and the various ways in which male audiences might be using these images and narratives to make sense of their own experiences as male, white/black, working-class/middle-class in a changing gender and economic order.

Examining the meanings that these texts generate and the pleasures they afford provides insights into important discursive practices surrounding masculinity and gender. This approach circumvents the constraints imposed by effects models and their attendant dichotomisation of reality and fiction. The responses observed among Fiske and Dawson's study participants indicate that fantasy need not be seen as the antithesis of reality but rather as an integral aspect of it. Importantly, Fiske and Dawson reject Blumler and Katz's (1974) 'uses and gratifications' model since they do not agree that audiences' social/material needs are ultimately gratified by their media use:

Our study suggests that media use articulates and clarifies social needs but in no way gratifies them. The homeless men's sense of unjust social deprivation was validated and confirmed by their watching of *Die Hard*, certainly not assuaged by it (Fiske and Dawson 1996 p310).

According to Beynon:

...masculinity as it is enacted is a mixture of the situation and previous experience and always has an imagined element because 'how men would like to be has obvious implications for the ways in which they act in everyday life' (Roper and Tosh, 1991: 14) (Beynon 2002 p64).

Conversely, however, how men act in everyday life can also have implications for how they would like to be. What is of interest here, therefore, is how audiences use or situate

the films they watch in relation to "wider gender scripts" (Nixon 1997 p314) and discourses on masculinity.

4.5 Gangsters, Boxers, Kung-Fu Fighters and Action Heroes: Exploring Multiple Pleasures and Identifications

Recently, Joanne Lacey (2002) has examined the appeal of *The Sopranos* to a British male audience. Although this work relates exclusively to a television genre, it is of relevance to the present research given its focus on the male audience and how men make use of *The Sopranos* to understand their own masculinity. Using individual and group interviews with ten British men (aged 16 - 65), Lacey asks how men's investments in media texts negotiate the boundaries between their psychological/emotional states and social existence. She models her approach on that of British film researcher, Thomas Austin, who argues for an integrated approach that looks at industry audience figures, the reception and reviews around the media text in the press and on television and empirical audience research. Lacey uses newspaper reports to speculate that the cult audience for *The Sopranos* is largely middle-class, which, in turn, influences her selection of respondents.⁶ Her study looks primarily at the male audience's relationship to American television drama, the structure of men's lives today (their negotiation of codes of work, family, leisure, and the relationship between masculinity and responsibility) and the appeal of the Italian-American gangster as a signifier of masculine power, control and protection.

Lacey's findings indicate that the primary appeal of *The Sopranos* is its quality. All of her respondents were familiar with the gangster genre and demonstrated detailed mob "cultural capital". For example, her interviewees gave detailed accounts of the similarities and differences between *The Sopranos* and *The Godfather*: "They know their American mobsters and they know where and how Tony fits (Lacey 2002 p99)." It is possible that the sophistication of the readings elicited is partly attributable to the fact that four of Lacey's respondents were students and one was a university lecturer. Another significant aspect of the programme's appeal is that it continues to represent the iconography of Italian-American culture and mob masculinity, which the British respondents considered to be much more glamorous than the eastend gangsters of *Lock Stock and Two Smoking*

⁶ With one exception, all Lacey's respondents were middle-class and/or employed in middle-class professional jobs.

Barrels. According to one respondent (Roger), "This was a good show, something more serious, not in a lad's mag kind of way (Lacey 2002)". Thus a considerable feature of the (middle-class) audience's pleasure was derived from familiarity with the genre and the ability to discuss it in the context of gangster films such as *Goodfellas* and *The Godfather* trilogy.

What is most interesting about Lacey's findings, however, is that all her respondents used the programme to mediate the realities of their everyday lives, depending on their age and varying work / family commitments. For these men, *The Sopranos* provided both the escapism and the regular, intense involvement associated with soap opera, as well as the opportunity to discuss storylines and characters with friends and colleagues. Interestingly, however, they related to the programme and its characters in different ways. The 16-18 year olds, although they did not feel alienated by the narrative centrality of a middle-aged man in crisis, identified more readily with the show's younger characters such as Meadow and Livia, and they considered Christopher, who is generally thought to represent a new, more violent and less moral mafia, to be cool. They were also more enticed by the fantasy of living the mobster life, although they expressed concern about the violence that such a lifestyle would, in reality, entail. The 24-year old was particularly attracted to *The Sopranos* homosocial spaces, such as the Bada Bing! club, which he felt reflected his own sense of loss of a heterosexual "lads culture" in Brighton. Thus the respondents demonstrated a strong awareness of their reasons for liking the programme, which were, on the whole, connected to the material realities of their lives as men.

The older respondents identified most closely with Tony and with the drudgeries and tensions of his everyday life. They often sympathised / empathised with the pressures of his working environment, on the one hand, and the intensity of his family obligations, on the other, and saw him as a man trying to do his best in a difficult world. According to one interviewee, "The Sopranos have as much of the Simpsons about them as the Corleones, and Tony is often as much like Homer as he is Vito (Derek) (Lacey 2002 p102)." Like Tony, these men had the highest levels of professional and family

responsibility, had experienced the most change in their lives and had clearly had the most difficulty in coming to terms with these changes. One respondent (Rodger, 35), who identified strongly with Tony's work and family pressures, commented:

I'd like to see [Tony] find a way out, away from the expectations of his family, of everyone. I'd like to see him figure out who the fuck he wants to be, to do what he wants to so that he can say 'fuck you'. I'd like the same for myself (ibid. p103).

Lacey concludes that, "Tony Soprano functions as a cipher for the lived contradictions of the British middle-aged, or middle-aging, middle-management lifestyle but with the escapist fantasies attached to Mafia masculinity (ibid. p100)". Taken together, Lacey's and Fiske and Dawson's studies illustrate the crucial role played by both social class and age in terms of how viewers relate certain narratives and male characters to their own identities and experiences. Moreover, these qualitative studies provoke further important questions, such as how working-class men might engage with *The Sopranos* or how middle-class businessmen interpret Bruce Willis' anti-authoritarian "masculinity" (Tasker 1993). Lacey's cross-generational analysis provides a particularly interesting insight into the different investments that men of different ages make in the text, depending on their home, work and family circumstances.

The value in both of these studies is that, while they identify disparate and sometimes counter-readings of specific texts, they do not dislocate these readings from the material, emotional and psychological lives of their audiences. According to Miller and Philo (2001), "The [encoding / decoding] model suggests - and crucially has been widely taken to suggest - that it is the meanings of texts which are "negotiated" rather than meanings about reality." They claim that the shift from exploring the relationship between textual reception and reality to examining the reception of texts alone has estranged media studies from the material world. Both Lacey's and Fiske and Dawson's approaches are cognisant of the need to tease out the - often simultaneous and overlapping - engagements of the audience with the text-as-text and with the text as (re)producing reality or what Fiske (1987 p21) refers to as "the dominant sense of reality". They support the view in media studies that media consumption is an ideological process, whereby audiences do

political work (Morley 1980) as well as referential, ludic and aesthetic work (Livingstone 1990), and that viewers add value to what they watch (Morley 1989 p23).

Mary Ellen Brown's (1996) study of *Twin Peaks* is interesting in this context because it addresses the self-knowingness and performativity of both media texts and audiences, without denying that reading strategies are ideological in the sense that they are shaped by lived experience and by individual identity. Brown's respondents engaged in ludic and playful work, such as willingly "being fooled", and in "surface strategies" such as taking pleasure in the technical aspects of the production, as well in processes of intellectualisation and identification (the "That's me!" factor). However, Brown's insistence on separating out postmodern or nomadic reading strategies - based on performance, style and pleasure - as unrelated to reality, from 'realistic' reading strategies, or those which relate to 'real life', effectively denies that ludic reception work also belongs to an ideological reality. In a recent Irish study with 15-17 year-old males (Ging 2005), focus-group participants often vocalised this type of ludic work, by commenting humourously or sarcastically about certain images, imposing their own meanings on images, parodying scenes from advertisements or films and so forth. These performances of reception, however, constituted an important aspect of the findings: they demonstrated, in particular, the perceived need of the young men to perform their responses to the text, frequently as a means of policing and (re)negotiating the acceptable boundaries of masculinity and sexuality.

The idea that audiences of popular media add value to what they consume is strongly supported by Robbins and Cohen's (1978) study of working-class youth culture in North London, which charts the rise and fall of the Black Horse disco on a working-class estate. As part of the study, the researchers document their respondents' fascination with Bruce Lee and *kung fu* movies, which, they argue, has less to do with Lee's character or the fact that he presents a new and exotic fighting style but rather is attributable to the fact that the content of these movies "goes side by side with their unconscious recognition of its narrative style or 'grammar', as one which is identical with their own (Robbins and Cohen

1978 p98)". Like Bruce Lee in movies such as *Fist of Fury*, these young men find themselves caught up in a social system which they neither understand nor control:

But unlike the heroes of the Western, gangster or fantasy stories (which in movie or comic form constitute these kids' staple cultural diet), Bruce Lee shuns the advanced weaponry of 'the Man' to fight back, just as he scorns ideological ruses. He takes on the technology of 'the system' armed with nothing but his fists, and his superior techniques of body control. And unlike these kids, he manages to salvage victory out of defeat (ibid. p96).

Robbins and Cohen dismiss moral panics about the effects of media violence on working-class youths, claiming that what is in play is the linkage or correspondence of two distinct forms of "collective representation", namely oral tradition in working-class culture and some media genres: "It becomes evident from this that such lads readily draw on the resources of the mass media where it supports their imaginative capacities as story-tellers of their own lives (ibid. p101)." Robbins and Cohen's ethnographic study suggests that certain media texts produce different pleasures and semiotic resources for different socio-economic groups. Like Fiske and Dawson, they challenge the notion that action movies necessarily endorse the hegemony of white, middle-class masculinity, by exploring the ways in which working-class and socially-excluded men use these narratives and characters to articulate their own experiences and struggles.

Similarly, Valerie Walkerdine's (1986) study of working-class family watching *Rocky* indicates that the machismo and violence on display offers a range of different pleasures and meanings, some of which prioritise a class-based reading of male powerlessness over a gender-based reading that connotes male power and privilege. Although initially repulsed by the violence of *Rocky* and by the father's pleasure in the "gut-churning horror of the constant replay (ibid. p169)", Walkerdine experiences a radical shift in terms of her response to the film by taking up the subject position of working-class woman:

And at that moment I recognised something that took me far beyond the pseudo-sophistication of condemning its macho sexism, its stereotyped portrayals. The film brought me up against such memories of pain and struggle and class that it made me cry...I too wanted Rocky to win. Indeed, I *was* Rocky - struggling, fighting, crying to get out (ibid. p169).

Walkerdine's own engagement with the text, which she considers to be as relevant as the responses of the Cole family whom she is observing, is testament to Ellis' (1982)

contention that processes of identification and desire are dynamic and fluid, and can transgress gender(ed) boundaries. Moreover, her psychic alignment with Rocky as fighter supports Fiske and Dawson's claim that the mediated enactment of violence can function as a symbol for other, more complex forms of struggle. Like Fiske and Dawson, Walkerdine suggests that portrayals of physical violence carry particular significance for working-class men, who derive from the spectacle of fighting and winning a sense of the possibility of overcoming adversity: "The fantasy of the fighter is the fantasy of a working-class male omnipotence over the forces of humiliating oppression which mutilate and break the body in *manual* labour (Walkerdine 1986 p173)." She contends that, like Mr. Cole, Rocky is a small man in the world, but he struggles to become a big man within his family and immediate community. For both Rocky and Mr. Cole, therefore, fighting, or at least the equation of power with manifestations or threats of physical strength, represents the only available means of negotiating and challenging one's situation:

Fighting can be turned into a celebration of masculinity, but its basis is in oppression. This should also be understood, as in *Rocky*, as the desperate retreat to the body, because the 'way out', of becoming bourgeois through the mind is not open to Mr. Cole (ibid. p181).

Walkerdine thus rejects the feminist / liberal anti-sexist discourse which views *Rocky* as a celebratory display of violence and machismo in favour of a more sympathetic, class-based reading, whereby "masculinity" is understood both as an expression of oppression and the desire to overcome it. Her approach is of particular interest here because, although she identifies the working-class male spectator as potentially belonging to a specific "interpretive community" (Fish 1980), she also challenges the notion that films can produce readings which 'fix' the subject. By considering spectators' psychical realities as well as the material and historical conditions which have shaped them, she is able to regard viewing as constituting:

...a point of dynamic intersection, the production of a new sign articulated through the plays of significance of the film and those which already articulate the subject. This sort of approach should make it possible to deal with the issue of specific readings, and the location of readers/viewers, without collapsing into essentialism (ibid. p189)."

Thus, while factors such as class, ethnicity and gender play a crucial role in reception, they are considered in terms of how they intersect with individual psychological subjects, in other words in terms of "what those relations *mean to them*" (ibid. p190).

Clearly, this type of approach has certain limitations, most notably the problem of "how to take adequate account of the psychical reality of both observer and observed (ibid. p192)." According to Walkerdine, this necessitates a disruption of the line that is usually drawn between fantasy and reality, since fantasy is as much a part of everyday life, relationships and power relations as it is a constituent of film viewing. Similarly, Thomas Newkirk's (2002) work on media use and literacy among boys locates questions of media use and reception within broader social and cultural practices. Newkirk shows that, rather than mimic, his respondents most often transform, recombine, and participate in the story lines they borrow from media culture and that these practices improve rather than impair their writing skills. Such approaches are underpinned by the idea that the consumption of mediated fantasies is an important part of everyday reality, and relates back to the point that fantasy (how men would like to be) not only impacts upon how men act in everyday life (Roper and Tosh 1991) but, conversely, how men act in everyday life also impacts upon fantasy (how men would like to be). Rather than looking at effects, therefore, Walkerdine is concerned with "the effectivity of filmic representations within the lived relations of domestic practices - signifying and discursive practices which are historically constituted and regulated (ibid. p189)."

4.6 Challenges to Pleasure and the Active Audience

As the research outlined above indicates, the reception-oriented work instigated by Stuart Hall and David Morley in the 1970s and 1980s, and advanced, in particular, by feminist theorists such as Ang (1985, 1989), Brown (1994, 1996), Radway (1987), Hobson (1982, 1989) and Walkerdine (1986), suggests that audiences are active in negotiating, subverting and/or rejecting the dominant ideological messages encoded into media texts. In addition to this, some of the recent research conducted in the area of fandom and fan cultures (Jenkins 1992, Hills 2001) explores not only the ability of audiences to read texts 'against the grain' but also to engage in practices of subversive (re)construction, whereby 'fan writing communities' (Jenkins 1992) engage in 'slash fiction' on internet websites⁷. The existence of such activities strongly supports Fiske's concept of the tertiary text, whereby the meaning-making process continues after the viewing event, and Morley's (1989 p23) contention that audiences add significant value to the texts that they watch.

Theories which conceptualise (media) audiences as active and autonomous consumers of mediated images are frequently underpinned by an understanding of viewers as increasingly sophisticated, media-literate or culturally-competent. The increasing levels of parody, pastiche, intertextuality and self-reflexivity at work in contemporary cinema, music videos, digital games and advertising suggest that audiences, in particular young audiences, have become more skilled connoisseurs of authorial intention. According to MacKeogh (2002), while dominant public discourse around youth and the media stresses vulnerability, television positions young people as a sophisticated audience, addressing them as "thinking, discerning adults". This view of the audience would also appear to be supported by increased levels of extra-diegetic knowledge facilitated by Internet sites, specialist magazines and DVD 'extras' that inform audiences about how texts are written and produced. However, while the practices of fandom described by Jenkins (1992)

⁷ 'Slash fiction' is fan fiction focussing on same-sex relationships. "Slash" refers to the convention of employing a stroke or slash to signify a same-sex relationship between two characters. The practice originated in *Star Trek* fan fiction with Kirk and Spock stories. Sexual activity may or may not occur during the story but at least one character must realise that he or she is attracted to the other. Now there is a considerable amount of female/female slash fiction available, much of which revolves around *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (with Xena/Gabrielle or Xena/Callisto and Buffy/Willow or Buffy/Faith combinations). See Jenkins (1992 p185-222) discussion of slash fiction and the fan-writing community.

suggest a strong awareness of the ideological functioning of certain texts, some commentators claim that there is insufficient evidence to support the argument that increased media literacy (insofar as it refers to audiences' specialist knowledge of a genre and/or ability to recognise intertextual references) is coterminous with an ability to deconstruct media in ideological terms.

According to Judith Mayne, reception studies has thus been problematised by the “temptation to see any response that differs slightly from what is assumed to be the norm or the ideal as necessarily radical and contestatory” (Mayne 2002 p38). She argues that the either/or dichotomy which underpins claims of ideological domination, on the one hand, and ideological resistance, on the other, has created an unhelpful duality:

Both positions ascribe an unqualified power to the text, on the one hand, and social defined readers/viewers on the other. The problem in each case is that the activity of making meaning is assumed to reside in one single source – either the cinematic apparatus, or the socially contextualised viewer’ (Mayne 2002 p40).

As Mayne has argued, rather than illustrating that oppositional or negotiated readings are possible, these examples serve to show that oppositional or negotiated readings are, in fact, the norm. Importantly, they indicate that non-preferred readings are by no means synonymous with ideological resistance: that Lacey’s respondents picked up on the masculinity-in-crisis subtext of *The Sopranos* may in fact signal little more than their prioritising of a more recent variant of hegemonic masculinity (the male as victim of feminism) over another, more traditional one. Although the ways in which fictional violence relates to viewers’ lives may be a lot more complex than, for example, the endorsement of violent behaviour, the extent to which “variant decodings represent liberating pleasures and social empowerment” (Denski and Sholle 1992 p59) requires further, more rigorous investigation. Moreover, the apparent absence of irony as a reading strategy (Hutcheon 1994) among the participants in this study suggests that variant decodings can, in some instances, be more repressive than intended by the text, as is the case, for example when camp parody is (mis)interpreted as straight machismo.

According to David Miller and Greg Philo, many theorists:

...on discovering that people have different views about the world...mistakenly advance the thesis that texts have no fixed meanings and reject concepts such as media power and influence (Miller and Philo 2001, internet source).

They are critical of what they perceive as a tendency among critical theorists to rely "on explicit assumptions (and statements) about media power and the reproduction of ideologies, even though they have tended, when discussing violence, to go along with the argument about audience 'activity' (Miller and Philo 1996 p18)." The researchers claim that these contradictory conceptualisations of media influence, on the one hand, and audience resistance, on the other, produce the impression that audiences are passive victims of a manipulative press and news media but active interpreters of (violent) entertainment. David Morley has also criticised the way in which his own results have been applied to subsequent studies, claiming that reception studies has been taken to be "documenting the total absence of media influence, in the 'semiotic democracy' of post-modern pluralism" (Morley 1997 p125). However, the effects research that has attempted to determine (the extent of) a correlation between television viewing and the degree to which children form stereotypical notions of gender (Cheles-Miller 1975, Frueh and McGhee 1975, McGhee, 1975, McGhee and Frueh 1980, Meyer 198, Morgan 1982, Perloff 1977, Zuckerman, Singer, and Singer 1980) has been either inconclusive or has been able to show only very modest associations between viewing and the internalisation of sex-role stereotypes (Craig 1992). According to Craig, experimental studies conducted by Barkley, Ullman, Otto and Brecht (1977), Cobb, Stevens-Long and Goldstein (1982), Cordua, McGraw and Drabman (1979), Drabman, Robertson, Patterson, Jarvie, Hammer and Cordua (1981) and Miller and Reeves (1976) are also inconclusive.

Stan Denski and David Sholle's (1992) study of gender performance in heavy metal is interesting in the context of this discussion, given that it is one of few empirical reception studies whose findings challenge the oppositional potential of popular media, which they suggest may have been "significantly overestimated in these recent reformulations (ibid. p42)." Using a performative theory of gender as a framework, they examine how the representation and construction of masculinity in the subgenre of heavy metal music known as "glam metal" is understood by the genre's fans, and ask whether glam metal

performance is best understood as a challenge to or embodiment of dominant gender relations. Interested in this particular genre's apparently contradictory mix of macho "cockrock" and feminine elements, such as the romantic, ballad-like compositions and the wearing of jewelry, make-up, long hair and low-slung pants, the researchers ask how and why the adolescent heterosexual male audience "identifies with performers who appear to take up the stylistic marks of the feminine (ibid. p46)".

While they acknowledge the need for further empirical research, Denski and Sholle conclude that the gender performances which underpin heavy metal fall short of the subversive discourse of drag. On the contrary, they argue that, for the male audience, the incorporation of feminine dress codes into the performance serves the purpose of overcoming a (male, adolescent) fear of the feminine:

The feminized appearance of heavy metal bands seems then not to stand as signification of solidarity with feminism and gay rights (a possible "resistant" reading); rather, it is, at the simplest level, a way for straight white performers to inject an element of flamboyance into their performances. At a deeper level, it is a complex practice that at once expresses both a rebellion against straight societal and parental rules, and offers a response to feminine power. By taking the feminine into itself, heavy metal disavows the need for women, thus overcoming the fear of exercising desire (ibid. p54-55).

Although they concede that media receivers are capable of constructing various responses to a given text, they are sceptical about the extent to which "these variant decodings represent liberating pleasures and social empowerment (ibid. p59)."

Denski and Sholle conclude that:

...for all its elaborate posturing and outrageous theatrics, heavy metal's appropriation of feminine gender signs fails to offer a meaningful challenge to the socially constructed core identity of binary sex, offering instead a thinly disguised reproduction of traditional masculine roles of power and domination presented in the context of an aggressive heterosexuality (ibid. p59).

Although they draw on the findings of separate and ongoing ethnographies of musicians and audiences, which involve extensive reviews of fanzines and interviews with musicians and fans, their findings - as they are presented here - derive predominantly

from textual analysis, and rely heavily on psychoanalytic feminist theories such as those of Kaplan (1987) to explain the function of male masquerade. Citing Kaplan, they argue that unlike female masquerade, which functions to mask the absence of a lack (of the phallus), male masquerade in heavy metal denies the possibility of lack, and renders the feminine non-male rather than Other. Only two interviews, which are connected to the larger projects they mention, were conducted with heavy metal fans for the purpose of the chapter in question and, although the opinions expressed by these respondents support their contention that heavy metal and glam metal in particular are not "expressive of a resistant parody of straight heterosexuality (ibid. p47)", their description of the world of heavy metal fandom as "male, white, suburban, inert" and of its fans as largely apolitical, working-class and alienated clearly requires further supporting evidence.

4.7 Conclusion

This Chapter illustrates that the literature on male spectatorship, with its configuration of the audience as a hypothetical psychoanalytic construct (Gauntlett 2002 p40) and its imposition of universal meanings on particular viewing situations (Walkerdine 1986), bears little relation to how meaning is generated in socially-specific contexts of reception and "how this sense is incorporated into an existing fantasy-structure (ibid. p190)." However, although a number of empirical studies of the male audience are used to demonstrate that spectators are active readers of films, this acknowledgement of audience agency is underpinned by a recognition of the ideological nature of pleasure, performativity and fantasy in reading strategies. Miller and Philo (2001) have argued that the shift from exploring the relationship between textual reception and reality to examining the reception of texts in themselves has estranged media studies from the material world. Similarly, Meaghan Morris (1990) claims that theorists such as Fiske (1987, 1991), who argues that postmodern texts allow the audience to consume images creatively and autonomously, conceptualise the audience as impervious to ideological influence.

The studies by Walkerdine, Robbins and Cohen, Fiske and Dawson and Lacey are described in detail not simply because they are the only available ones that address male audiences of film, but also because, taken together, they demonstrate that practices of textual reception and reality cannot be separated, since they are both interrelated aspects of lived experience. These studies also suggest that viewers derive a broad range of meanings and pleasures from viewing particular films: although these readings may not demonstrate an awareness of or resistance to the 'dominant ideological message' or 'preferred reading', they are nonetheless ideological in the sense that they are generated or emerge as a result of the complex constellation of social, historical and individual/psychical factors that articulate the subject at a given point in time. The empirical findings outlined here suggest that images are never meaning-free (Morris 1990), but they also enable us to consider spectatorship from the perspective that films are rarely impervious to the ideological influence of audiences.

This study acknowledges the role of pleasure, performativity and fantasy in reading strategies (Brown 1996), but does not accept that such practices render media texts unideological. It also recognises that there are often simultaneous and overlapping engagements of the audience with the text-as-text and with the text as (re)producing reality or what Fiske (1987 p21) refers to as "the dominant sense of reality". Although Brookey and Westerfelhaus' (2002) interpret *Fight Club* as an exploration of homoeroticism, many of the participants in a recent study conducted with male Irish teenagers (Ging 2005) felt that the film had more to say about the realities of male violence and fighting in Irish towns, cities and suburbs. What much of the psychoanalytic and feminist textual analysis of film overlooks, therefore, is the diverse way in which films are viewed and used by their equally diverse audiences as part of everyday social interaction, for example as a means of processing and negotiating male group dynamics (Robbins and Cohen 1978). Assuming that audiences interpret and use media texts in radically different ways, as the literature asserts, the key question in this study is not how images of male disaffection and machismo affect viewers but rather how these images and narratives make sense to viewers, and how they might relate them to their lived experiences and to a sense of their own identities as men.

Chapter 5 - Methodology

5.1 Introduction

Before the introduction of genre criticism to film studies, it was commonplace to analyse a given film or body of films from either an *auteurist* perspective or from the point of view of “film as social document” (Ryall 1978). Ryall developed a new model of genre analysis, which distinguished genre criticism from earlier approaches by examining the relationship between art product, source and audience. According to this triangular model, all three factors constitute moments in the production of the text and are dynamically interdependent. However, a further, important consideration, which is omitted from this equation, is the question of social, economic, political and cultural context. More recent work on media reception, such as that undertaken by Hall (1980), Morley (1980), Hobson (1982), Radway (1987), Katz and Liebes (1986), Liebes and Katz (1990), Walkerdine (1986), Ang (1989), Frey et al. (1991), Staiger (1992, 2000) and Fiske and Dawson (1996), investigates the role of cultural texts in the production of meaning by asking how communication is related to other variables, such as class, gender, ethnicity and national identity. This suggests that it is necessary to look at the source, the text and the audience as well as at wider economic, social, historical, political and cultural factors in order to achieve a more holistic understanding of how mediated images both reflect and construct meanings at any given time in a particular society.

Although film theorists such as Tom Ryall (1978), Thomas Austin (2002) and Martin Barker (2000) have flagged the need to address film audiences in a bid to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of how meanings are generated and received, film studies remains largely preoccupied with textual analysis and with psychoanalytical theories of spectatorship that are not grounded in empirical studies of the audience. With the exception of Staiger (1992, 2000), Stacey (1994), Kuhn (2002) and Barker's (2000) study of the “implied audience” in contemporary Hollywood cinema, there is a dearth of qualitative work in film studies that addresses the audience in terms that circumvent or move beyond hypothetical frameworks derived from feminist psychoanalysis. This is

even more pertinent in relation to ethnographic studies of the male audience, which, as Chapter 4 has demonstrated, have emerged almost exclusively from disciplines such as cultural studies and media studies but remain absent in film studies (Fejes 1992).

This study brings together a combination of approaches from film studies and media studies which, when taken together as a unified interdisciplinary methodology, shift the focus from media as text or as production economy to media as practice (Couldry 2004). It uses textual and generic analysis to highlight key shifts in representational practices in Irish cinema, which it locates within wider cultural and social developments and in relation to the discourses through which these developments are mediated. As Judith Mayne (2002 p34) has warned, socially-specific practices of reception should not be regarded as a solution to the limitations of textual analysis but rather as part of the open-ended range of practices that are focused on media. As far as the audience is concerned, contemporary Irish cinema is considered not in terms of media effects but rather in terms of what this phenomenon has to do with wider social processes. According to Couldry, the analysis of media as practice “places media studies firmly within a broader sociology of action and knowledge (or if you prefer, cultural anthropology or cognitive anthropology), and sets it apart from versions of media studies formulated within the paradigm of literary criticism” (Couldry 2004, internet source). The driving question therefore becomes, to what uses are media put in social life generally.

The methodologies employed in this study depart significantly from those conventionally used in film studies, motivated, as they are, by the wider sociological concerns and debates about masculinity. While it has been necessary to start with the text in order to map out a typology of male-oriented (sub)genres and male types, the inception and propagation of the films and characters analysed here are considered very much in terms of “wider gender scripts” (Nixon 1997) and in relation to the changing practices of consumption and reception that underpin postmodern discourses on media. Consequently, the audience studies, rather than focusing exclusively on spectators’ responses to a specific film, aim to paint a much broader, more socially-contextualised picture of media-oriented practices (Couldry 2004). The study thus departs from the British audience-

research tradition, which has been heavily influenced by semiotics and whereby all questions “start from the supposed structuring properties of the text itself” (Couldry 2004) by teasing out the hidden assumptions about media effects in the light of the wider social, economic, cultural and cognitive contexts within which mediated fictions circulate. As a whole, this analysis attempts to make sense of the connections between masculinity debates in the public arena, textual analyses of the recent male-oriented and masculinity-themed films and socially-specific practices of reception which, in turn, must be considered in the context of spectators’ social, economic, cultural and psychological realities. Rather than positing audience research as antithetical to textual research, the rationale is to move beyond both paradigms and into a more sociologically-oriented model of understanding of media or what Couldry (2004, internet source) describes as “media-oriented practice, in all its looseness and openness.”

The rationale for combining textual and generic analysis with a qualitative audience reception study is twofold: firstly, it considers the hypotheses and theoretical frameworks emerging from text-based analyses and the speculative claims which they often make about audience appeal, mode of address, cultural capital and spectatorship, in the context of the social audience. Secondly, it situates the reception of a particular film within broader profiles of film use to gain broader and deeper insights into how men understand and invest in mediated images of masculinity in the contexts of their own lives and social practices. At present, both pro-feminist and anti-feminist accounts of masculinity-in-crisis are increasingly constructing a meta-discourse of problematisation around what it means to be a man. Given the ubiquity of this discourse across all forms of media, from news reports about academic underachievement, on the one hand, to self-conscious commentaries about male performance anxiety in Nick Hornby's novels, “smart films”, *Loaded* and *The Simpsons*, on the other, it is considered likely that a cycle of films which feature resistant masculinities and which articulate many of these discourses of male empowerment and disempowerment, might offer a rich source of meanings and pleasures to diverse groups of men. According to David Morley (1992), one of the most important challenges of media research is to link:

..."differential interpretations of media texts back to the socio-economic structure of society, showing how members of different groups and classes, sharing different 'cultural codes', will interpret a given message differently, not just at the personal, idiosyncratic level, but in a way 'systematically related to their socio-economic position' (ibid. p72).

Importantly, however, the socially-specific readings elicited here are not intended as retorts to the limitations of textual analysis. As film theorist Judith Mayne (2002) has pointed out, reception studies may merely serve to replicate the "ideal reader" of textual studies by giving us a reader "who seems more real because she is quoted and referred to, but who is every bit as problematic as the ideal reader" (Mayne 2002 p33) because she is mediated by the questions, analyses and narratives of the researcher. Mayne warns of the need "to be careful of the appeals that are made in the name of empirical audiences or ethnography as the truth that will set us free from the overly abstract theorisation of the past" (ibid p34). This study attempts to move beyond the text/context dichotomy by looking at media as social practice. It is conceptualised as grounded in a specific place / space in Ireland in 2004/2005 and, in this sense, it responds to Judith Mayne's call for more specific, local studies, which focus:

...less on large theories that can account for everything, and more on the play and variation that exist at particular junctures between the competing claims of film spectatorship – as the function of an apparatus, as a means of ideological control, on the one hand, and as a series of discontinuous, heterogenous, and sometimes empowering responses, on the other (ibid: 45).

According to Fiske and Dawson (1996):

There is real value in empirical data that put flesh on a theoretical skeleton and show how a macrotheory can be revealed in a particular analysis, but this is not all that such data can offer: Ethnographers must always expect to be surprised, must always expect, indeed desire, their theoretical preconceptions to be challenged and to require modification (ibid. p313).

In broader, epistemological terms, therefore, this study attempts to appropriate theories of the active audience in a film studies context, without jettisoning an understanding of cinema as ideological. In Fiske and Dawson's study, the cultural ethnographic approach adopted is seen as deviating significantly from studies which eschew the significance of

the text and construct the reader as active, autonomous and impervious to ideological influence. The authors contend that their methodology:

...takes its place alongside textual and ideological approaches, for the data it produces require analysis in the same way as do texts and ideological practices. What ethnography does is to extend the object of analysis to include socially specific practices that textual or ideological approaches often overlook (ibid p314).

A recent study on consumption and use of media by Irish 15-17-year-old males (Ging 2005) is a useful case in point, whereby none of the readings of *Fight Club* that have emerged from the film studies literature (see Chapter 2) surfaced in group discussions about the film. Instead, many of the study participants related to the film because it addressed men's frustration and the realities of male violence and fighting in Irish towns, cities and suburbs. As one participant commented, "I can identify with this [*Fight Club*] because when I'm angry or upset I put on hardcore dance music and attack my punching bag for about half an hour, it's just a way to relieve stress without physically harming anybody." In the various group discussions about violence, many participants spoke of the fear of getting beaten up as one of the main problems that young men had to contend with, and cited bullying and an inability to discuss problems as key factors in male suicide. In spite of this, there was also a certain admiration associated with being able to defend oneself. These contradictions suggest that even boys who do not want to get involved in fighting often see it as a necessary way of asserting their masculinity. For them, *Fight Club* was not interesting because of its postmodern irony (Sconce 2002), its blistering critique and simultaneous internalisation of consumer culture (Church-Gibson 2004), its masculinity-in-crisis rhetoric (Giroux and Szeman 2001) or its homoerotic subtext (Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002) but because they could relate it to a core concern in their lives, namely the allure of physical violence and, at the same time, a fear of violence and an awareness of its futility as a means to resolving conflict. Importantly, however, these readings do not refute the validity of textual analyses but rather indicate that global culture is consumed and given meaning locally, where globally circulating texts interact with local discourses (Hall 1991/1997).

Thus, by relating macro-theories of gender representation in cinema to practices of reception, it is possible, as Fiske and Dawson suggest, to extend the category of textual analysis to encompass also socially-specific readings of films. While these data alone cannot be used to generate representative or universalising theories, they can “put flesh” on existing theoretical frameworks, by revealing readings that are both supportive of and contradictory to certain hypotheses. For example, Gauntlett (2002) has argued that a generation of younger men, who accept women as equals and do not feel threatened or emasculated by social change, can have little, if any, affiliation with laddish magazines such as *Loaded* and *FHM*, since these publications are engaged in an antagonistic dialogue with feminism to which only older men can relate. However, while the majority of 15-17-year-old participants in Ging's (2005) study appeared to have little or no conscious grasp of laddism's anti-feminist backlash politics, they did not consider themselves as excluded from the target audience of men's magazines. Although only 20% claimed to be regular readers, they were nonetheless enthusiastic and uncritical about the content. Indeed, the data emerging from the focus groups indicated that discussions about lad magazines were used by teenage men as a means of publicly performing and affirming their heterosexuality, by emphasising their interest in women, beer and cars.

This chapter outlines the various methodological concerns that are at stake in linking textual analyses emerging from film studies with approaches that have typically been applied in the area of television audience research. It points toward a model according to which ideological analyses of films might also take account of film-viewing, and of the complex material and ideological factors which inform the various ways in which films make sense to the people who watch them. According to Birgitta Höijer:

...reception studies both have to deal with "text" analyses and the analysis of viewers' responses, and to relate them to each other. Also, there is an interest to take social or individual factors into account and to shed light on differences in viewers' receptions....Accordingly, reception studies run across theoretical and methodological problems which traditionally have been separate (Höijer 1990 p15).

Similarly, Hanke has claimed that:

Any theory of cultural hegemony must also take account of the cultural studies perspective on the audience, specifically, the thesis that

subordinate members of the audience are able to resist the hegemonic thrust of media culture (Hanke 1992 p186).

This study indicates that acceptance versus resistance is but one axis by which the reception process can be understood or evaluated, and argues for a more open and nuanced approach to understanding the multiple pleasures, identifications and investments that filmic masculinities offer to their male consumers. According to Couldry (2004, internet source), "we should open our lens even wider to take in the whole range of practices in which media consumption and media-related talk is embedded, including practices of avoiding or selecting out media inputs".

With such an approach in mind, this study considers the qualitative audience readings of the films under analysis in terms of contextual factors such as the national economy, the influence of national film policy, cross-textual promotional strategies and press reviews as well as the broader social and cultural worlds from which the films have evolved and into which they have been delivered. It is cognisant of the fact that what audiences do and say in relation to media cannot be separated out from the other multiple sets of practices and understandings that govern their daily lives. As Couldry (*ibid.*) argues, "We must look closely at the categorisations of practice that people make themselves". While the popularity and proliferation of a particular way of representing and discursively constructing contemporary masculinity is strongly suggestive of external cinematic influences that have, in turn, been theorised as responses to a changing social order, it is also crucial to consider that individual consumers of these texts are unlikely to carve up the social universe into the same gendered categories and frameworks as, for example, a feminist film scholar. It is only by situating film readings within sets of wider social practices that we can gain more local, intense understandings of what it means for Irish men to live in a society in which masculinity is increasingly problematised and in which conflicting discourses on masculinity circulate in the news and entertainment media.

5.2 Selecting a Category of Film Texts for Analysis

It is important to note that this study did not originate in the manner proscribed by Couldry, whereby the identification of a specific media practice or set of practices determines the shape and scope of the research. However, it is partly informed by this logic in the sense that the films under analysis are popular, they have been anchored by other practices outside of film culture, they are the result of specific policy initiatives in Irish filmmaking and they coincide with a wider social problematisation of masculinity. This is not to say that the (sub)genres categorised here are understood in this way by their audiences, that they lack appeal for female audiences or that, taken together, they constitute an homogenous typology of masculinity but rather that they represent significantly new and distinct patterns in the filmic representation of men to merit further investigation. Where the study dovetails with Couldry's schema of media as practice, therefore, is in the way in which it regards these films as related to a much wider range of discursive practices, both mediated and unmediated, through which they come to have meaning for the people who watch them. Given that the literature in Chapters 2 and 3 asserts that these films hold a particular appeal for male viewers, this study is concerned, quite simply, with determining, in the first instance, whether this holds true for different groupings of the male audience in Ireland and, secondly, what the nature of this appeal is.

The study begins with a broad examination of contemporary films which foreground issues of male power and powerlessness. Whether the masculinities on display exhibit the characteristics of the hypermasculine gangster, the angry young rebel or the self-declared victim of social progress, they are understood as, in some way, addressing or responding to the recent "social problematisation of masculinity" (Ferguson 2003). A number of key cycles of male-oriented and/or masculinity-themed films were selected because they were considered to operate in a very new and specific way in the context of the wider discourses that currently circulate about changing conceptualisations of men and masculinity: far from the confident, moisturising New Men or Metrosexual Men who underpin what McMahon (1999) refers to as an "optimistic" or "progressive" rhetoric of gender equality, the masculinities that emerge in these films appear as damaged, troubled

and/or conflicted, whether this manifests itself in overt diatribes about male victimisation or in displays of violence, machismo and bravado that restrict male characters' ability to connect emotionally with the people they love.

While fictional displays of anger, violence and machismo have been dismissed by some theorists as anachronistic or out of synch with reality, this study views contemporary cinema as significantly more tuned into the gender *zeitgeist* than such commentators contend, suggesting rather that it operates in continuous dialogue with social change, both reflecting and constructing new discourses on gender. Viewed in this light, the ostensibly contradictory discourses which celebrate gangsters, criminals and hard men as male icons in the cinema, on the one hand, and those which express "a fear of a rampant, untamed masculinity, of men running wild" (Beynon 2002 p128) in the news media, on the other, are both interrelated aspects of a wider and ongoing social and cultural dialogue about men. In epistemological terms, therefore, the textual analysis approach adopted here depends less on feminist psychoanalysis and more on an understanding of fictional images of masculinity as they relate to wider social, cultural and economic factors. While there is much to be said about the *id* and the *ego* in relation to *Fight Club*, the film's gender politics are also deeply enmeshed in a particular social and historical moment. To the extent that audiences pick up on the film's mobilisation of men's movement rhetoric, such readings are entirely dependent on familiarity with recent discourses about female power and male alienation. The cycles that were selected (the American "smart film", new gangster cinema, the British underclass film, the "male rampage" film and the teen "gross-out" comedy) are thus discussed and analysed primarily in terms of how they articulate with and respond to contemporary discourses on gender. They are also considered to be significant, however, because they have generated important debates around masculinity in film studies and elsewhere: debates which, in spite of the significant continuities that a substantial number of recent Irish films exhibit with these cycles, have not yet emerged in relation to Irish cinema. The selection of films discussed in Chapter 3, therefore, is underpinned by a trajectory from the general to the particular, whereby a cycle of contemporary Irish films is identified and analysed in the context of

themes and issues that have, to date, been addressed only in relation to American, British and other European cinemas.

For the purposes of the audience reception strand of the study, *Intermission* (2003) was selected because it is, in many ways, exemplary of the Irish cycle and because it also addresses many of the issues discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Moreover, as the highest ever grossing Irish directed and produced film (2.8 million Euros), it is likely to have had the widest reach across Irish audiences. It was on theatrical release for 18 weeks in the Republic of Ireland and played on 30 screens in the first week of its release. It premiered at number one on its rental release and is Irish video rental chain Xtravision's most rented video/DVD in a six week period ever¹. *Intermission* also won a number of Irish awards and was widely reviewed in the Irish print and broadcast media around the time of its release². As a result, the majority of participants had already seen this film, which facilitated discussions about the original viewing event (where participants saw it and with whom, what they recalled about their viewing experiences, how theatrical audiences responded to the film) as well as consideration of participants' engagement with the film, and related films and issues, in the second, more artificial context of viewing. Even those participants who had not seen the film had heard of it, and were therefore not exposed in the focus groups to an entirely unfamiliar text.

Of particular interest to the core theoretical concerns of this study was *Intermission's* promotional mode of address, which appears to target a 'lad demographic'. The video/DVD cover features favourable reviews from men's lifestyle magazines, *Maxim* and *FHM*³. A similar discursive register is also evident in the promotional address of Shimmy Marcus' *Head Rush*, whose taglines included "Would you go to Amsterdam for Charlie?", "No sex, no drugs, no rock 'n' roll - what's a boy to do?" and "Contains Foul Language, a Great Shag Scene, Bloody Violence and BP Fallon Naked!"⁴. Although the

¹ Statistics from Moira Horgan, Head of Marketing, Bord Scannán na hÉireann / the Irish Film Board.

² *Intermission* won Best Irish Film Winner, Best Director Winner, Best Supporting Actor Winner and Best Script Winner at the Irish Film & Television Awards 2003.

³ 'A comedy drama that rivals *Trainspotting* for balls, brains and back-alley wit' (*Maxim*), 'Foul-mouthed, fast-paced and funny' (*FHM*).

⁴ See <http://www.headrushthemovie.com/index.php>

gangster theme of *Head Rush* and the centrality of its male protagonists suggest a predominantly male address, producer Edwina Forkin claims that it is not specifically geared toward a male audience but rather to 15-30 year olds generally⁵. By contrast, many of the film theorists whose work is discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 operate on the premise that these types of films hold specific appeal for the male audience. Viewers' perceptions regarding the films' (gendered) mode of address thus become an important way of teasing out general attitudes on gender and media use as well as accessing the more specific discourses on masculinity that are used to make sense of the texts in question. Whether or not male viewers consider *Intermission* and other, similar films to be predominantly male-oriented and why / how, is therefore an important question that emerges in the focus group discussions.

Finally, in press reviews of *Intermission*, the film was widely compared to both *Magnolia* and *Trainspotting*. Like other films discussed in this study, such as *Head Rush* and *Adam and Paul*, *Intermission's* continuity with aspects of contemporary American and British cinema is considered to be of particular interest, since it references aesthetic elements, narrative themes, stylistic devices and indeed masculinities that can be understood both locally and globally. Unlike many of the other Irish films analysed in this cycle, however, *Intermission* features a wide variety of male characters and presents numerous, often conflicting discourses about masculinity. While some epitomise the "fucked by fate" attitudes of "smart film" described by Sconce (2002), others, such as Detective Lynch, appear to function as parodies of machismo or, in the case of Ben, as self-reflexive commentaries about a middle-class male fascination with working-class and criminal masculinities. How these various characters and discourses are understood by different viewers is one of the primary concerns of the empirical study. The screening of this film, therefore, was intended to determine whether viewers' class, location and understanding of their own masculine identities would lead to different engagements with the film's multiple characters and subplots. As such, it was also intended to stimulate a much wider debate about men and masculinity both within and beyond the media.

⁵ E-mail interview conducted with Edwina Forkin, Zanzibar Productions, on 7th September 2004.

5.3 Qualitative Audience Research Design

This study employs methodologies which have typically been applied in the area of television reception studies. It combines some quantitative elements with predominantly qualitative methods since quantitative data, while useful for the purpose of determining viewing habits and the popularity of certain texts as well as wider demographic data of participants, offer little or no insights into how or why audiences engage with or derive particular meanings and pleasures from films. The questionnaires are thus designed to elicit both qualitative and quantitative data that is used in conjunction with the transcripts from the focus-group discussions. The findings derived from these methods are then linked back to the textual analyses and theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. In this sense, the integrated approach adopted here bears some similarities to that advocated by British film researcher Thomas Austin (1999), who argues for a qualitative audience reception methodology that not only involves empirical audience research but also looks at industry audience figures and the reception and reviews around the media text in the press and on television (cited in Lacey 2002 p96). In this case, however, "reception and reviews" also incorporates the textual analyses and theoretical frameworks which have emerged in relation to the film or set of films under analysis. The approach is also somewhat similar to that adopted by Annette Kuhn (2002) in her recent study of oral accounts of film-going in 1930s Britain. Using data collected throughout the 1990s, Kuhn moves beyond the text-context dualism that tends to characterise film studies, drawing from history, contemporary records, ethnographic interviews with surviving cinema-goers and old film reviews. She thus applies a cultural-studies style ethnographic approach to the analysis of media consumption, describing her methodology as historical ethnography or 'ethno-history'. Kuhn's approach is inductive, in that it is not shaped by hypotheses or *a priori* assumptions, and the focus is both political and personal: she looks at the role of film-going in people's everyday lives but also at the way in which cinema culture was - and is - historically and socially situated.

According to Sarantakos (1993), qualitative research is characterised by an inductive logic of theory building that begins from reality, concurrent data generation, analysis and

theory verification and the ongoing development of concepts during the research process. While elements of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) 'grounded' approach are evident in the present study, it is partly shaped and directed by existing theories and hypotheses. According to Glaser and Strauss, the researcher is like a newborn person "who is not socialised in the world in which he or she is born; research for the mature researcher is a process of resocialisation" (ibid p13). This study is therefore partly grounded in the sense that the researcher is open to the possibility of eliciting entirely new findings not based on existing hypotheses. However, while the focus group interviews were flexibly designed to accommodate spontaneity (or, as Fiske and Dawson put it, to allow the researcher to "be surprised"), they were also informed by a number of guiding questions whose intention was to determine whether and to what extent the appeal of *Intermission* to participants could be understood in the context of the various theoretical claims about masculinity, spectatorship, cultural competence and mode of address that have emerged from the literature.

Sarantakos also stresses that qualitative theories allow for generalisation (analytic or exemplar), whereby sample units can act as typical representatives of a class or group of phenomena. However, it is important to note that qualitative research is also characterised by a rejection of the relevance of representativeness. Consequently, the researcher's findings from a cultural subgroup are not a statistical representation of the population, nor do they represent the cultural subgroup at large. Generalisations, however, are central to this approach, albeit in a different way than they are used by quantitative researchers, since they are related only to the typical cases studied and not to random theories or principles (Sarantakos 1993 p27). According to Sarantakos:

Although qualitative researchers consider generalisations to be important, they relate them to the typical cases they study, not to random theory and principles...what qualitative research claims is that such findings can be interpreted beyond the cases studied and are examples of an 'exemplar generalisation', or 'analytic generalisation' (ibid. p27).

Similarly, Fiske and Dawson claim that:

Context-specific practices of culture are not simply isolated fragments, they are, rather, *systemic*. By this we mean that they are concrete instances of a system in practice, and through their systemacity we can generalize

out, not to specific groups of people, nor to their social acts, but to the structural forces that shape the social order" (Fiske and Dawson 1996 p314-315).

In her discussion on reliability, validity and generalisability in reception analysis, Birgitta Höijer (1990) agrees that generalisation is possible but difficult in qualitative reception analysis. She quotes Kazdin (1982) to support her argument that there is no obvious correlation between the scope of the study and generalisability, who maintains that:

...the use of large numbers of subjects in research does not, by itself, ensure generalisable findings. In the vast majority of between-group investigations, results are evaluated on the basis of average group performance. The analyses do not shed light on the generality of effects among individuals (Kazdin 1982 p282 cited in Höijer 1990 p19).

Höijer concludes that to describe and explain 'real' receptions among individuals is precisely the aim of qualitative reception research, rather than statistically constructed average receptions. Difficulties may arise, however, at the level of selection (which and how many respondents to choose, how to group them, how to test them against other groups, where and how to interview them, which and how many texts to select and how to integrate them into the interviews). She maintains that, "An account of validity in reception studies should include the method for assembling the data about the reception as well as the analysis of the material" (ibid p17), listing theoretical foundations, conceptual clarity and methodological considerations as key elements in this process. There are also fundamental choices to be made with regard to the researcher-respondent relationship. One of the most difficult of these is the extent to which the researcher makes explicit the objectives of the study and, in particular his/her opinions of the texts being studied. Bogumil and Immerfall (1985 p71) have argued that it is impossible to neutralise the relationship between researcher and researched by artificial means, and that researcher should look for "transparence" by "stating openly the course and elements of the research process, and let others judge its quality" (Bogumil and Immerfall 1985 cited in Sarantakos 1993 p21). The degree to which this is possible or desirable, however, may depend on participants' attitudes, openness to cooperation and levels of education.

5.4 Selection of Research Participants

Four groups of men were selected to participate in the audience studies. Extant groups were chosen because it was considered that these groups would be used to socialising with one another and discussing films, television programmes and other aspects of popular culture. As Joseph Tobin recommends:

...if your research is on a topic that people commonly discuss with others, do group interviews. Popular media are social texts. A good portion of the pleasure and meaning we get from movies comes from talking about them” (Tobin 2000 p141).

As far as group-specific variables were concerned, the intention was to talk to men from different age groups, socio-economic backgrounds and locations with a view to determining whether, to what extent and how these factors might be seen as influential in engendering a “clustering of beliefs” (Schlesinger et al. 1998) among the groups. It was decided that selecting two groups of urban-based and two groups of rural-based men would best serve the research questions relating to issues of local, national and transnational masculine identity, while involving groups from different socio-economic backgrounds would enable the researcher to address the key concerns of the study, namely how representations of class and masculinity – and the relationship between them - were understood by these groups. Finally, although most of the participants fell within the target age bracket for the films under analysis (15-35), it was decided to involve a group of older men (aged 37-50) to determine whether or not significant cross-generational discrepancies were evident.

The urban, working-class group comprised 6 participants on a Youthreach programme, a national, government-funded education and training programme for early school leavers⁶. The Youthreach centre is located in a socially-marginalised suburb of north Co. Dublin which has experienced problems with drug abuse and unemployment since the building of an estate of high-rise flats in the late 1960s which, although intended as a model housing estate, were poorly landscaped and lacked social and recreational facilities (Somerville-Woodward 2002 p45). Initial contact was made with one of the supervisors

⁶ More information about the Youthreach programme can be found at <http://www.youthreach.ie/index.htm>

who teaches video to the group, and he arranged for several teaching slots to be given over to the screening and focus group, whereby participation was optional. Participants in this group had all grown up in roughly the same urban area, were aged between 15 and 18 with an average age of 17 and were all single. Their highest level of education at the time of data collection (2004) was the Junior Certificate⁷. These participants were used to a relatively disciplined working day and their tutors, while relaxed and very personal in their approach, were also very clearly figures of authority. Because of this, it took participants a while to relax and to distinguish the researcher from an authority figure. However, the researcher's age, gender and status as interviewer meant that power differentials were by no means eliminated.

Unlike most of the middle-class participants, who demonstrated degrees of awareness as to why an academic would be interested in masculinity and Irish cinema, these younger, working-class participants did not try to make sense of the researcher's motives. However, neither were they sceptical about the researchers' intentions: on the contrary, they were enthusiastic contributors, indicating to their supervisor that they enjoyed the discussion and asking him if I could come back again to show them another film and hear their views on it. Participants in this group were therefore the most vulnerable: on the one hand, they were the least likely to attempt to hide their feelings or impress the researcher, yet on the other they were the most likely to suffer detrimental consequences from researcher intrusion into their privacy, given the focus of the study on working-class and socially-excluded masculinities.

The rural middle-class group was made up of 5 members of the university GAA Club⁸. These participants were all students, though from different disciplines (Sports Science, Engineering, Computers), and were aged between 19 and 22. Most of these students come from a rural town approximately 70 miles north of Dublin, and one is from a small town in the South East. At the time of data collection, they lived in the student residence

⁷ The Junior Certificate is a national examination normally taken by students aged 14 -15, after 3 years of post-primary education.

⁸ The club is engaged in the indigenous games of Hurling and Gaelic Football, for whose revival and maintenance the Gaelic Athletic Association was originally established in 1884.

on campus in two adjacent apartments shared exclusively by male students. The GAA participants reported dividing their time on campus between physical training and sports practice, studying and watching films together. Along with the urban professional group, these participants were the most tightly bonded: they lived, played sport, socialised and watched films together and most of them came from roughly the same area. Initial contact was made with the Chairperson of the GAA Club, who suggested contacting another member of the club. This member then offered to organise a group of volunteers to participate. Since all of his roommates were members of the club and were from rural backgrounds, he suggested we conduct the screening and focus group in their apartment on campus. While participants in this group were friendly, relaxed and accommodating, they were somewhat skeptical about the idea of doing serious academic research on the subject of watching films and appeared at times to be making a conscious effort to keep the discussion light-hearted.

The urban middle-class group was made up of 5 university-educated men between the ages of 20 and 23, four of whom were in stable employment. This group grew up together in a relatively affluent, middle-class Dublin suburb. At the time of data collection, three were working in office jobs, one was working as a barber and one was completing his studies (BA in Communications) and working part-time. Initial contact was made by sending an e-mail to student lists looking for a participant who had a close circle of third-level-educated friends in stable employment. A student whose circle of friends overlapped considerably with that of his older brother responded, and offered to organise a small group of volunteers from this circle. Generally speaking, these participants were confident and clearly used to discussing ideas and exchanging opinions with one another. They were avid viewers and commentators on cinema, and saw nothing strange about a lecturer conducting research on masculinity and film. On the contrary, they were keen to demonstrate their ability to analyse and talk knowledgably about films, although they did not attempt in any overt way to infer the researcher's agenda. This group did not stray from the discussion topic as much as the others and they took turns to give lengthy responses to questions. They also appeared to be entirely comfortable in the presence of a

female researcher and with the classroom setting that was used to conduct the screening and focus-group discussion.

Finally the rural, unemployed group comprised 7 members of a rural Men's Group, as well as the group leader. This is a group for marginalised rural men who have become socially and geographically isolated from their families and the community through unemployment and family breakdown in a region which has been particularly adversely affected by rural depopulation and the demise of small-scale farming. The group is not an overtly politicised one, in the sense that it is not concerned with men's rights and does not espouse the anti-feminist political agenda of the New Men's Movement, as defined by Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003 p134)⁹. It is rather a support network which aims to give isolated men opportunities to increase their personal, social and technical skills and which provides a common space in which they can perform teamwork for the local community and for voluntary groups. Some of the men had girlfriends or partners but most were single. They were all involved in a community employment scheme, though one was working as a caretaker and one as a gardener at the time of data collection (2004). Most of these men had low levels of formal education, and few had completed secondary school. They were aged between 37 and 50. With the exception of one participant, who was originally from London, and another from Scotland, who said he had spent 15 years travelling, all of the participants had grown up in and still lived in the region.

Initial contact was made with the group leader, who obtained consensus from the group members for the researcher to spend a day in their drop-in centre, located in the local community centre. As it was not possible to predict who would call into the centre on that day, it was more difficult to control the number of participants in this focus group, hence the larger number of 8. The group leader was also very keen to be involved. This group was the least cohesive in the sense that its members exhibited significantly different levels of education and media literacy. There was also a much wider range of ages than in

⁹ For a detailed overview of masculinity politics, see Chapter 6 (Masculinity politics in late modernity) in Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003) and Messner (1997) *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements*.

the other groups and they had not spent their formative years together. However, they were used to working on community schemes together and came to the drop-in centre on a very regular basis (often every day) to have coffee, chat, watch television and do basic cookery courses. The presence of the group leader was extremely helpful in this focus group as he knew which participants were happy to talk once they overcame their initial shyness and which needed more space or privacy. These participants, although they displayed a certain curiosity about the research, refrained from asking questions about it. They were the least comfortable in the presence of a female researcher, although this manifested itself not in hostility or withdrawal but rather in shyness. The group leader thus acted as a crucial mediator or interpreter of participants' emotional sensibilities in the discussion.

Where possible, the screenings and focus-group interviews were held in spaces in which the groups were accustomed to meeting and socialising. In the case of the Youthreach Group, this was in a classroom where the participants normally watched videos together. In the case of the GAA Group, the screening and focus group took place in the living room of one of their campus apartments. The session with the Rural Men's Group was held in the common room where they have meetings and talks, watch television and meet to drink coffee. In the case of the Urban Professionals, a classroom in the university normally used for films studies lectures was chosen as a location. The student who responded to the e-mail appeal for volunteers arranged for the group of friends to meet after work and come to the university. Although it was considered impractical, in the context of such relatively short encounters with participants, to enter into any kind of genuinely naturalistic viewing context, attempts were made, where possible, to use familiar settings, in which participants were used to interacting as a group, and to arrange the seating accordingly. In nearly all of the groups, one member tended to dominate by steering the conversation in different directions. Where appropriate, the researcher attempted to actively involve quieter members of the group, albeit bearing in mind that these were extant groups and that the group dynamics observed in the study were probably relatively reliable indicators of the group dynamics generally.

Every attempt was made to protect the reputation of the individuals and organisations involved. As is the case in all research which entails consent in group settings, decisions had to be made with regard to how much authority should be afforded to 'gatekeepers' such as tutors or group leaders. In the case of the Youthreach Group and the Men's Group, the individuals involved were cognisant of and sensitive to the interests and vulnerabilities of participants. In the case of the GAA and Urban Professional Groups, participants volunteered on a more individual basis, whereby the person with whom initial contact was made did not have the same 'gatekeeping' function among the group. Although all the 'gatekeepers' had outlined the nature of the research and obtained consent from participants prior to the focus groups, the researcher took care to reiterate the basic objectives of the research, to ensure confidentiality and to reconfirm that participants were willing to be involved. It is important to bear in mind that Ireland is a small place and that concealing locations and identities is sometimes difficult. The names of all individuals were changed and, where it was considered appropriate, the specific names and locations of organisations were withheld. Finally, all steps of the research design and implementation were underpinned by the dictum that no participant should be sacrificed to the greater good and that each participant should benefit individually. While benefits in a study such as this are generally not tangible or immediately recognisable to participants, it is hoped that the research contributes to a body of knowledge that will influence thinking about men and masculinity in ways which are of benefit to men (and women) generally.

5.5 Questionnaire (see appendix 1)

The questionnaire consisted of four-pages featuring mainly closed (yes/no) or multiple-choice questions which were pre-coded. A number of open (qualitative) questions were also included to elicit general attitudes about film-viewing, cinema attendance and tastes and preferences. For these questions, large blank spaces were left to facilitate open-ended responses. Participants were also asked to provide information in the questionnaire relating to employment and education, which helped to construct a more detailed and reliable account of socio-economic status. Questions relating to personal information, such as age, sex, employment and education were situated toward the end of the questionnaire, as were the more qualitative questions seeking opinions, since it was anticipated that participants would find this type of questioning less invasive after they had worked through the core questions (Brown 1994). The questionnaire was designed to be part of the screening and focus group session. This was primarily for practical reasons: firstly, to ensure that questionnaires and group interview transcripts 'matched up' (in other words to avoid the possibility of having volunteers complete questionnaires beforehand and not show up for the focus group, or of having volunteers show up for the focus group who had not previously completed questionnaires); and secondly, to oversee completion of the questionnaires and to help participants with problems and questions. This was considered to be especially important in the case of the disadvantaged rural group, where the researcher had been advised that literacy problems might arise. During the screening of the film, the researcher was able to familiarise herself with the particularities of the group (dynamic) by taking observational notes as well as by reading through the completed questionnaires, from which it was possible to establish general trends in relation to cinema attendance, film consumption and personal data, and to flag unusual comments for subsequent discussion.

More specifically, by determining whether participants had seen *Intermission* and whether or not they liked it and why, the researcher was able to identify a number of recurring themes, issues and preoccupations in relation to the film. However, these did not necessarily shape the subsequent group discussions. Although recurring themes and

outstanding comments provided potential topics for discussion, whether or not they emerged in the focus group interviews depended on the flow of the conversation and how participants themselves directed it. By accommodating a certain degree of creativity, fluidity and dynamism into the focus group process, it was possible to foreground the researcher's key questions and issues as well as to allow participants' salient concerns and preoccupations to emerge. To some extent, this flexibility is informed by the qualitative approach used by Maykut and Morehouse (1994), which is based on the constant comparative method of data analysis and the presentation of findings within an interpretative-descriptive framework. Their methodology requires the researcher to frame the research questions in the form of a focus of inquiry statement. This provides initial direction on entering the field under study, and can then be broadened or narrowed as data collection progresses and salient themes in the participants' world begin to emerge.

After the focus groups, the questionnaires were analysed with a view to building more robust and detailed profiles of the focus-group participants. The open / qualitative components of the questionnaires were transcribed, coded and subsequently analysed for repetition of particular words, concepts and discourses as well for evidence of radically conflicting responses. According to Maykut and Morehouse,

Words are the way that most people come to understand their situations.
We create our world with words. We explain ourselves with words. We
defend and hide ourselves with words (ibid. 1994 p18).

Thus, the researcher's task lies in identifying and analysing recurring words, phrases, themes, topics and concepts in order to gain an understanding of the participants' world and worldview. Also of importance here are instances of silence as well as non-verbal signs such as body language and laughter. This systematic approach to the qualitative data ensures that quotes selected are representative rather than random or arbitrary utterances selected to support or refute emerging hypotheses. This data was also compared with that emerging from the focus-group transcripts, with a view to determining whether or not significant differences were evident in relation to how participants described their tastes, preferences and viewing pleasures in the private questionnaire format compared with in the public group discussion format.

5.6 Focus-Group Design

Four meetings were set up, each containing 5 - 8 participants. Each meeting lasted approximately 3 hours: it entailed a brief introductory session, completion of the questionnaire, a screening of the film *Intermission* and a focus-group discussion. It was decided to use 'extant' groups with a view to bringing together men who were used to and comfortable with socialising together. The purpose of this was to facilitate open conversation, whereby members of the groups would not feel intimidated in expressing their opinions and were more likely to discuss their responses to the film as they normally would. After a brief, informal chat to put participants at ease, they were each asked to complete a questionnaire. Participants were informed that the post-screening group discussion would be recorded, although tape-recording equipment was positioned as unobtrusively as possible. It is widely acknowledged in the literature on media reception that audiences respond differently to films depending on whether they are viewed in the cinema, at home on video, in a group or alone. While creating a certain degree of ease or 'naturalness' was by no means an attempt to efface the artificiality of the viewing event - since screenings were also intended to stimulate reflexive discussion about participants' viewing habits (outside the study context) and general attitudes and to jog their memories about texts they had already seen - it was nonetheless designed to facilitate a relaxed group dynamic, whereby viewers could feel comfortable in expressing their opinions.

A set of guiding questions were used to focus the group interview (see Appendix 2). However, the shape of the discussion was also partly determined by important comments and preferences arising from the questionnaires as well as by participants' own agendas, interests and willingness to converse without prompting. If participants identified a particular topic of interest and were content to discuss it spontaneously, they were not interrupted. The value of informal, semi-structured group interviews is supported by Shirley Prendergast and Alan Prout (1980), who interviewed teenage females about motherhood and marriage. When speaking informally, the participants discussed the tedium, loneliness and depression associated with child-rearing but when asked formally whether they felt it was a good life for a mother at home with a young child, nearly all

agreed with the hegemonic notion that it was. According to Frazer (1987), these private discourse registers (the informal discussion) are dropped in contexts where they might not be supported (the formal interview).

According to Kitzinger (1999 p33), "The idea behind the focus group method is that group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview." In this case, focus groups were chosen above individual interviews because it was considered that group discussions enabled participants to discuss films as they normally would, as well as to reflect critically upon their own responses. In a recent study with male teenagers (Ging 2005), it emerged that much of the sense-making and rating of media texts takes place in the schoolyard or in other contexts that are situated both temporally and spatially beyond the moment of consumption. This concept of the reception process as extending into post-viewing group discussions and behaviours is in keeping with Fiske's (1991) notion of the "tertiary text", and suggests that it is in informal group situations, or what Curtin and Linehan (2002 p68) refer to as "geographies of inclusion", that boys and men both perform and negotiate the rules of normative masculinity. However, in my own earlier study (Ging 2005), the fact that participants also frequently commented that they would react to certain texts differently if alone or if watching with their mothers, also indicates a degree of self-reflexivity, whereby explicit attention is drawn to the social performance of masculinity, in general, and of the male audience, in particular (as well as to participants' awareness of this process). Particularly among extant groups of men, therefore, the focus group setting is considered to be a discussion forum in which both individual opinions and group interaction elicit important findings.

5.7 Group Interviewing and the Researcher-Researched Relationship

As in other hierarchical dyads such as teacher/student and employer/employee, the researcher and the researched aren't equal, but that doesn't mean that the less powerful figure in the pair lacks the power to resist, undermine, parody, and in other ways complicate things (Tobin 2000 p143).

Qualitative audience research, in particular that which is underpinned by feminist or gender-based issues, places significant emphasis on the relationship between researcher and respondent, and draws explicit attention to the power differentials that may be caused by factors such as gender, sexuality and social class. According to Jeff Hearn (1987), "The relationship of researcher to researched, learner to learned, teacher to taught are problematic and need re/practising (not just rethinking) in ways that do not reproduce the patriarchy of disinterested positivism." However, although what Haraway (1991 p19) calls the "God-trick", namely "ways of being nowhere and claiming to see comprehensively", highlights the impossibility of objectivity, inscribing one's subjectivity into the research process entails a complex set of problematics. According to Valerie Walkerdine (1986), attempts made in humanistic forms of social science to circumvent the inevitable power dynamic between the researcher and the researched, such as reducing 'power differentials' or 'putting subjects at ease', are patronising and rarely eschew the normative and regulative nature of most therapeutically and psychoanalytically oriented research.

How to acknowledge and rigorously account for the impact that the researcher-researched relationship has on the interview findings is therefore a key problematic in feminist-oriented ethnographic research. While it is desirable to inform participants about the nature and objectives of the research, the extent to which this is, in reality, possible depends largely upon participants' familiarity with the procedures and objectives involved in this type of research. The question of subjectivity, therefore, does not only address issues of class, gender, ethnicity and age but also of how the researcher's position as 'surveillant Other' (Walkerdine 1986 p191) impacts upon the responses and behaviours of participants. Walkerdine has used the term 'recognition', derived from the

Althusserian concept of "mis-recognition", to describe an analytical process whereby the subject is placed in the historical moment, as a relation in the discursive practices described. Similarly, Seale (1998 p215) contends that the interviewer's role in the production of meanings during the interview also becomes a topic of interest. Thus the focus groups in this study were seen not as representations of the world or of reality but rather as a constituent, self-reflexive and dynamic *part* of the world they describe (Hammersley and Atkinson 1994).

Much feminist audience analysis (Radway 1987, Ang 1985, 1989, Hobson 1982, 1989, Geraghty 1991) has involved female researchers interviewing women about their reception of female-oriented texts such as melodrama, soap opera and romantic fiction. In much of the literature emerging from this work, it is clear that the researcher has developed considerable knowledge of and interest in the text in question, and can identify with respondents both as fellow women and as fellow fans. According to Oakley (1981) and Finch (1984), women talk more easily to other women. They regard subjectivity and personal involvement, traditionally perceived as unreliable and biased, to be the essential conditions under which people communicate and share personal information about their lives. However, in the case of a female researcher interviewing working-class rural men about images of masculinity, the gender and class dynamics may restrict the potential for researcher-respondent identification considerably. Maria Lohan (2000), on the other hand, engages with the idea, as documented by the literature on men's friendships (Stein 1986, Allan 1989, Nardi 1992) and espoused by many of her own respondents, that men find it easier to talk openly with women. As Lohan points out, tensions and affiliations arising from issues of gender highlight the non-neutrality of the interviewing event. However, she draws attention to the possibility that, by benefiting from certain gender norms, such as the perceived ability of men to communicate more openly with women, the researcher may well be consolidating this view of women (as more emotionally and socially adept than men) among her respondents: "It may be that, at times, as researchers we find ourselves entangled in, and possibly fortifying, the very ideas we set out to challenge" (ibid. p176).

Lohan also discusses the ways in which boundaries are co-maintained in the interview context. She points to research with 'lone fathers' by McKee and O'Brien, in which the authors noted that "the boundaries between women as 'scientific observer', confidante and sexual being are sometimes finely negotiated and often conflated" (McKee and O'Brien 1986 p158 cited in Lohan 2000 p176). A more complex picture of the interview process thus emerges, whereby the researcher is inscribed as a socially constituted agent in the research dynamic, and whereby affinities and tensions between researcher and researched may traverse complex sets of factors beyond gender alone, in which the reflexivity of the methodology extends to accommodate the notion of performance by both researcher and researched. According to Lohan, using feminist methodologies draws analytic attention to the interview process as "a site for the co-construction between researcher and researched of gender difference, the performance and maintenance of gender identities and the co-construction of reflexivity" (ibid p169). She notes that in her own study of men's use of the domestic telephone, she was "performing *multiple* gender identities in the context of the interviews which, in turn, generated different sorts of relationships with the interviewees. This was most pertinent in terms of the interviewees' age but also in terms of their socio-economic positioning" (ibid p175-176).

Rather than disavowing or attempting to eliminate the dynamic tensions that arise on account of the gender, socio-economic status and position of power held by both researcher and researched, this study considers these factors as an integral part of the methodology and of the findings. That some men might perform descriptions of their media usage (Lohan 2000) differently in the questionnaire than they would in the group situation is thus regarded as a valuable finding in itself. Likewise, the various ways in which gender, class and age might influence the performances of and dynamic between the researcher and the researched is considered to yield important insights into participants' worldviews and, by extension, into the ways in which films function within those worldviews. While, as Walkerdine contends, it is impossible to avoid the power differential inherent in the researcher-researched dynamic, it is also useful to bear in mind that the researcher also finds herself in an unfamiliar situation in which the "teacher-taught" relationship can be, at least temporarily, disrupted if and when participants

choose to invite her into their social world and to instruct or induct her into its codes and conventions.

The methodological approach adopted in this study is thus underpinned by the inscription of subjectivity into the research experience and a concept of ethnographic-oriented research as a fluid and dynamic process. However, in order to avoid slipping into what Lohan describes as a "relativist vacuum", it ensures "responsible reflexivity" (ibid. 2000: 171) by rigorously documenting and analysing participants' utterances and behaviours as discourse. As Fiske and Dawson (1996) have commented:

If no description can be objective because discourse is not, then the discursivity of the description must be recognised as part of the interpretive process, and not as part of the object to be interpreted (ibid. p313).

Qualitative audience research thus aims to examine social relations with a view to describing reality as experienced by the research participants. It studies reality from the inside and aims to understand people rather than to measure them. According to Ien Ang (1989), ethnographic research is now recognised by many as "one of the most adequate ways to learn about the differential subtleties of people's engagements with television and other media".

5.8 Data Analysis

The four focus group interviews were recorded using a tape recorder. The interviews were subsequently transcribed and the transcripts were coded to identify recurring themes and discourses. According to Seale (1998 p204), a qualitative approach "demands that researchers look closely at the way in which interviewees choose and use particular words or phrases to generate 'ideas' or representations of their social worlds" or what he refers to as "linguistic repertoire" (ibid p212). Similarly, Ien Ang contends that:

What people say or write about their experiences, preferences, habits cannot be taken entirely at face value...they should be read symptomatically. We must search for what is behind the explicitly written for the presuppositions and accepted attitudes within them (Ang 1982 p11).

Although, in this case, the themes identified were influenced by the core research questions, particular attention was paid to avoiding the registration, retrieval and more frequent use of "vivid" rather than "pallid" data (Miles and Huberman 1984 p230-231) or, as Hjort puts it, the reading of large amounts of transcribed material "as the Devil reads the Bible" (Hjort 1986 p107 cited in Höijer 1990 p16). As was the case when analysing the qualitative elements of the questionnaire, the focus-group transcripts were systematically analysed to ensure that quotes selected were representative of the participants interviewed and that radically contradictory utterances could be identified as exceptions. Supplementary fieldnotes taken during and after the focus groups provided useful information about the interviews as topics, for example the body language of the participants, their performances of masculinity and media usage and their mode of interacting with the researcher.

It is important to note that the analytic status of the interview can be approached in various different ways (Seale 1998 p204). Seale quotes the example of anthropologist Evans-Pritchard's (1940) interviews with the Nuer in southern Sudan. Due to the tribe's skills in deflecting interview questions, the interview transcripts do not serve as useful resources for discovering things about the lives of the Nuer, but rather as topics or social events in their own right. Potter and Mulkay (1985 cited in Seale 1998 p212) also stress the importance of using interview data to reveal the interpretive practices or discourses

that participants draw on to construct versions of their social universe. Participants' accounts are thus best considered not as transparent and unproblematic windows onto certain realities but rather in the context of the discursive event, whereby interviews are treated both as topic and resource (Cain and Finch 1981 cited in Seale 1998 p216). This approach to data as discourse, provided it is rigorous and systematic, frames the various factors influencing the interview dynamic not as impediments but rather as a necessary means to accessing the social worlds within which cultural meanings are generated and operate.

Of particular interest to this study are the methodologies applied by Joseph Tobin (2000) in his study of children's discussions in an Hawaiian primary school about the film *Swiss Family Robinson*. Tobin builds on the work of Morley, Radway, Hobson, Ang, Liebes and Katz, Hodge and Tripp and Buckingham but also uses the writings of Derrida and Bakhtin to deconstruct the children's utterances which, he claims, often reveal unresolved tensions or fundamental incoherences that have been patched over. He seeks out examples of aporia in the children's comments, which he describes as "sites of doubt or perplexity where the apparent coherence of a text can be unravelled" (Tobin 2000 p14) as well as enthymemes or statements that seem strange or incoherent, in order "to uncover key beliefs and assumptions held by a community of speakers" (ibid p145). Like Mayne (2002) and Höijer (1990), Tobin acknowledges the status of his participants' utterances as text, but constantly contextualises them within wider social, cultural and economic frameworks. He identifies in his transcripts citations of larger, often conflicting discourses which re-present the wider society's "intellectual confusion, ideological divisiveness, and hypocrisy about media effects" (ibid p22). Tobin contends that the relentless citationality of the children's responses is partly a form of resistance, which enables them to answer the interviewer's questions without being self-revelatory or self-incriminating: "When asked about imitative violence, the students cite popular arguments from the larger culture. When I ask them to clarify what they mean, they cite other arguments. Such is the nature of language and discourse" (ibid p27). Importantly, however, Tobin eschews a fully poststructuralist position. Rather than viewing all conversations as nothing but citation and the endless deferral of meaning, he sees the

citatoriality of the children's conversations as symptomatic of the particular questions he asks and of the contexts in which they answer. His methodological approach thus responds to Mayne's (2002) call for more specific local studies of media use and to Couldry's (2004) endorsement of a shift away from media texts and effects to explorations of media as practice.

5.9 Conclusion

This study adopts a cross-disciplinary methodological approach, which applies qualitative ethnographic techniques normally used in television research to the context of film analysis. It is partly informed by an investigation of media as practice, as proposed by Couldry (2004), in the sense that it locates filmmaking and film-viewing practices within broader economic, social and cultural contexts. However, unlike Couldry's model, where the epicenter of inquiry is the actual practices that surround particular media, this study originates from a specific set of texts, which are linked by similar representations of masculinity. While the study takes its core research questions from the film studies and media studies literatures on masculinity, it redirects these questions to local contexts and thus situates them in relation to socially-specific practices of film-viewing. The appeal of these films to male audiences is established not primarily from the empirical data (although the empirical data confirms this) but rather from a combination of intra- and extra-textual sources such as generic and thematic styles, mode of address, press reviews, box-office statistics, film policy initiatives and the film studies literature.

The qualitative empirical studies, on the other hand, were designed to provide much more detailed insights into the significance of these films as discourses on masculinity and class and the relationship between them. The research design was informed by theoretical frameworks emerging from both film studies and existing reception research with male audiences, in the sense that the researcher set out to investigate whether and to what extent factors such as class and location might influence different men's readings of film in an Irish context. However, it is also partly grounded, in the sense that the researcher comes to the research situation without pre-conceptions about the social worlds of the participants or about the pleasures and meanings which they derive from cinema. Whether or not salient differences emerged along lines of class, age, national identity or cultural competence, it was expected that the discussions would yield nonetheless significant insights into processes of reception and gender, in other words into how Irish men engage with, make sense of and derive pleasure from male-oriented and masculinity-themed films.

Although by adopting a cross-disciplinary approach, the study does not seek to bridge the gap between textual analysis and reception research, it demonstrates that important epistemological continuities can and do exist between these spheres. According to Merris Griffiths (2002), textual analysis identifies the parameters within which audience readings occur, whereby how these readings occur is a matter for further research. However, while the textual analysis literature provides a rich source of thematic concerns and theoretical frameworks by which to shape socially-situated reception work, qualitative audience research must also take account of the possibility that cinematic representations can operate and be used in socially significant ways that have not been accounted for in the textual analysis literature. Particularly in the context of Irish film studies, where cinematic representations of gender have been analysed predominantly within the broader context of national identity, this study asks whether global (or at least western) discourses on gender and class are also prevalent within our national cinema, and explores how these discourses are understood and used by members of the male audience.

Chapter 6 -

National Cinema, Transnational Masculinities: Negotiations of Gender and Nation in Film-Viewing Practices

6.1. Introduction

Critiques of the impact of globalisation on Irish filmmaking have tended to centre on the universalising influences of Hollywood narrative (Quinn 2000), the homogenisation of Irish culture, the demise of politically-motivated filmmaking (McLoone 2000) and the marginalisation of ethnic minority groups (Ging 2002). Specific attention has not been paid, however, to the impact of global media on indigenous representations of gender or of masculinity. According to R. W. Connell:

The emergence of new arenas of social relationship on a world scale creates new patterns of gender relations. Transnational corporations, international communications systems, global mass media, and international state structures (from the United Nations to the European Union) are such arenas. These institutions have their own gender regimes and may form the basis for new configurations of masculinity...Local gender orders now interact not only with the gender orders of other local societies but also with the gender order of the global arena (Connell 2005 p1804).

This chapter explores how male viewers of Irish cinema negotiate the tensions between the national, the transnational and the local from the perspective of representations of and discourses on contemporary masculinity. It presents audiences' accounts of their involvements with the masculinities of recent Irish film to demonstrate that mediated images of gender are understood not only in relation to the local or the national but also through complex intertextual engagements that exceed national boundaries.

Connell's comments, cited above, are useful in that they enable us to consider the mass media as an arena with its own gender regimes, which are clearly enmeshed with those of the (non-mediated) social world but which also present us with "new configurations of masculinity" (ibid.). In an increasingly global, franchise-led, networked and converging mediasphere, formal and aesthetic synergies across different media forms and genres have been accelerated and intensified, with the result that the boundaries between cinema, video, television, cctv, advertising, trailers and games have become increasingly blurred. With increasing conglomeration, comes

increased intertextuality (O'Donoghue 1997), whereby different media formats have learned to 'speak to one another' not only across technical and formal boundaries but also across geographical ones¹, with the result that new variants of hegemonic masculinity are becoming increasingly hybridised. As has been demonstrated above, the resistant or "anxious white male subject" described by Connell (1995 cited in Messner and Montez de Oca 2005 p1882) that appears across a range of recent cinematic (sub)genres has emerged in complex, symbiotic relation with the new images of masculinity that are visible in transnational advertising, television programmes and men's magazines. The recently released British-American co-production *Green Street* (2005), in which a young Harvard graduate becomes involved in British soccer hooliganism, is a germane example of the increased exchange value of (what were formerly) nationally-specific cultural practices and products in the new global marketplace. In the new "postmodern geography of communications processes" (Morley 1996 p318), the mass media increasingly relativise our sense of place, so that "locality is no longer seen as the center stage of life's drama" (Kirby 1989 p330 cited in Morley 1996 p336).

While Morley (ibid.) refers to the geography of communication in relation to television, processes of transnational flow and intertextuality affect all mass media, not only at the level of content and distribution but also in terms of how they are received and talked about. The chatrooms and message boards of internet fansites are key examples of spaces in which the meanings and pleasures of films are negotiated beyond geographical boundaries. Rather than obviate the need to focus on the local and the specific, however, Morley (1996 p318), citing Foucault (1980 p149) argues that:

...the "geographical imagination" and its refocusing of the relation of communications and geography, needs to be applied, as he puts it, to the "little tactics of the habitat" every bit as much as to the "great strategies of geopolitics" (1980: 149).

Thus, while examining representations of and discourses on masculinity in the context of transnational media flows is a useful indicator of the limitations of nationally-specific readings of cinema, it is also important to acknowledge that significant

¹ O'Donoghue describes the boundaries between various media formats as increasing 'leaky' and attributes this phenomenon to "increasing institutional ties between advertising, commercial media, and mass entertainment" (1997 p257-258 cited in Messner and Montez de Oca 2005 p1897).

specificities persist, at the level of production, text and reception. As Barton (2004 p112) has argued, the conscious desire to cast off the old shibboleths of Irish cinema, or what she refers to as "the culturally specific desire not to be culturally specific", in itself provides insights into changing concepts of Irish culture and identity, and into Ireland's experience of and response to globalisation. This Chapter explores how different groups of Irish men engage with the masculinities, styles and narratives of contemporary Irish cinema and how they locate their film-viewing activities within wider social and cultural practices. It illustrates how mediated fictions intersect in complex ways with both national and transnational discourses on gender and class, which are often difficult to tease apart. Set against the context of national film policy and the marketing strategies employed by the films' producers and distributors, these audience studies show that the new masculinities of Irish cinema index not only national but also local and transnational issues and concerns, and that they are understood by audiences in these terms, often simultaneously.

6.2 Mapping Media as Practice: Locating Irish film Consumption within Broader Contexts of Film and Media Use

Although the commonality of experience among small groups of men cannot be taken to represent the wider populations from which they hail, it nonetheless serves as a valuable indicator of how local taste cultures emerge and also demonstrates how films are enmeshed in wider social practices and understandings of the world. The data from the questionnaires thus provided important points of reference for the qualitative element of the study and a broader context within which the consumption of Irish films could be understood. The most significant overall finding in terms of film-viewing patterns was that all of the groups interviewed reported significantly higher levels of film-viewing at home than in the cinema, irrespective of age. This is supported by quantitative findings from a study (Ging 2005) with 15-17 year old boys, in which 30% of participants said they went to the cinema once a week, whereas 52% said they watched a video/DVD once or twice a week, and only 3% said they went to the cinema twice or more per week, compared with 21% who said they watched three or more videos/DVDs per week. These figures suggest a significant shift in the context of reception, which affects not only how and with whom people watch films but also how filmmakers conceive of their target audiences. According to Creeber (2002), these trends suggest the emergence of new cultures of reception, a phenomenon to which the film industry is already responding by adopting the styles and codes of the small screen.

Significantly, the decline in cinema attendance and increased popularity of home-viewing entails a gendered dimension. While home-viewing is clearly not restricted to groups of men, it appears that, in an increasingly gender-polarised culture, 'boys' nights in' and 'girls' nights in' are an increasingly regular feature of film-viewing practices. The majority of young participants in this study, namely those from the GAA, Youthreach and Urban Professional groups, exhibited a highly gendered understanding of film genres and audiences, whereby conventionally male-oriented genres such as action, crime, sports dramas and teen / 'gross-out' comedies were cited as favourites, with 'chick-flicks' and romances considered to be exclusively for women. These perceptions are strongly supported by the market research conducted

by screen advertising contractors such as Pearl and Dean in the UK², which shows that action, war, crime, horror and teen comedy are generally favoured by males, while romance and ‘chick-flicks’ attract larger female audiences. This was in marked contrast to the older, rural-based participants (aged 37 – 50), who saw cinema-going primarily as a family activity or a social event enjoyed by couples and who displayed much more diverse tastes in and considerably less gendered understandings of film. According to Steve Chibnall (2001), the film industry has begun to acknowledge and to respond to increasingly gendered patterns in domestic viewing contexts. He claims that the films associated with the new British gangster cycle (“gangster light”) are unsuitable as “date movies” on account of their masculinist subject matter and lack of cinematic spectacle, and are therefore consciously geared toward video/DVD. In the present study, participants’ reporting of all-male, domestic-centred viewing support this: with the exception of members of the Rural Men’s Group, almost all of the participants said they watched the films under analysis, as well as films in general, with their “mates”, i.e. male friends.

The second most pertinent overall finding is that, while American films accounted for the majority of participants’ film-viewing, British and Irish films were also mentioned. The high consumption of mainstream American films is unsurprising, given that 94% of the films shown in Irish cinemas are American (Stoneman 2005 p258). When asked in the questionnaires to list the last five films they had seen, their favourite five films from the last 6-12 months and their favourite five films ever, participants cited approximately the same number of Irish and British films. The most popular British films were *Snatch*, *Lock Stock*, *Trainspotting*, *Layer Cake* and *Mean Machine*. Although similar numbers of British and Irish film titles were cited, these trends suggest that Irish films are gaining in popularity among mainstream Irish audiences. *Intermission*, *The General*, *Adam and Paul*, *Crush Proof*, *Michael Collins*, *The Commitments*, *In the Name of the Father*, *The Butcher Boy*, *Some Mother’s Son*

² See <http://www.pearlanddean.com>, accessed June 2005. The male/female ratios provided by Pearl and Dean for a selection of romantic dramas are as follows: *Mean Girls* – 20 / 80, *Emma* – 39 / 61, *The Sweetest Thing* – 34 / 66 and *Something’s Gotta Give* – 28 / 72. The following films, however, attracted substantially higher numbers of males: *Road Trip* – 63 / 37, *Traffic* – 64 / 36, *Three Kings* – 66 / 34, *Underworld* – 69 / 31, *Narc* – 73 / 27, *Die Another Day* – 61 / 39, *Starsky & Hutch* – 60 / 40, *Mean Machine* – 69 / 31, *Casino* – 64 / 36, *2 Fast 2 Furious* – 62 / 38, *Stay Tuned* – 60 / 40 and *True Romance* – 72 / 28.

and *Inside I'm Dancing* were all cited in the 'favourites' lists. Asking participants to tick a checklist of recent American, British and Irish films also revealed that, while the American and British films pertaining to the (sub)genres discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 had been watched by most of them, Irish films such as *Intermission*, *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof*, *The General*, *I Went Down*, *Ordinary Decent Criminal*, *Veronica Guerin*, *Adam and Paul*, *Man About Dog*, *Spin the Bottle*, *About Adam* and *When Brendan Met Trudy* had also been seen in relatively high numbers. These patterns indicate that the types of films under analysis in this study, while they do not account for the entirety of participants' film-viewing, are both regularly viewed and well received. Although lower-budget and lesser marketed Irish films from the (sub)genre such as *The Halo Effect*, *Last Days in Dublin*, *Flick*, *Saltwater* and *The Actors* had only been seen by a few participants, the larger-budget films of the 'cycle', in other words those which were actively promoted and had sustained theatrical releases, had been seen by almost everyone.

This relative popularity of recent Irish films reflects the efforts of the Irish Film Board over the past ten years to place audience desires and expectations at the centre of its drive to compete commercially. As part of this policy initiative, filmmakers were encouraged to think of themselves as 'market-responsive auteurs' by considering the audience at all stages of the production process. According to Rod Stoneman, then CEO of the Irish Film, Board:

The conception of reception is part of a necessary process to take creativity away from the solipsistic ideology of self-expression. This perspective also leads to a new framework for the placement of the 'auteur' and reader in relation to the text (Stoneman 2005 p252).

Therefore many of the films which emerged under the Second Irish Film Board were made with a view to appealing to existing tastes and patterns of consumption. Importantly, Stoneman is cognisant of the fact that, "the market is a mechanism which is most efficient at fulfilling desires that it has itself created" (ibid. p259), and he readily acknowledges that "the cycle of created demand is locked into specific audience targeting, often focused on a teenage male demographic" (opt.cit.). Stoneman's account of a self-consciously audience-oriented national film policy over the past ten years provides a useful context within which to make sense of the viewer responses discussed in this chapter. Most importantly, it reveals that recent Irish

cinema has been deliberately tapping into existing audience tastes and desires, cultivated primarily from engagements with other Anglophone cinemas.

6.2.1 Discrepancies in Patterns of Consumption between Groups

While there were significant continuities across the four groups of participants interviewed, there were also considerable discrepancies. The key distinguishing factor in terms of viewing patterns and types of films watched was age, whereby the older, rural-based participants said they rarely went to the cinema, watched very few films at home and did not display much interest in films featuring gangsters, criminals or working-class urban characters. This is unsurprising, given the scarcity of cinema theatres in the region and the fact that the majority of participants in this group were over 35. The other three groups, who were all in the 15-34 age range, which accounts for approximately 75% of cinema attendance in Ireland³, reported significantly higher cinema attendance, with most of them going once a fortnight or once a month. With the exception of one participant, who went to see independent and arthouse films every week in the mobile cinema that visited the village, and another two who said they watched a DVD/video once a week, film did not play as significant a role in the daily lives of participants from the Rural men's Group as it did with the other groups.

This group cited drama, comedy, romance and westerns as their favourite genres. Alongside more recent titles, films such as *Out of Africa*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *The Mission* appeared in the favourites lists. Only one participant, who had spent many years in Scotland and was interested in *Trainspotting* because it was filmed in the area in which he had lived, cited *Snatch*, *Lock Stock and Trainspotting* as among his favourite films ever. Irish films such as *The General*, *Michael Collins* and *The Butcher Boy* were popular and, of these, *The General* was the most widely viewed, although it divided opinion considerably: while five participants listed it as among their favourite films ever, one participant disliked it because it was "too violent and disturbing" and another felt that it was "romanticising mass murderers". This group was the least cohesive or coherent in terms of film preferences and practices and exhibited the widest range of media literacies. While their age range (37-50) excludes them from the core target market for most of the (sub)genres under analysis here, it was nonetheless considered important to explore how a contemporary Irish film set in Dublin would be received by socially-excluded rural men. Although

³ See Medialive cinema audience profiles at <http://www.medialive.ie/index.html>, accessed November 2005.

discussions about films were clearly not common in the social conversations that took place between most of these men, a couple of the participants were cognisant of the current debates about men and masculinity and made some interesting comments on contemporary gender relations. Of particular interest in the focus groups was the way in which the group leader related the themes and characters of *Intermission* to wider discourses on masculinity in Ireland (see Chapter 7).

These patterns differed significantly to those of the young, urban-based participants in the Youthreach Group. When asked what types of films they liked to watch, they cited (in order of preference) comedy, action, gangster and horror as their favourite genres. However, analysis of the actual film titles they cited as their favourites revealed a strong preference for gangster / crime and underclass films with some action and comedy. The most popular titles were *Scarface*, *The Godfather*, *Goodfellas*, *White Chicks* and *Trainspotting*. Other titles mentioned were *Crush Proof*, *Mean Machine*, *Gladiator*, *Pulp Fiction*, *The General*, *Boyz n da Hood*, *Heat*, *Face Off*, *Die Hard with a Vengeance*, *Fight Club*, *Freddy Got Fingered* and *American History X*. The only 'favourite films ever' that did not coincide with the (sub)genres analysed in Chapter 2 were *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, *Spiderman 2* and *Sniper*. This group were the highest consumers of criminal and gangster films and of films which could be said to feature "protest masculinities" (Connell 1995). Dramas such as *American Beauty*, *Magnolia* and *Falling Down* were significantly less popular. As one participant commented in the questionnaire, he didn't like *American Beauty* because it is "for older people having mid-life crisis".

For this group, the most popular and frequently watched Irish films were *The General*, *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof*, *Ordinary Decent Criminal* and *Spin the Bottle*, all of which are located in Dublin and feature working-class, socially-excluded or criminal male characters. None of the group had seen any of the contemporary Irish films which feature middle-class characters, such as *Goldfish Memory*, *About Adam* or *When Brendan Met Trudy*. It emerged that both *Accelerator* and *Crushproof* were cult films among this group, in spite of the fact that they had enjoyed only short theatrical releases some 6-8 years prior to the time of data collection. Compared with the other groups interviewed, with the exception of the Rural Men's Group, these participants were relatively infrequent cinema-goers and reported watching a lot of

films on DVD and on television. As well as more recent, mainstream releases, they also said they watched what are often considered to be classic youth, drugs or gangster films, such as *Midnight Express* (1978), *Cheech and Chong: Up in Smoke* (1978), *The Godfather* (1972), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and *Scarface* (1983) as well as more recent “classics” such as *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Trainspotting* (1996). Of the four groups in the study, the Youthreach Group were the most avid consumers of the (sub)genres under analysis here. Crime / gangster films and teen comedies, in particular, accounted for much of their viewing.

Patterns and preferences differed again in the case of the young, rural, middle-class participants from the GAA Group. This group watched by far the most films of all the study participants. While they said that they went to the cinema on average once or twice a month, almost always with girlfriends, they reported watching on average 4 or 5 films a week on DVD, video or television. These films were watched collectively in either of the two (all-male) campus apartments that they shared. They cited action, comedy, drama and thriller as their favourite genres, which was a relatively accurate account of their generic preferences judging by the individual film titles they listed as favourites. Classic Hollywood action films such as *Die Hard*, *The Last Boy Scout*, *Predator* and *The Rock* were popular. What was most striking, however, was these participants’ interest in sports-themed dramas such as *Remember the Titans*, *Miracle*, *Million Dollar Baby*, *Wimbledon* and the *Rocky* films, which featured strongly among their favourites. Dramas such as *Braveheart*, *King Arthur*, *Gladiator* and *The Shawshank Redemption* were also extremely popular.

With the exception of the *Godfather* trilogy, gangster/crime films or underclass films were not listed among the ‘favourites from the last 6-12 months’ or ‘favourite films ever’ categories. However, favourites selected from the checklist of films included *Snatch*, *Lock Stock*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Die Hard* and *Man About Dog*. The only Irish film that featured in the favourites lists of the GAA Group was *In the Name of the Father*. These young men were not familiar with either *Crush Proof* or *Accelerator*, although most had seen *The General* and *Ordinary Decent Criminal* and they had all seen *Intermission*. Three had seen *When Brendan Met Trudy*, three had seen *Man About Dog* and one had seen *About Adam*, indicating a somewhat broader,

though less intense engagement with Irish films than was evident among the Youthreach Group.

The Urban Professional Group displayed much more eclectic tastes in film than either the Youthreach Group or the GAA Group. They cited drama, comedy, action and gangster as their favourite genres and, again, this was a relatively accurate reflection of their individual title choices. While American cinema was as dominant here as among the other groups, there was much more focus on drama than on action, with films such as *Cold Mountain*, *Closer*, *Finding Neverland*, *Ray*, *Beyond the Sea*, *Big Fish*, *Romeo and Juliette*, *Thirteen Days* and *Amistad* appearing in the favourites lists. However, crime/gangster films such as *City of God*, *Oceans Twelve*, *Snatch*, *Lock Stock* and *The Usual Suspects* were also prevalent in the favourites lists, as well as *Trainspotting* and *Requiem for a Dream*. Comedies such as *Meet the Fockers*, *Garden State* and *The Life Aquatic* and epic / adventure films such as *Braveheart*, *Gladiator*, *Indiana Jones* and *Lord of the Rings* were also cited among the favourites. The checklist indicated that this group had seen more 'smart films', such as *American Beauty*, *Magnolia* and *Requiem for a Dream*, and fewer action films than the other groups.

The Urban Professional Group had also seen a wider range of Irish films than any of the other groups, including those featuring middle-class protagonists such as *Peaches*, *About Adam*, *When Brendan Met Trudy*, *Disco Pigs*, *Cowboys and Angels* and *Goldfish Memory*. Their favourite Irish films from the checklist were *Intermission*, *The General* and *Spin the Bottle*. Like the GAA and Youthreach groups, the most common non-Irish favourites they selected from the checklist were *Trainspotting*, *Snatch*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Fight Club*, *Lethal Weapon* and *Die Hard*. This group, however, appeared to be more interested in *Fight Club* than the GAA or Youthreach groups. Also, they cited *The Full Monty* and *American Beauty* as favourites, while the others did not. Although they were relatively frequent cinema-goers, this group watched more films on DVD, video or television (at least one film a week). While they reported going to the cinema mostly with friends, their domestic viewing practices were less gendered than among the GAA and Youthreach groups: they said they usually watched films at home alone, with family, with a girlfriend or sometimes with friends.

This somewhat crude, quantitative overview of film consumption indicates that, while the (sub)genres discussed in chapters 2 and 3 do not account for all of participants' film-viewing, they are nonetheless central to the film preferences and practices of most of the men interviewed. The most emblematic films from all these (sub)genres had been seen by nearly all of the participants and were, almost without exception, well received. However, although quantitative data such as this draw attention to the fact that significant differences occur between and among different male viewers, they tell us little about why and how these films are watched. The value of socially-specific qualitative analyses is that they provide contextualised insights into the uses, meanings and pleasures associated with film-viewing that cannot be accounted for by box-office figures or marketing research. The remainder of this chapter explores the qualitative findings of this study, derived mostly from the focus groups, to determine how and to what extent participants' engagements with the Irish films under analysis were informed by local, national and transnational influences. It asks to what extent the masculinities featured were understood as indexing the realities of men's lives in Ireland and to what extent they were understood in relation to non-indigenous cultural images of and discourses on masculinity. By exploring "little tactics of the habitat" (Foucault 1980 p149 cited in Morley 1996) through viewers' accounts of their film-viewing, it becomes possible to move beyond the cinema-as-national-allegory framework and toward a postmodern geography of communications processes and practices (ibid.).

6.3 Qualitative Findings: The Geospatial and Sociospatial Geography of interpretive practices relating to *Intermission*

In their study of *Dallas* viewers, Liebes and Katz (1990) set out to investigate the appeal of the programme for different audiences in Israel, the USA and Japan. They assembled small groups of married couples from among Israeli Arabs, newly arrived Russian Jews, veteran Moroccan settlers and members of kibbutzim. Ten groups of second-generation Americans living in Los Angeles and, subsequently, Japanese groups were also interviewed⁴. Liebes and Katz (1990) discovered that the different groups retold an episode of *Dallas* in significantly different ways: the two “more traditional groups” (Arabs and Moroccan Jews) favoured linearity and retold the story in a modified Proppian form, the retellings of the Russian Jews were ideological and the Americans and kibbutzniks told the story psychoanalytically. The researchers also identified several different forms of involvement, which they refer to as real, ludic, ideological and constructional. These categories were generated from the cross-tabulation of two variables, which they identified as referential/rhetorical (or critical, metalinguistic) and closed/open (hot/cool). The former has to do with awareness of the constructedness of the text, while the latter has to do with the sense of being able to negotiate with the text. The researchers thus located real involvement at the intersection of referential and closed, whereby intra-diegetic characters and their values are treated as “given” and are usually argued with. In Katz and Liebes’ study, the more traditional groups favoured this type of engagement and tended to stay “dressed in their own identities” (ibid.). Ludic engagements, on the other hand, were located at the intersection of referential and open, whereby audiences “checked their own identities at the door” (ibid.) and engaged performatively with the on-screen characters. Finally, they define ideological forms of involvement as rhetorical and closed, while constructional engagement is described as rhetorical and open.

The various forms of involvement categorised by Liebes and Katz proved useful in teasing out questions of local, national and transnational engagements with and understandings of Irish films. While, as Liebes and Katz put it, a lot of commuting inevitably goes on between categories, certain groups leaned more heavily toward

⁴ Katz and Liebes’ (1996) study involved a total of sixty-five groups of six members each (approximately ten for each of the six cultures).

particular forms of investment or involvement. Thus the predominantly real (referential/closed) and constructional readings of the Youthreach participants contrasted with the frequently ludic and ideological engagements of the Urban Professional Group. However, while the former were best able to relate the Irish crime and underclass films to their everyday lives, thus suggesting a stronger local engagement, they nonetheless made significant connections between these films and the British and American films discussed in Chapter 2. The quantitative mapping out of wider patterns of film consumption thus provides a context within which to examine participants' qualitative engagements with recent Irish cinema and the extent to which the films are understood or identified with as specifically Irish. Their various forms of involvement (Liebes and Katz 1990) point to new sociospatial geographies of film use (Morley 1996), which transgress both textual and national boundaries.

The screenings of and focus-group discussions about *Intermission* provided insights into specific forms of audience involvement as well as eliciting more general data about film preferences and practices. In the various focus-group discussions about *Intermission* and, by extension, other recent Irish films, what Mary Ellen Brown (1996) refers to as the "that's me" factor played a strong role in anchoring the films to a sense of the local or national. Many of the discussions focussed on what were perceived to be the exclusively Irish qualities of the film, with participants citing the Dublin humour and accents as a major source of pleasure. Interestingly, however, when asked what other films *Intermission* reminded them of, most participants mentioned British or American films such as *Snatch*, *Lock Stock*, *Trainspotting*, *Love Actually*, *Pulp Fiction* and *Magnolia*. It was thus understood as both unmistakably Irish and similar to a number of non-Irish films that are emblematic of the (sub)genres discussed in Chapter 2. There were, however, significantly different forms of involvement between - and, in some instances, among - the different groups, which require further, more detailed unpacking. This commonality of experience among the groups and the differences between them strongly supports the notion that different "interpretive communities" (Fish 1980) are formed through complex social, economic and cultural processes.

6.3.1 “I love watching Dublin films and shit and seeing places that you know”: Local versus National Communities among Young, Working-Class Viewers

Of the six Youthreach Group participants, four had previously seen *Intermission* and they were all enthusiastic about watching it again. None of them had seen it in the cinema but rather at home on DVD, either with each other or with other friends. Of all the groups interviewed, the Youthreach participants most frequently displayed real forms of involvement. According to Liebes and Katz (1990), real engagement occurs at the intersection of referential and closed, whereby the text’s characters and their values are treated as ‘given’ and are frequently argued with. In their study of overseas audiences of *Dallas*, it was the more “traditional” groups (Arabs and Moroccan Jews) who leaned toward this form of engagement and who, as the researchers put it, stayed “dressed in their identities”. There was little evidence among the Youthreach group of the postmodern reading strategies described by Brown (1996), which include surface, technical/aesthetic and intellectual reading strategies, or of the ludic and ideological readings outlined by Liebes and Katz (1990). While constructional engagement was sometimes evident, the dominant form of involvement among these boys was the realistic reading strategy of identification noted by Brown (1996). When asked why they liked *Intermission*, this group immediately likened it to their lived experiences as Dubliners:

Interviewer: OK what did you like about it?
 David: It’s funny
 Declan: It’s the way people go on sometimes
 Ray: It’s real down to earth
 Gary: It goes on the way everybody else goes on
 Declan: Cos it’s Dublin
 Ray: Yeah

When asked whether *Intermission* was considered to be a typically Irish film, the Youthreach participants took this to mean a film that depicts typical situations in everyday Irish life, rather than a film like the majority of other Irish films.

Interviewer: Em...do you think *Intermission* is a typically Irish film?
 Gary: Yeah
 Tommy: Yeah
 Interviewer: Why?
 Declan: There’s all Dubliners in it and all...it’s real
 Tommy: The celtic songs and all in it

Ray: He keeps sayin' "man" an' all in it
 Gary: Yeah
 [laughter]
 Gary: The words and all in it

The dominant way in which these participants talked about films was to collectively recount scenes, especially funny ones, to quote pieces of dialogue and to talk about characters as if they were real. However, they also engaged in some constructional (rhetorical, open) work, most notably when discussing how good certain actors were at playing their roles, in pointing out continuity errors and in supplying extra-diegetic knowledge about extras and locations known to them. For this group, films about real Dublin gangs and real criminals were preferable to fictional ones, although the boundaries were sometimes blurred, particularly when it came to films such as *Accelerator* and *Crushproof*, which were seen as representing a way of life that was sufficiently familiar to be considered real:

David: Films that are true that really happen they are the best
 Declan: Yeah they're the best
 Peter: They're the best
 Ray: Like Michael Collins and all and The Name of the Father
 Interviewer: What about Crush Proof?
 Tommy: Yes it's a deadly film, I don't think it happened that though
 Interviewer: But it's realistic?
 Peter: Yeah it's realistic
 Gary: What's that about?
 Peter: They go on horses on the
 Interviewer: Young lads on horses?
 Peter: Cos they kill a fella...by accident, a car comes around by accident, and scares the horses, they are only messing but they didn't mean to kill him.
 Tommy: They were trying to frighten him
 Ray: The police are after them then

Films that were located or shot in Ballymun were of particular interest, such as *The Commitments*, *The Family* and *Adam and Paul*. As one participant put it, "I love watching Dublin films and shit and seeing places that you know." Even *Into the West* (1992), a magical-realist family adventure film that seemed like an unlikely choice for these boys, was considered to be "deadly" because it was set in Ballymun and was about the 'urban cowboy' culture. However, while the pleasure in seeing familiar locations on screen was a key attraction, there was also a predominantly positive response to the way in which areas such as Ballymun and Finglas and their characters

were discursively constructed in films such as *Adam and Paul*, *Accelerator* and *Crushproof*: as places with problems that are frequently the subject of outside news commentary and sociological research but also as unique places with unique characters whose lives are shown sympathetically from the inside. Like the protagonists of *Crushproof* and *Accelerator*, who were seen as fugitives from an unjust legal system, *Adam and Paul*'s eponymous characters were viewed with a mixture of disapproval, sympathy and affection. While they condemned the mugging of a boy with Down's syndrome and the fact that heroin addicts will "rob from their own", they related to the film in a different way to the other groups by virtue of its location and its associated social problems:

- Declan: Yeah...it's a bad life, it makes you think looking at them, that's bad man when you see people in town like they're walking around the streets and...
- Interviewer: Yeah
- Tommy: And there's a what's it...what's your man's name they are talking to, from that country, he's good in it
- Peter: I never seen it
- Interviewer: The Romanian guy?
- Declan: Yeah the Romanian guy, oh...ah it's comical
- Interviewer: Do you think it's very real?
- Declan: Yeah real real...'cos like they're walking around town, they're in Ballymun they come in here to get their gear and all and then they find two bags gets thrown out and once the guards come in they find it and your man dies, ODs, he just take the gear out of the pocket and walks off...it's a good ending

On the whole, the tendency among this group to fixate on real (referential and closed) and constructional forms of involvement anchored their film-viewing practices, at least in relation to Irish film, strongly in the local, as opposed to the national. As far as constructional involvement was concerned, they discussed how brown sauce would actually taste in tea, and they were interested in one participant's observation that the buses in *Intermission* were old and that both Irish punts and Euros were visible in the film, which led him to believe that it was set ten years ago. This led to a discussion about how someone had spotted a pair of Nike trainers in *Braveheart*, and about a local man, Mr. Kelly, who had been an extra in that film. The group members were also particularly interested in Declan's account of how his friend had done the graffiti on a wall that was shown in a scene in *Intermission*.

For this group, the Lehiff character (Colin Farrel) and Detective Lynch (Colm Meaney) were the stars of *Intermission*, and the relationship between them was considered to be the central plot. They exhibited less ludic involvement than the GAA and Urban Professional groups, who frequently imitated Lehiff. Although there was little evidence of direct identification with Lehiff, with David consciously distancing himself from this character by commenting, “Colin Farrel’s like a traveller in it”, the group displayed a largely referential interest in the Lehiff / Lynch subplot. Arguably, the Youthreach group’s focus on Lehiff is simply a response to the film’s promotional strategies: Colin Farrell, on account of being the best-known actor in the film, features centrally in the posters and on the video/DVD cover. He opens the film in a memorable scene that all participants discussed at length and, although he is dead by the film’s end, Farrell’s rendition of The Clash’s *I Fought the Law* over the closing credits serves to further stamp the film with his signature. However, he was not considered to be the star or protagonist by the other groups, which demonstrates that, for different audiences, different subplots and characters stood out as more or less central. For the Youthreach Group, it was the antagonistic drama between male youth and the forces of law and order which structured their understanding of the film, and which seemed to underpin their wider interest in gangster, criminal and underclass films such as *Snatch*, *Lock Stock*, *Mean Machine* and *Chopper*. Because of their prioritisation of the Lehiff / Lynch plot over other subplots, *Intermission* was seen as comparable with *Accelerator* and *Crushproof*:

- Interviewer: And what other films does it remind you of...you said it Snatch
 Ray: Yeah
 Interviewer: What else?
 David: It’s like Crush Proof as well and Accelerator
 Interviewer: OK...have you all watched Crush Proof and Accelerator before?
 Peter: Yeah
 Ray: Yeah
 Interviewer: Did you like it?
 David: Yeah
 Declan: Deadly
 David: Crush Proof is deadly
 Declan: Accelerator is alright but Crush Proof is better
 Tommy: I never seen that Accelerator
 Declan: It’s deadly
 Peter: Ace film that
 Tommy: I never heard of that

- Declan: Crush Proof is well better
 Peter: Yeah
 Tommy: I didn't see it
 Interviewer: So why did you like Accelerator?
 David: The cars and the races...and the crashes
 [Laughter]
 Interviewer: What about Crushproof?
 Declan: That's just a deadly film, it's the horses and all, if you're into horses
 it's a good film
 Peter: The way the youngfella goes on
 David: Yeah it's funny
 [Laughter]

Unlike the other groups, who read Detective Lynch and the supermarket manager as primarily comical characters or parodies of traditional Irish masculinity, the Youthreach group took them more seriously. Like the Guard in *Crushproof*, these men were seen as powerful but also as warped, and much pleasure was derived from disliking them and from seeing them being upstaged by the film's (anti)heroes. Declan, who was the most outspoken member of the group, was particularly critical of these characters. He described Lynch as "a big power man" and said of the supermarket manager, "I don't like the fellow who they work for in the supermarket, their manager, he was wrecking my head...like they say in the States." The scene in which John throws a can of peas at the manager, the scene in which the young man in possession of cannabis gets away from Detective Lynch and the final scene in which the young boy throws a stone through the manager's windscreen were all enthusiastically received during the screening. Unlike the other groups, who regarded the young boy who threw the stones as funny but nonetheless threatening, the Youthreach boys were more sympathetic toward him and felt that he should have been given a bigger role. Much like the informants in Fiske and Dawson's (1996) study, the boys in this group sought out moments of resistance against the *status quo*, in which their favourite characters were seen to win tactical battles, if not the final victory.

In spite of the tendency to anchor discussions about films in the local, however, *Intermission* was compared first and foremost to *Snatch*.

- Interviewer: OK...is this the type of film you usually like to watch?
 Ray: Yeah

David: Yeah
 Declan: A bit of comedy and a bit of action
 Tommy: A bit of action in it
 Gary: Like Snatch really
 Declan: Yeah
 Interviewer: Do you think it's like Snatch?
 Gary: Yeah
 Declan: But in Dublin

Similarly, *Crushproof* was compared with *Mean Machine*, which David offered as another good example of a film in which you are on the side of the criminals, and a discussion about *The General* seamlessly developed into a conversation about the Australian film *Chopper* (2000), a biopic of the legendary Australian crime figure Mark Brandon 'Chopper' Read. This film was very popular among the group and, even though Declan's brother had brought it back from Australia on DVD, he said it was available in video shops here.

Interviewer: Why did you like *The General* though, was it because it was a real story?
 Tommy: Yes it's a real story you read about him and all...there's books as well you can get
 David: There's films and...did you see *Chopper*
 [Laughter]
 Interviewer: The Australian film?
 Declan: Yeah yeah
 Interviewer: No I've been meaning to see that
 Declan: It's a deadly film it is
 Tommy: He chops off his ears an' all
 David: Yeah
 Declan: He can't read or write
 David: It's deadly it is
 Interviewer: Is it a true story?
 Declan: Yeah, he can't read or write and he wrote three best book or bestsellers, can't read or write
 Tommy: Yeah
 Interviewer: Is this guy still alive?
 David: Yeah he lives in Tasmania
 Tommy: At the end of it he's in a prison in Tasmania
 Declan: He's all normal now, he used to kill eh drug dealers and all, he doesn't kill like normal people
 David: Just after he killed them
 Tommy: He works for the Guards and all that
 Gary: And is he still alive now?
 Declan: Yeah there's an interview with him at the end of the film
 David: There's an interview with him and he's just standing there
 Tommy: He's a psycho he is

Gary: How old is he about now?
 Declan: About fifty
 David: Ah it's fuckin' rare funny

When asked why they thought there were more Irish films about crime now, most of the participants in the group attributed this phenomenon to the present-day reality of rising crime rates in Ireland, although one participant alluded to the gendered nature of its appeal:

Peter: Cos that's the way everything is now
 Ray: Everything is changing, that's what is out now, years ago you'd think ah yeah
 Peter: That's what it's like people getting chased in cars
 Tommy: Because young fellas like all that kind of stuff

Interviewer: Do you think that's why more Irish films are about that?
 Peter: Yeah like it changes with the times, it's not like years ago westerns and all...I think it's getting more like
 Declan: It's like they can relate, people that watch them can relate to the things that's happening in the film
 Peter: You know what it's about because you hear and see things like that or you...or you know what they're doing
 Interviewer: And is that true do you think there's more crime?
 Declan: Yeah
 Peter: Yeah
 Declan: Especially around Crumlin
 Interviewer: And why do people like watching films like that?
 Peter: They can relate to them
 Gary: To get a few tips
 [laughter]

What is of particular interest in the Youthreach transcripts is the fluidity with which discussions moved from an interest in films about local criminal gangs to true and fictional crime stories located elsewhere (*Snatch*, *Chopper*, *Mean Machine*), as well as the way in which real crime, fictional crime and news-mediated crime were frequently conflated. As Fishman and Cavender (1998) and Surette (1997) have argued, the emergence of new, hybrid genres such as the "reality crime" show represents both a new genre of entertainment and a new kind of crime news. The increased intertextuality that is evident across different forms of news and entertainment media, coupled with this group's tendency toward real (referential,

closed) involvements, set the scene for more fluid transactions. Ray's comment "that's what is out now" may thus refer as much to what's out in the media as to what's out there on the streets, while Tommy's comment that "young fellas like all that kind of stuff" makes an important link between the realities of the social world and audience desires. As Fiske and Dawson (1996) have argued, inequitable societies create the conditions under which a 'taste for violence' flourishes. Given that these boys have grown up in one of the most socially disadvantaged areas in the country and that, in spite of the affluence created by the Celtic Tiger economy, 7 per cent of the population were "consistently poor" in 2004 and almost one fifth of the population were at risk of poverty (EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2004)⁵, it is understandable that they have developed a taste for films which invite audience identification / sympathy with young, working-class (anti)heroes such as those featured in *Intermission*, *Accelerator* and *Crushproof*.

However, while this group's prioritisation of referential readings of the films over other forms of involvement tended to anchor their film-viewing practices within socially-specific or local understandings of the world, they had no hesitation in linking them to similar Australian, British and American films. The Irish films they liked were considered to be specifically Irish only insofar as they contained local slang, were about local pastimes/subcultures and were shot in recognisable locations. Thus, *Intermission* was like *Snatch* but in Dublin and *Chopper* was like *The General* but in Australia. For the Youthreach group, the consumption of 'gang films' arguably formed a stronger sense of "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) with fictional characters and implied audiences beyond national boundaries than was fostered by the elusive notion of a national film culture, given that none of this group had seen any of the contemporary Irish films which feature middle-class characters, such as *Goldfish*, *Memory*, *About Adam* or *When Brendan Met Trudy*.

In this context, it is useful to consider that these boys' own concept of a local or national culture may be one in which national boundaries have already been significantly blurred. Empirical data collected earlier with young men from the same

⁵ See http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/labour_market/current/eusilc.pdf, accessed 3rd January 2006.

area (Ging 2005) shows that what might be considered by others as ideologically contradictory media practices were not regarded in this way by the participants themselves. Thus, while they said they identified strongly with republican folk groups such as *The Wolfe Tones*, whose lyrics are often overtly anti-British, they were also immersed in a predominantly British soccer culture, which involved supporting British soccer teams, admiring British soccer heroes and watching televised matches on British television channels. These apparent contradictions indicate that the “imagined community” of the nation state (Anderson 1991), in whose construction the mass media play a crucial role (Morley 1996), is significantly challenged by other imagined communities (structured along lines of class, gender or ethnicity), which are supported by media practices that transcend or cut across national boundaries.

6.3.2 “Unbelievably Irish”: Humour as National Imaginary among the GAA Group

The engagements and identifications of the GAA Group with *Intermission* were significantly different. As far as Irish films were concerned, they made no connections between this film and crime, gangster or underclass films such as *Accelerator* and *Crushproof*, which they had not seen. For most of these participants, *Intermission* was a typical Irish comedy, which they compared with *The Commitments* and *When Brendan Met Trudy*. One participant felt that the appeal of *Intermission* and *Man About Dog* was similar in that they both played on local accents and humour, though he also saw similarities between *Man About Dog* and *Snatch*. From the point of view of aesthetic and narrative codes, however, these participants compared *Intermission* with a number of American films such as *Traffic*, *21 Grams*, *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs*. As was the case with all of the groups interviewed, participants felt that *Intermission* was both specifically Irish and similar to recent American and British films. This group were less inclined to identify with Lehiff (Colin Farrell), although they derived much pleasure from imitating him. There was general consensus that Detective Lynch was the central character, followed by Lehiff and John:

- Interviewer: Who was the star of the film do you think?
 Liam: Em
 Peadar: Your man Gerry Lynch is very funny
 Patrick: I think Colm Meaney is
 Michael: Colm Meaney yeah
 Interviewer: The detective?
 Peadar: And I like John...yer man Cillian Murphy
 Martin: Which fella's he?
 Peadar: John
 Liam: I think...not completely but Colin Farrell does steal it a wee bit...because every time he's in you're laughing
 Patrick: Yeah Colin Farrell and Colm Meaney I think are the stars
 Michael: There's no real...I don't think there's a main character really
 Peadar: No but I think he...whenever Colin Farrell's in it you're gonna get a laugh out of it
 Patrick: Ah yeah
 Peadar: Do you know fuck off or I'll shoot ye like...fuck this man and he runs out like...I think like there's a laugh in it every time he's in it...you know what I mean...that's fucking delish man and all that
 [Laughter]

For these young men, none of whom came from Dublin, the Dublin accents and humour were both familiar and strange, and they derived considerable pleasure during the focus-group discussion from quoting lines of dialogue to one another. Unlike Liebes and Katz's (1990) informants, whose ludic engagements with *Dallas* involved "checking their identities at the door" (ibid.), these men regarded Lehiff's tough urban (anti)heroics as both identifiable with and Other: their performances of his character seemed to walk a tightrope between establishing him as different to them and yet also being interpellated by his world view. Several participants in this group had seen *Intermission* in the cinema as well as on DVD. When asked how the cinema audience responded to the film, one participant wondered aloud whether Dublin audiences found it as funny as he did, to which another responded that he thought it was as funny for Dublin viewers as it was for people from the country or 'cultchies':

- Interviewer: Where did you see, which cinema did you see it in?
 Patrick: In the Savoy in town
 Interviewer: OK...and can you remember what the reaction of the audience was?
 Patrick: Yeah they seemed to enjoy it
 Interviewer: Yeah?
 Peadar: It's very funny
 Michael: I think it was in Dublin actually as well
 Liam: Every couple of scenes there was something to laugh about
 Martin: The Dublin accent and all that
 Liam: I wonder would they find it funny in Dublin or
 Martin: The real Dubliney parts I thought everybody was laughing at ...
 Patrick: Yeah yeah
 Peadar: Whether it was a crowd of cultchies that were in watching it or...kind of...they were all laughing at it...do you remember when your man that's fucking delish man everyone just bursted out laughin'
 Patrick: The bit at the start when they cracked up you know
 Peadar: The whole place fell apart then, it fell to pieces
 [Laughter]

When asked whether they thought it was an Irish film, most of the group agreed emphatically that it was:

- Interviewer: Do you think of it as an Irish film?
 Martin: Oh yes definitely
 Peadar: Unbelievably Irish
 Patrick: Very much so yes
 Michael: I think even people from America or England would have difficulty understanding some of the things in that...the really...the really Dublin things like the accent

These comments are similar to those made by the Youthreach group, whereby the film's humour was regarded as specifically Irish and therefore partly unintelligible to British and American audiences. What emerged was a collective sense of pleasure associated with an audience that is imagined as exclusively Irish, and which revels in getting the in-jokes. Even though each group engaged with *Intermission*'s Dublinese on different levels, some identifying more closely with it (laughing with) and others at more of a remove (laughing at), there was a sense of pleasure common to all in the notion of a collective sense of humour that excluded non-Irish audiences. The Urban Professional Group made this point most explicitly:

Michael: It's kind of camaraderie in a way
 Patrick: You think you're getting more jokes
 Michael: Yeah you can see yourself being in the pub

Interestingly, however, this prompted the Urban Professional group to wonder whether the same specificities applied to the new British gangster films:

Sean: Yeah, it's real every-day jokes and little phrases
 Graham: It's the phrases exactly
 Sean: That probably wouldn't make sense to, you know like English people wouldn't get some of the small, you know one or two words at the end of a sentence or mightn't get what they mean when they say one thing or another like...I can't think of any examples
 Cathal: But Lock Stock that was set in London...you know Cockney
 Graham: We probably don't get bits of them
 Sean: I suppose there's bits of them that we don't get
 Graham: But they're real

Liebes and Katz's (1990) distinction between referential and rhetorical involvement is useful here in unpacking the ostensibly contradictory readings of *Intermission* as exclusively Irish and simultaneously reminiscent of recent British and American (sub)genres. What emerges from the transcripts is a greater tendency to compare *Intermission* with non-Irish films when doing rhetorical (ideological or constructional) work, and to see the film as more specifically Irish when doing referential (real and ludic) work. The following excerpt from the GAA Group transcript is a typical example of constructional (rhetorical/open) work that enables

the film to be more easily considered in terms of aesthetic and generic styles that participants were familiar with from British and American films:

- Peadar: It does remind me...it's not like...the way it's filmed...it's like it's...it's almost like it's not shot on a good camera or something do you know the way it's...the scenes are kinda
- Michael: The camera's all over the place
- Liam: Jumpy...it's like someone...you know the way your man is filming Colm Meaney
- Michael: Yeah
- Peadar: It's almost like all the scenes are someone is standing there with a camera...just the way they're kinda...do you know it's not really em...it's as if they're trying to show this ordinary day in the life of someone rather than an actual film being made so it does remind me of I don't know what film...
- Patrick: Traffic
- Peadar: But it does remind me of films of that kind
- Interviewer: Traffic?
- Patrick: Yeah...yeah something like that...or even 21 grams
- Michael: Traffic's like that
- Peadar: Yeah
- Patrick: It's kind of like that as well
- Michael: The way the way it skips from scene to scene and doesn't give you a good 10 minute run at one at one sort of ...it's kind of like Reservoir Dogs or something
- Peadar: Yeah
- Patrick: And it all comes together then in the end
- Michael: You can't really see that really coming together...all the characters...but eventually they do
- Liam: Em
- Interviewer: Yeah...there's been a few American films like that where there's no...there's no one star
- Michael: And it comes together like
- Interviewer: Yeah
- Peadar: Pulp Fiction was like that
- Patrick: Pulp Fiction yeah
- Michael: Yes

6.3.4 “You wouldn’t want to associate with them”: the Role of Class and Location in Negotiating Character Identification among the Urban Professional Group

From the point of view of narrative structure and aesthetic codes, the Urban Professional Group compared *Intermission* to *Snatch*, *Lock Stock, Layer Cake*, *Magnolia* and *Love Actually*. This group did the most commuting between referential (both real and constructional) and rhetorical (both ideological and ludic) of all the groups interviewed. For these participants, *Intermission*’s verisimilitude was the source of much comic pleasure, in particular with reference to recognisable phrases and characters. Sally’s moustache, referred to in the film as a “ronnie” was a particular source of pleasure for Graham, who assumed, prior to watching the film, that it was a term specific to his own suburb:

- Graham: But the Ronnie thing, that is so, like that comes from, you would only hear that in secondary school, I’d never heard it before and then...I thought it was confined to Swords even, where we’re all from, and when I saw it in the film I just cracked up laughing because it’s like
[Laughter]
- Sean: But like it was, it’s all those little things, the phrases, the best thing about the Roddy Doyle films was all those little phrases and

Interestingly, this group was the most flexible in its ability to read different characters using different types of involvement. They identified most closely with John and Oscar or “different parts of both of them”. These characters were understood by all participants in this group to be the central characters of the film and also the most real:

- Interviewer: Which characters would you identify with most?
- Graham: The two lads
- Sean: Different parts like
- Ryan: Yeah...mainly the two
- Graham : I think Oscar...because he’s just like
- Sean: Yeah different parts of both of them...definitely

Unlike John and Oscar, however, Detective Lynch, the supermarket manager and Lehiff were considered to be peripheral characters who were partly realistic and partly parodic or comical. Although they sometimes discussed Lehiff’s character and actions in real terms, they saw him primarily as a “link character” (Graham) whose function

was “just to move the story along” (Sean). He was seen simultaneously as a comic stereotype and as a realistic portrait of hard masculinity that conceals less stable elements:

- Graham: You kinda laugh at...Colin Farrel's character
 Sean: Yeah but at the same time you might know someone that acts real tough on the outside but then he shows that wants likes his wok and his kitchen utensils.

A later discussion about Lehiff's verisimilitude started out as ostensibly referential but appeared to transmute into a rhetorical engagement with cinematic / mediated representations of the criminal:

- Interviewer: Is he plausible?
 William: Yeah I'd say so
 Graham: Yeah I'd say he is
 Sean: Yeah that's like years
 Graham: Do you remember the light criminal from like maybe ten years ago, like you know he didn't intend to use the gun, you know he
 Sean: He says look what you made me do
 Graham: It's kind of like you know it's more of an eighties or rather what I picture as an eighties light criminal, where he's just kind of looking for opportunities to make a few quid so he could get out of the hole he's in

Unlike the Youthreach participants, for whom Lehiff was real(istic), or the GAA participants, for whom Lehiff was both real(istic) and a figure of fascination with whose character they engaged ludically or performatively, the Urban Professionals were more critical in their reading of this character. He was considered more as a narrative and representational construct, whose performance of a certain type of working-class masculinity was present to provide comic relief and to link the various subplots. In the following excerpt, Sean's real (referential, closed) engagement with Lehiff is questioned and partly undermined by Ryan's constructional intervention

- Sean: At the start he goes on about like love and settling down and all that and then when he hits her you think it's all just a scheme but he says it again later on when he's looking at all these domestic appliances, he's looking to settle down, you know he's this hard guy but he's still, even when he has the girl hostage like, he's still em into getting a house and settling down, he's planning his future life of settling down and....he's the same as anyone else, you know, he just does it the wrong way.

- Ryan: They might just have put that in though to lighten him up like, to make him a little bit likeable, like
 Sean: Yeah that's true

The reluctance among this group to regard Lehiff as a central character or to invest in him the same kind of real involvements afforded John and Oscar can be interpreted in a number of ways. Firstly, as middle-class men, they may be less inclined to identify with a working-class character. Secondly, as Dublin middle-class men who are familiar with the socially-disadvantaged areas from which Lehiff comes, there may be more reluctance to identify with his character than, for example, with an eastend criminal from *Lock Stock*. Like Joanne Lacey's (2002) British informants, who considered *The Sopranos* to be much more glamorous than the eastend gangsters of *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, Dublin's working-class petty criminals may hold less appeal for Dublin middle-class men than either eastend 'wide boys' or New Jersey mobsters. Thirdly, given their greater tendency toward rhetorical involvement, these participants may simply have perceived his character, as they did those of Lynch and the supermarket manager, as playing a more symbolic or metonymical role in the film than those of Oscar and John.

There is another possibility worth considering, however, which relates to all of these factors, namely that these viewers did not identify with Lehiff or consider him central to the film because he was not regarded as a sufficiently authentic or convincing criminal. As the excerpt above indicates, Lehiff was seen as a "light criminal" from ten years ago. At a later point in the discussion, when participants from this group were asked why the image of the gangster or hard criminal was appealing, they talked about classic images of the American and British mafia. It transpired from this discussion that Colin Farrell was considered to be a "wannabe" gangster and rebel. Participants' comments also suggested that the activities of the gangster or criminal, when placed in a local context, became less appealing and disrupted the fantasy of the sharp-dressed hard man who has made it. The discussion is worth quoting at length:

- Interviewer: Why are gangsters or the gangster look so central to lad culture?
 William: I don't know but I think you're spot on there, I find it really interesting reading about articles like that, it's just when Graham was going on about articles he read in FHM, I remember some em that I've read in FHM and they would be gangster articles, particularly about that, and

- if I was to say, if I was flicking through it I would actually stop at eh, ah you know, some mafia assassin thing or the top ten mafia gigs or something like that...eh I don't know why it is but it's interesting
- Graham: Like the Krays or something
- Sean: I'd say it's because they're always dressed sharply, they have power, they have money, they generally have the good-looking girlfriend, and they're respected by all their peers
- Ryan: Yeah it's easy success
- Graham: Yeah
- William: And it's not considered stuffy
- Graham: Yeah and they didn't start out successful
- Ryan: And they're tough
- William: You can't see the work
- Graham: Yeah you can't
- Sean: You know what you were saying earlier about Colin Farrell about being one of those icons...well Colin Farrell cuts himself out that he is a gangster, and he's tough and stuff
- Graham: But he's not successful at it
- Sean: Normally we'd know in real life if people were like that...if you were on the bus and you heard lads your age talking about robbing something you'd be shocked, it wouldn't happen like that, you wouldn't want to associate with them
- Graham: Yeah that's true
- Ryan: It's a fascination or a fantasy or something that...you know you're totally separated from it but...it's how, not really how the other half live but it's...I dunno...maybe it's like kids and cops and robbers
- Cian: You're only gonna see the, it's like watching *Cribs* like, you know, you're only gonna see the, or you're only gonna read about the gangsters who are incredibly successful
- Ryan: Yeah
- Cian: And they're, you know, they've a fantastic lifestyle and haven't got caught yet, em, and you know they're making this money by you know, having fun
- William: What is a gangster? He's a scumbag who's successful I suppose
- Sean: Hmm
- Graham: And organised
- Interviewer: So what do you think is their appeal?
- William: They're interesting
- Ryan: Yeah they're interesting exactly
- Sean: It's like any rich person, like a celebrity, you know

Whether participants were referring to Colin Farrell the actor or *Intermission*'s Lehiff character is unclear here. However, what emerges is a conscious acknowledgement not only of *Intermission*'s continuities but also of its discontinuities in relation to more generic films from British and American cinema. Long before any discussion of gangsters had started and before participants were asked what other films *Intermission* reminded of them of, Ryan was trying to situate it generically. While he perceived a

significant similarity with the London gangster films, he also felt that it was much softer:

Ryan: I dunno, I don't know how you'd class that film because the only films that would be similar would be like London gangster films, although Intermission is very much softer than it, the same kind of everyone just trying to get by like...in the criminal terms, just trying to pull off a couple of jobs just to keep them going

Graham: Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels

Sean: Yeah exactly that kind of

Interviewer: Do you think it's similar to that?

Sean: Yeah but I don't know what kind of, what type of film that is, obviously very much male-orientated and most guys would enjoy them types of films above others, so....

6.3.5 Locality, Age and Dis-identification among the Rural Men's Group

On the whole, the Rural Men's Group, who were the most infrequent cinema-goers and film viewers, were also the least engaged spectators in the study. They did not have the same cinematic frame of reference as the other groups, and therefore tended to do predominantly referential (real) and, to a lesser extent, constructional work. One participant, who preferred classic romantic Hollywood films, disliked *Intermission* because it didn't have a happy ending. Others had little to say about it. Three members of this group, however, were both engaged with and outspoken about the film. The group leader, Frank, spoke at length about the masculinities in the film and the problems encountered by its characters. His readings were almost exclusively real (closed/referential). Matthew, a man of 40 who had lived for most of his life in London, was also cognisant of the discourses on masculinity in the film and alternated between referential and ideological involvements. Mathew and Jim, a Scottish man who had travelled for 15 years and had lived in Glasgow, were the only ones who related *Intermission* to films such as *Snatch* and *Trainspotting*. Jim's readings were also primarily referential, and he was the only participant in this group who said he identified with characters in the film.

Most of these men had lived in a rural area all their lives and had no experience of city life. For them, the film was primarily understood as a reflection of the crime that was happening in Dublin and which they read about or heard in the broadcast media:

Interviewer: Is it about a place or a life that you recognise?
 Paschal: I think it was more or less the typical criminal...carry on that's going on in Dublin that's more and more...we read about it...the typical kind of general type of stuff you know like the life in estates....

While the specifically urban location and criminal theme of the film seemed to preclude the kind of identifications present in the other groups, the lives and problems of the characters were generally seen as common or everyday. Matthew, in particular, was keen to point out that the issues of masculinity addressed by the film, especially in relation to relationships and problems of emotional expression, were universal:

Interviewer: When you see the film is it something that you recognise?
 Niall: Not so much

- Jim: It's something you'd recognise as Dublin or Belfast but not...
- Paschal: Like you hear...you would only hear about it...you'd have to live in these places probably to realise if it is as bad as that or is it just your imagination or whatever
- Matthew: Yet the undercurrent of the whole thing you know...about people not speaking out and saying how they felt and things...that is common

Although Matthew could identify with the characters, Frank disagreed:

- Frank: Maybe in their own area but I couldn't...like it is when you ask the point normally when you walk away from a film there's somebody you wouldn't mind being or something but I don't think there was any one in that film really that you would identify with

Lack of interest in crime films in particular and in cinema generally meant that this group, with the exception of Frank and Matthew, tended not to consider *Intermission* in the context of other Irish films or in relation to other crime films. For most of these men, *Intermission* was a film about Dublin and urban crime, whose complicated plot structure was alienating for at least two participants. What was interesting among this older group, however, was the way in which the film was seen to articulate dominant discourses on men and masculinity. Frank talked at length about the alienating effects of machismo and emotional inarticulacy on men:

- Frank: But there's a lot in it concerning em you know the young lad the lad at the end of it that was going with Deirdre but he could never say how he felt

- Frank: There was a lot of contradictions, one contradiction was that the manager of the shop and the bank manager or whatever he was they had it all but they had the emptiest lives

While Frank's readings were more referential, whereby he saw the film as indexing real problems experienced by men, Matthew's involvement was more ideological. Frank read the performances of machismo in *Intermission* as realistic representations of male behaviour, yet did not comment on where he thought the film stood in relation to this. Matthew, on the other hand, felt the film was poking fun at machismo:

- Interviewer: Yeah...(to Frank) you say macho...to what extent do you think it's about macho or how does it deal with macho...what's macho?
- Matthew: It's shows it up for what it is really...it's just strutting ain't it and...I think it's pokes fun at it
- Frank: Even the wheelchair incident at the end...that's pure macho

Interviewer: Do you think they are making fun of that rather than...
Frank: No it's reality...it's like two cocks going together...the battle for the territory...and I think the whole thing to a certain extent was a battle like...Colin Farrell...basically his battle was with the cop because he had humiliated him basically...inside in the jakes so like there was an element of it right there and then...and.....the lad that lost the girl well of course there's an element...that had lost Deirdre...

Matthew was also cognisant of current debates on masculinity and gender equality but he also commented on how he thought the film was playing with these:

Matthew: It couldn't have been made five years ago
Interviewer: It couldn't have been?
Matthew: I don't think so
Interviewer: Can you explain a bit more about that...what kind of issues do you think?
Matthew: Well there's the issues of male...you know the female's...the rise in female power... financial and everything really...political... and that you know men are floundering about trying to find what am I good for if I'm not good for bringing home the bacon...it's sort of that...I think it's quite I think it's quite symbolic in that

6.4 Conclusion

Taken together, participants' responses indicate that predominantly referential work tends to anchor readings of films more readily to national or local understandings, whereas audiences who engage rhetorically or critically (metalinguistically) tend to view the text in terms that are considerably less limited by the boundaries of local or national culture. The way in which participants saw *Intermission* and other films such as *The General*, *Crush Proof*, *Accelerator* and *Man About Dog* as both typically Irish and as continuous with the non-indigenous (sub)genres discussed in Chapter 2 points to an understanding of national cinema as defined by recognisable locations and accents, yet also by the coalescence of local themes and stories with genres from elsewhere, such as the British gangster film. This was particularly evident in participants' tendency to describe certain Irish films as versions of *Trainspotting* or *Snatch* but set in Dublin. The extent to which viewers saw the films as articulating the realities of Irish life or dealing with social issues pertinent to Ireland thus depended to a large extent on how referential their engagements were. That said, the connections that the Youthreach group made between films such as *The General* and biopics set elsewhere, such as *Chopper*, indicates that communities can be imagined not only in terms of national or local identity but also along lines of class, gender and subcultural affinity.

As far as formal attributes such as editing and narrative styles were concerned, participants generally switched from what might be referred to as vertical readings to horizontal ones. Although they compared *Intermission* with other Irish films in relation to humour and character types, when it came to questions of genre, narrative structure or stylistic features they related it, and other recent Irish films, to films such as *Magnolia*, *Traffic*, *21 Grams*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Love Actually*, *Snatch*, *Trainspotting* and *Lock Stock*. The phrase "typically Irish film" was taken by all to mean a film that depicted typical situations in Irish life rather than a film exhibiting stylistic or thematic continuities with a body of national filmic work. Rod Stoneman (2005) has commented that Irish film policy over the past ten years has been explicitly concerned with fostering a film production environment in Ireland that speaks to "its own national imaginary with authenticity and integrity, whilst also navigating the implications of international finance from a market dominated by doxa from

elsewhere (Stoneman 2005 p251).” In the broadest sense, therefore, it appears that the objectives of the Second Irish Film Board have been largely achieved, in terms of how audiences negotiate this territory between the national and the transnational.

The findings of this study, however, call into question the extent to which such a cohesive sensibility as a “national imaginary” exists in relation to cinema. Given the commonality of experience and involvement among most of the groups and the corresponding differences between them, it emerges that the perceived Irishness of *Intermission* breaks down into further distinctive categories. Although almost all participants agreed that the humour was unmistakably Irish, their understandings of the film as indexing social realities differed considerably. For the Youthreach Group, the film was structured and mediated through the character of Lehiff, which in turn allowed them to compare it to other ‘disaffected youth’ films such as *Accelerator* and *Crushproof*. For them, the films articulated and valorised the experiences of socially-marginalised male youth in Dublin in ways that contrast significantly with current news reports about male youth and antisocial behaviour. They preferred films about real people and real gangs, and their predominantly real (referential, closed) engagements meant that they identified most closely and least critically with the social worlds portrayed in the urban underclass films. However, their love of locally-filmed narratives did not preclude an interest in similar films set elsewhere, and they applied the same type of real involvements to British and Australian films about both real and fictional crime gangs. For this group, there was little sense of Irish film facilitating or mediating a “national imaginary”: on the contrary, similar types of films, whether Irish, British, American or Australian, seemed to speak to a common working-class imaginary in which socially-excluded men were not pathologised but rather allowed to enact fantasies of male power and of rebellion against the forces of law and order, a theme which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

For most of the Rural Men’s Group, on the other hand, *Intermission* was understood as an extension of or commentary on, rather than a challenge to, the discourses on crime and working-class urban life that they heard about in the news media. Although the group leader and two members of the group who were not Irish related to the film in different ways, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, the rest of the group felt that *Intermission*, on account of its violent content and bad language, would

not appeal to older people. Their readings were mostly real, albeit in relation to an already (broadcast) mediated reality. On account of their age, low levels of media literacy and lack of experience of urban life, they did not relate to any of the characters and engaged with *Intermission* as an Irish film only insofar as it re-mediated certain assumptions they already held about the dangers and complexities of urban life in Ireland. For the GAA Group, *Intermission* also depicted a social world of which they had little or no experience but it was nonetheless familiar to them in the sense that they lived in Dublin during the week, and could relate it both to other Irish comedies and to other non-Irish films about male youth and crime. Their ludic engagements with Lehiff were not dissimilar to their engagements with the heroes of the action films they enjoyed: he was an imagined possible Other with whom they could identify performatively but against whom they also partly asserted their own, very different (rural, middle-class) identities.

Finally, although the Urban Professionals identified strongly with *Intermission's* Dublin humour, they distanced themselves from Lehiff, who they considered in primarily constructional terms as a link character, a stereotype and/or a figure of fun. This does not appear, however, to be because working-class or criminal male characters did not appeal to them *per se* but rather because Lehiff seemed to represent the less glamorous realities of local crime. The eastend gangsters of the new British crime cycle and the New Jersey mobsters of *The Sopranos*, on the other hand, were figures of fascination whose appeal was attributed to their status as signifiers of male success. This supports Liebes and Katz' (1990) findings in their study of the reception of *Dallas* in Israel, Japan and the US, whereby American viewers insisted that *Dallas* was not real because they compared it with the reality they knew first-hand, whereas traditional Israeli viewers took for granted that *Dallas* revealed modern America. According to Liebes and Katz, "cultural distance reduces the preoccupation with the question of reality, and proximity causes viewers to measure critically how real it really is (ibid. p16)."

Unlike the socially engaged Irish films of the late 1970s and 1980s, which were strongly rooted in a particular time and place and which would have made little sense to audiences elsewhere, except as documenting a set of specifically Irish preoccupations, the contemporary films engage with the socially-specific in a way

that acknowledges and accommodates the increasingly transnational nature of film production and distribution. Their use of universal generic conventions to articulate local stories (with universal appeal) enables some viewers to read these films as telling their own, locally and socially rooted stories, while allowing others to recognise locations and characters in more general ways, which have as much to do with their (often already mediated) preconceptions about crime in Dublin's socially disadvantaged areas as with their knowledge of crime and urban underclass films from elsewhere. Collin's concept of "genericity", whereby a cinematic genre is indigenised (Pettitt 2004) - whether ironically or sincerely - to tell local stories, is thus a dominant feature of contemporary Irish film production. The diversity of the 'national audience' is well described by Higson (2000 p66) as:

...a fortuitous, contingent, abstract amalgam of dispersed and specific audiences or cultural subjects that have come together for a very specific event. At the end of this particular experience or event, the imagined community disperses again, while other communities reassemble quite differently for other relatively fleeting experiences. Such communities are rarely self-sufficient, stable or unified. They are much more likely to be contingent, complex, in part fragmented, in part overlapping with other senses of identity and belonging that have more to do with generation, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, politics or style than with nationality.

Both Martin McLoone (2000) and Ruth Barton (2004) have suggested that the increasingly global, universal and apolitical nature of contemporary Irish cinema does not occlude an engagement with (changing) Irish identities or with political readings of cinema. While this is true, it is also increasingly important to consider cinematic representations and discourses in the context of an increasingly franchise-led, networked and converging mediasphere, in which formal and aesthetic synergies have been accelerated and intensified across different media forms and genres. As far as representations of gender are concerned, it is vital to regard contemporary mediated discourses on masculinity in the context of new, transnational patterns of gender relations (Connell 2005), which are both facilitated by and expressed through the changing postmodern geography of communications processes (Morley 1996 p318). Unlike the earlier First-Wave films, which explored masculinity through the specifically Irish tropes of the land, the family, the Church, post-Colonialism and Nationalist politics, the contemporary films deal with issues that are pertinent to contemporary masculinity, such as joy-riding, 'anti-social' behaviour, unemployment,

alcohol and drug abuse, homelessness and crime. What is most striking, however, is the way in which the discursive construction of masculinity in film has moved from feminist-inflected critique toward a post-feminist and postmodern politics of ambivalence. This shift can only be understood and engaged with by looking to social developments and cultural developments whose genesis and scope exceeds both national and cinematic boundaries.

This chapter demonstrates that the Irish films under analysis index important social discourses on gender equality and masculinity, which are engaged with both consciously and unconsciously by Irish male viewers. However, while the masculinities explored are recognisable and can be identified with by Irish viewers, they are essentially localised manifestations of generic masculinities from elsewhere. While the participants in this study readily identified and engaged with the gender discourses available in the films and in other media texts, there was little evidence of engagements that were exclusive to Irish masculinity. This is not to say that Irish boys and men do not engage in nationally-specific enactments of masculinity or face nationally-specific problems but rather that their film-viewing practices are as much rooted in the local and the transnational as they are in nationally-specific negotiations of identity. As far as their engagements with Irish cinema were concerned, local and transnational discourses on and representations of gender and class cut across the national imaginary, pointing to the limitations of the national cinema / national psyche paradigm in the analysis of cinematic representations of gender. Chapter 7 teases out the gender-specific responses of viewers and attempts to locate them within a broader discursive schema of contemporary gender relations.

Chapter 7 –

Audiencing Masculinity: Viewers' Perceptions of Irish film's 'New' Men

7.1 Introduction

The findings of Chapter 6 indicate that the 'crime cycle' and urban underclass films which feature strongly in contemporary Irish cinema are best regarded as reflections of national identity and culture only insofar as these concepts are understood in the context of an increasingly transnational gender and media order. They also demonstrate that different 'interpretive communities' (Fish 1980) are motivated by and construct different subnational and transnational imaginaries, which may be drawn along lines of gender, class and/or ethnicity. This chapter focuses specifically on masculinity. It explores to what extent and how participants mobilised popular discourses on gender equality and masculinity to make sense of the characters and subplots of *Intermission*. It also explores the extent to which the films under analysis are perceived as having something to say about contemporary masculinities, and whether or not they are consciously viewed as continuous with wider (postmodern and postfeminist) discourses on masculinity. Participants' comments were thus analysed in relation to their general film-viewing preferences, which involved consideration of the ways in which discussions about certain cinematic genres or characters informed and were informed by dominant discourses or social conversations about gender (McMahon 1999).

In Ging's (2005) study on male teenagers and the media in Ireland, attention is drawn to the significance of the performance of media usage as well as "descriptions of media usage" (Lohan 2000 p172) in group discussions. Given that most participants were resistant to the idea of media influence, yet often did not demonstrate a conscious ability to decode texts ideologically, the extent to which comments about media influence could be treated as resource was sometimes limited. Thus, what participants had to say was often considerably less interesting than how they said it. For example, while they were often critical of the constraints imposed on boys to suppress emotion and act hard, they also seemed to derive considerable pleasure from the performance of tough, blokeish and oftentimes aggressive/homophobic

masculinity, particularly in discussions about television programmes such as *Jackass* and *Dirty Sanchez*. Observing how boys used mediated fictions as resources or “affirmation texts” (ibid.) in these performances, which served to publicly police the acceptable limits of masculinity among the peer group, was often more fruitful than the comments they gave in response to questions about why they liked particular texts. Rather than being considered as an interference to the methodological coherence or consistency of the research, these contradictory responses and behaviours gave rich insights into the complexity of the frequently oppositional discourses which boys and young men use to narrativise or make sense of their position in the world and of their own gendered identities.

Similarly, in his study with Hawaiian primary-school children, Joseph Tobin (2000) notes that informants’ utterances cannot be taken as transparent windows onto a set of clearly formulated world views. Tobin often found that the children’s comments were not only contradictory but also that they sometimes appeared to make little sense. However, by situating their utterances within the wider contexts of gender, class, ethnicity and national identity, he was able to detect the recycling of certain social discourses at work. While this phenomenon, which he refers to as citationality, was often unconsciously embedded in the children’s speech, it could also be used consciously to challenge the researcher’s preconceptions about children’s vulnerability and the allegedly pernicious effects of media violence, sexism or racism. Tobin thus read his informants’ proclivity to mobilise popular discourses on media violence not as mindless reiterations of commonsense but rather as attempts to show up the vacuity of the scholarly and public obsession with imitative violence and to critique adults’ fascination with this debate by rendering the conversation circular and absurd, while avoiding self-exposure (Tobin 2000 p27).

Tobin also found that his informants generally projected notions of vulnerability to media effects and imitative violence onto others. He cites David Buckingham (1996), who states:

Effects, it would appear, are things from which other people suffer. We ourselves...are somehow immune...These other people are seen as being unable to distinguish between fiction and reality. They are somehow too immature or mentally inadequate to know any better (Buckingham 1996 p 65 cited in Tobin 2000 p 29).

Although this study is not explicitly concerned with media effects but rather with the meanings, pleasures and uses to which mediated fictions are put in everyday life, Tobin's and Buckingham's foregrounding of citationality or discourse recycling is a useful analytical tool. With the exception of the Urban Professional Group and Jim and Martin from the Rural Men's Group, participants tended not to talk about men and masculinity in consciously critical or rhetorical terms. What was of interest, rather, was whether they made use of contemporary discourses on gender to talk about the Irish films – and their film-viewing practices generally – and whether the films, conversely, could be seen to inform their more general discussions about or attitudes toward gender or masculinity. The interview transcripts were thus analysed for evidence of references to or recycling of contemporary discourses around the news media's problematisation of masculinity and, in particular, male youth, men's rights and masculinity politics, postfeminist discourses on gender (equality) and Lad Culture's ironic gender negotiations. This analysis of the transcripts and questionnaires aimed to address the questions of how the crime and underclass films engage male viewers, whether the films are consciously understood as continuous with Lad Culture and whether participants' understandings of gender equality and masculinity were predominantly conducive with or antithetical to the gender political discourses of postfeminism, the new men's movement or Lad Culture.

7.2 Male Violence: Symbolic, Performative or Real?

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, many of the new (sub)genres in Anglophone cinema display a preoccupation with violence and violent crime: from the “new brutalism” (Shelley 1993) of Quentin Tarantino to the British underclass films, the new British gangster cycle and the American “male rampage films” (Pfeil 1996), men are configured as both perpetrators and victims of violent acts. The background questionnaires used in this study indicate that films containing violence were popular among most participants. Only participants from the Rural Men’s Group, whose age profile was substantially higher than the rest (37-50), said they disliked *Intermission* or other films specifically because of the levels or type of violence. However, while most of the other participants did not problematise or raise objections to violent films *per se*, they nonetheless responded in interesting ways to violent scenes in *Intermission* and to questions about cinematic violence. What was most interesting in these discussions were the similarities and differences that emerged with regard to their awareness of contemporary discourses on gender and violence, as well as of the debates about media effects and imitative violence.

A recent study conducted by the Stirling Media Research Institute on *Men Viewing Violence* (Schlesinger et al. 1998) explored how different groups of men responded to representations of violence portrayed in a variety of media contexts and formats. These included live boxing matches, sports news, a major prime-time soap opera, a documentary report, an authored television drama, an action movie and a thriller. Of particular interest was the way in which the respondents distinguished between the realistic television drama *Trip Trap* (1996), which dealt with domestic violence, and the fantasy mode of Hollywood films *Under Siege* (1992) and *Basic Instinct* (1992), which was seen as less socially consequential than the other genres and formats. While the television drama was seen also to have an educative value, of which the violence was part, the violence of the two Hollywood films was not considered as realistic or affecting but rather as a device to liven up the action. The researchers conclude that most viewers are adept at making the necessary generic distinctions to separate out real, realistic and fictional violence, and that they decide on its social consequentiality accordingly.

In the greater scheme of things, therefore, fiction film is generally positioned at the far end of the fantasy-realism scale, and is considered by both researchers and research participants to be less socially significant than documentaries or social-realist television dramas, which deliver an educational message about violence. Here, the concept of “socially significant” or “socially consequential” (ibid.), however, is heavily tied into discourses of media effects, imitative violence and ideological normalisation. Without intending to discredit the educational or ideological role of media representation, it is useful to consider the possibility that mediated fantasies are also socially significant in the sense that they are used to negotiate the realities of people’s everyday lives. As the audience studies outlined in Chapter 4 demonstrate, fantasy narratives featuring violent male characters, such as *The Sopranos* (1999-2006), *Die Hard* (1988), *Rocky* (1976) and *Fist of Fury* (1972), are interpreted in meaningful ways. Moreover, the pleasures and meanings offered by these fantasies are largely determined by men’s material lives and are thus part of everyday reality. Given the ubiquity and circularity of the media effects debate (Tobin 2000), this analysis pushes the consideration of the reception of mediated male violence beyond the issue of imitative violence, but without abandoning an understanding of mediated images as ideologically powerful.

The opening scene in *Intermission*, in which Lehiff chats up a female sales assistant and punches her in the face, generated considerable comment in film reviews around the time of the film’s theatrical release. While some reviewers found it shocking or disconcerting (Rose 2004), others were more ambivalent. In *Film Ireland*, Maureen Buggy wrote, “Colin Farrell’s star quality comes fluttering out at you in the first scene, where he talks a sales assistant gooey-eyed only to smack her in the face and grab her takings” (Buggy 2003 p34). Anecdotal accounts of viewer responses to this scene in cinemas, whereby some audiences registered shock, while others allegedly laughed and cheered, suggested that radically different readings of Lehiff’s violence were being called into play. Significantly, this scene was the most talked about in the focus group discussions, and participants’ reactions to it during the screening, the various ways in which they discussed it and their recollections of the cinema audience’s responses to it gave rise to a rich and complex series of discussions about gender, masculinity and media violence. For the Urban Professional Group, in

particular, it was a recurrent topic of conversation, which was underpinned by considerable anxiety and uncertainty. These participants were the most ostensibly conflicted about its significance and about what constituted an appropriate response, and group consensus about it shifted and reformulated during the discussion. Less than a minute into the focus-group interview, Sean brought up the opening scene, although the conversation quickly moved away from this topic again:

- Interviewer: Eh Sean you saw it in the cinema...do you remember seeing it...how the audience responded?
- Sean: Yeah especially the first part...when it started and he started talking about love...and eh you're thinking OK fair enough and then he boxes her...and everyone was just shocked...some people didn't know whether to laugh...some people were like... shocked and then you're kinda going...I don't know what way to react to it...but at the same time still understand that...you realise what's just after happening...it's just the teeth you know
- Ryan: Probably in Santry Omniplex or UCI I'd say...Coolock
- Interviewer: Graham what about yourself?
- Graham: Em...yeah same I remember is the reaction when he hit
- Ryan: Everyone was just laughing though like it was the first film I'd seen in a while where everyone was just really laughing and they got everything...everyone was laughing together at the same things and it was good like everyone enjoyed it I really enjoyed it

Like the Rural Men's Group, participants in this group were uncomfortable with this scene. However, unlike the Rural Men's Group, who relied primarily on discourses about rising crime rates to make sense of *Intermission*, and who were relatively unanimous in their disapproval and dislike of the scene, the Urban Professional Group actively confronted the ambiguities they felt when watching it and talking about it. While, in relation to other topics, most of their contributions to the discussion were lengthy and relatively self-assured, the conversation became more fragmented and uncertain around this subject. After initial reports of shocked responses, it was gradually conceded that audiences laughed and that most of those laughing were men. Whereas participants initially aligned themselves with the responses of female viewers, they ended up distinguishing between male and female, and there was a gradual admission that participants themselves had laughed, followed by an attempt to explain this:

- Interviewer: How do you think the female audience might have reacted to the scene at the beginning when he hit her?
- Graham: No I'd say they were the ones that were kind of gasping, were a bit more shocked
- Cian: In the cinema I don't remember them being
- Graham: Ah I was surprised you'd never have seen that before
- Ryan: Some guys laughed
- Graham: They were probably about the same as we were, I was really shocked
- Ryan: It was very blatant in your face the way it happened
- Cian: I don't think I've ever seen something like that
- Interviewer: What was your response again?
- Graham: I was shocked definitely, I don't think I'd ever seen something as blatantly kind of just vicious like, I think they'd be the same
- Sean: Well like everyone was shocked and like people didn't know eh...everyone was kind of taken aback
- Ryan: Yeah because I remember some guys
- Cian: Because people were laughing, I think I was probably was
- Ryan: Yeah
- Graham: Yeah that's what I mean because people, everyone was shocked, then some guys laughed at it and some girls like, oh my god
- Ryan: Because we didn't know we didn't know how to take it we didn't know
- Sean: I'd say most guys would have probably been surprised and then would have laughed about it...maybe there would have been a certain percentage of women who would have taken it a little bit serious...eh more seriously, and been shocked and then not moved onto the laughter
- Ryan: Yeah exactly yeah
- Graham: A certain percentage yeah but then some of them would have laughed as well
- Sean: Guys would...a serious percentage of guys would have tended to laugh
- Ryan: Yeah

It is difficult to discern whether this conversation amounts to a critique of or an apology for men's responses to this scene. Schlesinger et al. (1998), by comparing their findings of men viewing violence with those of an earlier study on women viewing violence (Schlesinger et al. 1992), conclude that, while women respond to fictional narratives of male violence by questioning and discussing the social and psychological motivations for characters' behaviour, men rarely do this in relation to either male or female characters:

Our analysis in the present study, however, leads us to conclude that men do not habitually think about problems such as rape or domestic violence. Nor, more generally, do they appear to be thinking about what makes women tick when responding to violence on the screen. Such points of contrast begin to give us a sense of how men's violence may be differently perceived in male and female cultures (Schlesinger et al. 1998).

While there is no female group in this study with which to compare responses, participants in the Urban Professional group exhibited an awareness of the reactions of female members of the audience, albeit prompted by the researcher. Although it is possible that some of the self-reflexivity and discomfort displayed by this group around this topic was attributable to the presence of a female interviewer, these participants demonstrated an awareness of gender issues generally, and were not reticent, for example, when it came to expressing their indignation about what they felt were prejudicial attitudes toward men's magazines (see below).

Interestingly, nobody in this group suggested that Lehiff's character or actions were supposed to be read ironically or that his violence against women was a narrative device intended to invite audience dis-identification or mark him as transgressive. On the contrary, William interpreted Lehiff's violence as an attempt by the filmmakers to deal with the contemporary social problem of violence against women:

William: Well they wouldn't have shown even ten or twenty years ago a fella hitting a woman just like that, well I doubt they would have, 'cos it was domestic violence was kind of...not even domestic but violence against women was always kind of shunned and let's not talk about it even though we all know that it happened for like years

Interviewer: Yeah

William: Well people realise what's going on and they're not afraid to talk about it

However, this progressive, social-realist reading of how Lehiff's violence functions ideologically does not explain why participants admitted to finding the scene funny, while acknowledging that many women did not. What emerges is a strong sense of ambiguity and discomfort that is not easily dismissed by reference to irony or other rhetorical devices. While an awareness of the seriousness of male violence against women is clearly present in participants' attempts to analyse their own reactions to the scene, this is not sufficient to invite disdain for Lehiff. Even though this group did not see him as a central character, they were nonetheless sympathetic toward him:

Graham: I dunno I just see him as a person who's trying to get on and make a go of something for himself and the only way he knows how to do it is to kind of be a criminal, I mean you can see what he wants to do is get, he goes on actually at not just one point, he goes on that he wants to settle

down, get his own house and be domesticated and that, but the only way he's ever going to be able to do that is by eh...you know stealing and pulling off the once-off big scam like the bank

Rather than indicating that participants are conflicted or ambiguous about violence *per se*, this commuting between sympathetic engagements, whereby Lehiff is seen as a figure of fun, and critical involvements, whereby the film is seen to be exposing Irish social taboos, appears to stem from these participants' simultaneous and overlapping understandings of the film as part crime caper, part Irish comedy and part serious drama about masculinity. Like the British underclass films described by Claire Monk (2000), the cross-generic and intertextual borrowings of the Irish films give rise to a particularly fluid and polysemic mode of address, whereby the male audience is addressed as a social problem, a political interest group and a consumer market, often within the same film. Although participants in this group were the most inclined toward rhetorical involvement and were also the most fluid in their ability to adopt or cite a range of different discourses on gender and masculinity, they struggled with the apparent incongruities inherent in laughing at Lehiff as a parody of the Irish underclass (anti)hero, sympathising with him as a socially-disadvantaged youth who doesn't know any better and being interpellated - by the male audience as much as by the text itself - to laugh at his violence against women.

Of all the groups interviewed, the Urban Professionals were the most self-reflexive as well as the most conflicted, not only by the film's ambivalence but also by their own subject positions: on the one hand, as men, who felt invited to respond – as men – in a different way to women and, on the other, as middle-class men, who shared a particular worldview or “clustering of beliefs” (Schlesinger et al. 1998 p61) when it came to gender equality and the manifestation of real violence. What emerged from all of the focus groups was a complex and often contradictory set of responses to questions about gender, equality and change. Crucially, how seriously viewers took images of violence or sexism depended very much on how referential their involvements were: even participants whose engagements were predominantly real, such as the Youthreach Group, were quick to point out that the opening scene of *Intermission* “wouldn't be funny if it really happened”. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to a more detailed analysis of participants' conversations about

masculinity, in which discourses about violence, feminism, sexism and gender equality were variously present.

7.3 Exploring Changing Discourses on Masculinity through Discussions about *Intermission* and Other Irish Films

As discussed above, the new British gangster cycle and underclass films have been theorised as coterminous with the ironic sexism and anti-pc politics of British Lad Culture (Monk 2000, Chibnall 2001), the 'male rampage film' (Pfeil 1995) and some elements of the 'smart film' have been attributed to the popularity of American masculinity politics (Pfeil 1995, Savran 1998), and the teen comedy has been explained as an anxious response to female power and the acceptance of homosexuality (Greven 2002). While many commentators consider these new manifestations of masculinity as attempts to re-affirm hegemonic masculinity or as part of a wider anti-feminist backlash, others (Walter 1998, Gauntlett 2002) have suggested that they signal a playful acceptance of change. Certainly, Joanne Lacey's (2002) study of British male viewers watching the *Sopranos* indicates that male viewers are clued into contemporary discourses on gender and that these discourses are widely used to make sense of the text in relation to their own lives and identities as men.

The fact that the discursive and representational terrain of the new gangster, the underclass (anti)hero, the angry white male and the 'loser' stretches beyond the film (sub)genres under analysis into lad magazines, laddish television programmes and advertising, combined with the fact that these texts actively cross-reference and cross-promote, is evidence of substantial ideological or gender-political continuity between the films and other media formats. Rod Stoneman's (2005) comments, discussed in Chapter 6, alert us to the fact that Irish filmmakers have been actively encouraged to take account of audience desires and demands at all stages of the production process and that the male teenage demographic features centrally in notions of what sells. A recent lifestyle research survey in Ireland (*Decode - Youth Lifestyle Research Programme*, 2000), conducted by the Market Research Bureau of Ireland on behalf of a syndicate of some of Ireland's leading media/marketing companies, divided the 18-24 youth market into five key psychographic and lifestyle clusters, one of which was defined as "Gary - The Man Behaving Badly". This category, which is deemed to constitute 17% of the youth population, describes young men who identify strongly with Lad Culture. Another key cluster was defined as "Homer - The Passivist":

described as “the inert, content, non-mover”, this group also constitutes 17% of the youth population¹.

While market research, audience figures and box-office data tell us that certain images of masculinity and male-oriented genres are popular with particular male viewers, they tend to operate on the basis of crude and often essentialist assumptions about what men like. Paul Bettany’s critique of marketing surveys which establish “that men between the ages of 15 and 28 get the horn every time they hear the word ‘gangster’” (Gilbey 2004) illustrates the point that such crude assumptions fail to address the complex economic and gender political realities through which certain texts, genres and images are mediated in the everyday experiences of viewers. The transition from regarding film audiences as psychographic and lifestyle clusters to considering them as “interpretive communities” (Fish 1980) necessitates a much deeper consideration of the meanings and pleasures associated with certain film-viewing practices, and of spectators’ psychical realities as well as the material and historical conditions which have shaped them (Walkerdine 1996). Socially-specific readings of films show that meta-theories which attribute the new male-oriented films to an anti-feminist backlash, on the one hand, or to ironic self-parody / gender performance, on the other, fail to account for the complexity, incertitude and ambiguity of the discursive frameworks through which most men make sense of mediated images, as well as for the fact that reading strategies are, for the most part, relatively unconscious or subconscious processes. The identification of participants’ citation and recycling of wider gender discourses thus becomes a key technique in determining how and why certain images and narratives appeal to viewers, as men.

As the findings reported in Chapter 6 illustrate, the viewers in this study were conscious of the continuities between contemporary Irish cinema and similar films emerging elsewhere. The directions which their conversations took also indicated that film narratives and characters were understood as operating within wider representative spaces: the appeal of *Mean Machine*, for example, was largely attributable to footballer Vinnie Jones, who was described by the Youthreach

¹ The other clusters were *Lois and Clark - The Cheerleader* (i.e., the active, healthy, fulfilled and happy, 27% of the youth population), *Britney* (i.e., the image-led, style-conscious female, 22% of the youth population) and *Frasier & Lilith* (i.e., self-assured, well-travelled, techno-aware and judgmental, 16% of the youth population).

participants as “a legend” (presumably as a footballer, an actor and a media celebrity). Among the same group, the appeal of crime narratives in Irish films was conflated with that of similar stories in television drama and the news. For the GAA Group and the Urban Professional Group, in particular, there was a more conscious awareness of the links between contemporary male-oriented Irish cinema and Lad Culture. A fuller picture of how participants positioned the films in terms of other media and in relation to wider gender discourses generally emerged by asking whether they felt that *Intermission* (and other similar films) were aimed primarily at a male or female audience and why.

Although most participants readily compared *Intermission* with British, male-oriented films such as *Snatch* and *Lock Stock*, there was some disagreement among the groups as to whether the film was primarily aimed at a male or female audience. For the Youthreach Group, who saw the film as most closely aligned with *Accelerator* and *Crushproof* as well as with the British gangster films, *Intermission* was perceived as a man’s film, although Declan and David argued that the presence of violent women in the film as well as Colin Farrell’s appeal to female viewers opened it up to a female audience:

- Interviewer: OK, em...do you think it’s the kind of film that would be more popular with men?
 Declan: Men
 David: Yeah
 Peter: Men yeah
 Interviewer: Why do you say that?
 Declan: Because it’s mostly men like acting in it
 David: I’d say men yeah
 Tommy: I’d say both
 Gary: Yeah
 David: Both yeah
 Declan: ‘Cos there’s all those mad feminists an’ shit...when you see that one bating the head off her fella an’ shit
 Tommy: Yeah
 David: And all the birds are mad into your man Colin Farrell so...they go to see him

For the Youthreach Group, the significance of the reviews from *FHM* and *Maxim* on the DVD cover was not particularly clear. Although they showed a lot of interest in men’s magazines, most said that they could not afford to buy them and only read them

if their brother or a friend had bought them. Declan and David also mentioned that they liked *Bizarre*, which focuses on the grotesque and the extreme and on bizarre sex, physical injury, torment and illness (Attwood 2005). Participants from this group were generally the least apologetic or defensive when it came to discussions about lad culture and male violence. Because their readings were primarily referential, they tended to accept *Intermission*'s representation of gender as a realistic depiction of "what life's like" (Declan). Unlike the other groups, they were neither critical nor defensive of laddism. They laughed openly during *Intermission*'s opening scene and they were not uncomfortable when asked about this, although Ray did point out that it would not be funny if it really happened:

- Interviewer: When I saw *Intermission* in the cinema that scene at the beginning do you know where he punches her, everybody laughed at the cinema
 Declan: Yeah
 Ray: Yes, it wouldn't be funny if you saw it in real life
 David: It looks like he was going to get stuck into her
 Tommy: Yeah
 Peter: Yeah
 Ray: You don't expect it
 [Laughter]

Similarly, in a discussion about *Fight Club*, the participants in this group did not problematise the film's violence or seek to explain it. Ray's comment that "it makes you want to go out and kill someone" was of particular interest here: rather than discredit the imitative violence debate by dismissing the film as pure entertainment, he adopted – either consciously or unconsciously - the position of the vulnerable viewer who is interpellated by the film's spectacular fight sequences:

- Interviewer: What did you think about that, the fight club?
 Declan: Ah deadly
 Peter: Ah it's ace
 Ray: It makes you want to go out and fuckin' kill someone
 Declan: Kill someone
 Ray: Yeah
 [Laughter]
 Peter: They were starting fights on priests and all they were
 [Laughter]

It is difficult to interpret the boys' openness about the appeal of violence in *Fight Club*. Unlike the Rural Men's group, who generally disapproved of male violence in films, or the GAA and Youthreach Groups, for whom violence was a complex and sometimes awkward topic of conversation, the Youthreach participants were ostensibly unconflicted regarding its appeal. Whether the Youthreach participants did not problematise male violence because they regard it as a natural fact of life or because they take for granted that mediated violence is harmless is unclear. In his study of schoolchildren watching *Swiss Family Robinson*, Tobin (2000) interprets his informants' citation of effects discourses as a deliberate attempt to challenge or subvert the media researcher's expectations and to highlight the circularity and futility of the media effects debate. Viewed in this way, it is possible that the Youthreach participants adopted the imitative violence discourse consciously: either to confuse or provoke the researcher or as a means of subverting news media discourses which pathologise male working-class youth. However, such an interpretation would be purely speculative, especially given that, unlike the other groups, these participants demonstrated little or no interest in impressing the researcher or in second-guessing her agenda. In this sense, their conversation appeared more naturalistic, although it is important to note that there are different kinds of conversational performativity and that their tendency to direct comments predominantly at one another may have been a way of taking control of the interview.

As far as "wider gender scripts" (Nixon 1997) were concerned, this group did not demonstrate a high awareness of contemporary discourses on gender. Unlike the participants in other groups, they were unconcerned about using politically-incorrect terms and exhibited little or no awareness of the film as explicitly dealing with men or masculinity. They said they had not heard of the term "masculinity crisis" and were ostensibly unaware of what Harry Ferguson (2003) refers to as the "social problematisation" of men and masculinity. Male problems were understood exclusively in terms of Oscar not being able to masturbate, which was the source of much humour:

- Interviewer: OK em...what about the idea of men having problems, masculinity crisis, what have you heard about that?
- Declan: The dude what's his name the other dude that works in the supermarket, he had some problems

- David: Yeah he had loads of them
[Laughter]
- Interviewer: Who the manager?
- Declan: No no not the manager, the other dude that couldn't wank and shit
- David: The young fella
- Interviewer: Oh Oscar yeah
- David: With the red hair
- Declan: He had a lot of problems
[Laughter]

Importantly, the female characters were entirely marginal to this group's understanding of the film, and they were dismissed at one point in the discussion as "all those mad feminists an' shit" (Declan). Although the Youthreach participants disliked the supermarket manager and Detective Lynch, they did not speak of them in the same derogatory terms that they reserved for the females:

- Gary: They all hate your woman [makes tutting sound] like that keeps on tuttin'...your woman that works in the
- Declan: Ah yeah that one would wreck your head... that fat wretched looking thing

What emerges from this group's response to *Intermission* and from their general film-viewing practices and preferences is a primarily referential engagement with urban underclass and crime films. For this group, *Intermission* was seen as similar to both *Accelerator* and *Crushproof* because of the conflict between Lynch and Lehiff, which was taken to be the central drama of the film. This group's primary identification with Lehiff, their perception of Lynch's character as realistic, their consideration of 'new men' John and Oscar as insignificant or marginal to the plot and their dismissal of female characters as mad, ugly or feminist combine to facilitate a reading of the text as an underclass crime film that is continuous with *Snatch* and *Lock Stock*. As far as gender relations were concerned, *Intermission* was seen to portray "the way life is": there was no awareness of the film either as a critique or an endorsement of hegemonic masculinity (ideological involvement) and no evidence of ironic or ludic readings. Class, therefore, rather than gender, played a much more important role in interpellating these viewers into the film's ideological universe.

There was no evidence of a collective sense of disenfranchisement on the basis of gender. Although 'feminist' was used as a derogatory term, this group, to the extent

that they consciously thought about issues of sexism or gender equality, accepted change as natural. It was agreed that the film couldn't have made sense twenty years ago "cos the women wouldn't be working as much like years ago, back years ago, ages ago, the men used to do the work then and the women used to just get the money" (Tommy). This group also perceived and accepted that women had considerable power within the community. That both Mick and Oscar were "scared of their birds" was seen as realistic, although this was the source of some amusement. Overall, gender equality was not a conscious concern of this group and they did not appear to mediate their "psychic alignment" (Walkerdine 1996) with *Intermission* or the other films discussed along lines of gender. Class identity, on the other hand, was central to the meanings and pleasures that they derived from watching the film, as well as other films such as *Accelerator*, *Crush Proof* and *Adam and Paul*. These boys, who had left school early and were pursuing vocational training, could relate to *Intermission's* portrayal of work and the attendant pressures of earning money. The manner in which these films position the spectator in sympathy with their unemployed, disenfranchised or disaffected male protagonists seemed to valorise their way of life: unlike the countless news reports and documentaries which problematise and arguably stigmatise socially-marginalised communities, these films were understood by the Youthreach Group as normalising everyday issues and problems with which they were familiar:

- Interviewer: You know the way they hate their jobs, is that realistic?
 Tommy: Yes
 Peter: Nearly everyone complains about their job
 Ray: Yeah
 Gary: Nobody really loves their job I don't think, not unless it is a good job
 David: Not all people
 Gary: In factories and
 David: A lot of people love their jobs I'd say
 Declan: Yeah if they have good ones, the ones that you want
 Gary: The ones that you're stuck with that you have to do, they're the ones...working in McDonalds and all
 David: Yeah but nobody says oh yeah I want to work in McDonalds

For the GAA Group, *Intermission* was also perceived as a male-oriented film, not only on account of the prevalence of male characters but also on account of the depth with which their problems and issues were explored, such as John's relationship

problems with Deirdre and Oscar's inability to masturbate. According to Martin, for example, the film offered viewers a male perspective not in the conventional 'male gaze' sense but because "it goes really in depth into things that are going on in their lives".

Martin: All I'm saying is that most of the characters are men and all the women are whatever [inaudible] it goes through the men's lives from their point of view like so that we...men can relate to it better than women.

In spite of an awareness of the fact that the film addresses serious emotional questions, participants in this group were reluctant to be drawn into any serious discussions about the film's meaning. Mention of Oscar's sexual dysfunction provoked a lot of laughter and one participant who, when talking about this, referred to Oscar's inability to "spill the beans", was subjected to considerable derision. Another was compared to Oscar because he had allegedly "fallen asleep on the job", which was also the source of much amusement among the group. While much of the joking and jeering was clearly attributable to the perceived inappropriateness of discussing such topics with a female lecturer, the jocular camaraderie among this group also appeared to be a familiar aspect of the group dynamic. For these participants, who liked teen comedies more than any of the other groups, *Intermission* was first and foremost a comedy. Although Lehiff was considered to be the central character, their involvements with him were much more ludic than those of the Youthreach Group, who identified with Lehiff in referential (real, closed) terms. When asked what they thought were the best scenes in the film, the GAA Group emphasised the key elements of what Attwood (2005), in relation to lad magazines, refers to as "grotesquerie":

Interview: Em...what do you think were the best scenes in the film?

Patrick: I think the start was funny

Michael: The toilet

Peadar: Yeah the toilet

Michael: When he pisses on him in the toilet that's funny

Peadar: When he decks yer one at the start that's funny

[laughter]

and when she decks him in bed

Michael: Yeah that's funny as well

Peadar: They have the biggest laughs don't they

Patrick: Yeah

Martin: I thought when your man was getting' sick in the aisle was good as well

Michael: Hmmm
[Laughter]

Although, for this group, the film's female characters were also marginal and were sometimes discussed in somewhat derisory terms, there was a certain cautiousness about how particular topics were addressed. At several points, participants pulled one another up for using politically-incorrect terms, such as when Peadar referred to the Travellers in *Snatch* as "knackers". Liam, in particular, was keen to disassociate himself from Peadar's unapologetic enjoyment of the violence in the opening scene. What was most apparent among this group, however, was the ostensibly harmonious coexistence between the optimistic rhetoric of progress and gender equality that characterises postfeminist discourse, on the one hand, and an acceptance of gender difference and inequity in relation to cultural representations, on the other. Earlier on in the discussion, it was established that women's liberation was a *fait accompli*:

Patrick: Years ago the man was the man and that was it like
Liam: A woman wouldn't have dreamt of
Michael: Nowadays
Patrick: Yeah exactly...women were just domestic...or whatever
Michael: That's...but like now they have jobs women are successful and they don't need their husbands or whatever...you know all that kind of stuff

Later on, however, participants attributed the fact that representations of men and women had not changed to the fact that most people still think of men as breadwinners and of women as domestic, as well to the fact that there are so few female filmmakers. The persistence of these inequities did not appear to conflict with participants' contention that women are now as successful as men and "don't need husbands". Similar types of discourses also emerged in an earlier study (Ging 2005) on teenage males in Ireland: in spite of the widespread belief that gender equality has been achieved, when asked who did most of the housework, 63 per cent of participants replied mothers, while only 3 per cent said their fathers did it. In the present study, gender segregation and stereotypical gender representations were not regarded as incongruous with equality but simply part of a mindset that is slow to change:

Peadar: I suppose the majority of like anybody I know can't really remember or picture a film that the wife's the main breadwinner in the family like

- Interviewer: Even still?
 Peadar: Yeah
 Liam: It's not really a conscious decision but
 Patrick: It's just the way it is
 Michael: It's been like that for years
 Liam: It's the way the world has always been and it doesn't just change just like that

As was the case with the Youthreach Group, *Intermission's* female characters were regarded as marginal. Deirdre was seen by Patrick as representative of most women in that she knew what she wanted but she was not regarded by any of the group as central to the story. Noleen, who physically attacks her husband for leaving her for a younger woman, was described as "mad" and "a wreck". The character of Sally, in particular, who had retreated from the world of dating following an abusive experience with a boyfriend and, as Deirdre put it, had "let herself go" by growing facial hair, was seen primarily as a figure of fun. Although this group expressed a certain amount of sympathy for her, they also found the scene in which Deirdre tells Sam that Sally's ex-boyfriend tied her up and defecated on her chest highly amusing. This was in stark contrast to the Urban Professional Group, who expressed disgust and disbelief during this scene, although they failed to comment on it in the focus group. The following excerpt illustrates the GAA Group's ambivalence toward Sally, who they felt could be forgiven (for having a moustache and being emotionally reserved) on account of what had happened to her:

- Interviewer: What kind of character is she?
 Peadar: Sad
 Michael: She's a bit dry is she
 Interviewer: She's what?
 Michael: She's very dry like she doesn't
 Peadar: She's emotionally disturbed
 Liam: That's because she's had a bit of a bad experience
 [Laughter]
 Peadar: Anyone could forgive her like you know
 Patrick: She's had a bad experience with every man
 Liam: I think she got dumped
 Peadar: Got dumped on
 [Loud laughter]
 Peadar: She got dumped
 Michael: She creates a good ending storyline when she
 Liam: Her and Oscar at the end
 Martin: I think there could be another thing...em apart from that it's a boys' a men's a lad's film or whatever...and em...we all know or have seen

women like that and we want to just say will you get rid of that ronnie
will you
[Laughter]

When asked why they thought the distributors had used favourable reviews from *Maxim* and *FHM* to promote the film, participants in this group were quick to identify these publications as “lads mags” and generally felt that this kind of pitch was appropriate, because “the fellas would get more craic out of it” (Martin), “It’s probably more of lads’ film” (Liam), and “There’s only two main women in it like...the two sisters...” (Patrick). Michael, however, commented that the film may have been misunderstood as a lads’ film because “They probably just saw your man hittin’ yer one at the start”. On the whole, however, this group were favourably disposed toward Lad Culture, which they understood as a relaxed approach to life and a reluctance to take things too seriously. As Peadar commented in relation to *Loaded*, “it’s a bit of crack like there’s jokes in it there’s naked women and just everything you know nothing serious...nothing like em that we have to worry about or any of this craic.” For most of this group, the pleasures and meanings generated by *Intermission* were coterminous with the discursive terrain of the magazines: it offered gross-out humour, a world in which work was not imperative, a sense of fascination and ludic involvement with Colin Farrell’s iconic working-class image and the ability to circumvent the film’s more serious comments on men and masculinity by foregrounding it as a comedy.

This group demonstrated a greater awareness of gender-political discourse than the Youthreach Group. Their attitude toward gender could be described as typically postfeminist in the sense that they understood gender equality as both desirable and already achieved, yet they also attributed inequitable and stereotypical representations of gender to “the way things have always been”. They took the gender segregation of cultural audiences for granted (“Romance wouldn’t be a big one in the house with five fellows”), which was reflected in their strong preferences for film genres that are typically aimed at men, such as action, sport and teen comedy. Although the participants in this group did not speak rhetorically or reflexively about Lad Culture as an antagonistic or ironic response to feminism, and steered clear of ideological involvements generally, they nonetheless mobilised its defensive rhetoric of harmless, blokeish fun. While no overt antagonism was directed toward the researcher, it was

possible to detect an implicit critique of feminist enquiry – and perhaps also of the academic critique of popular culture - in some of their comments. In the following exchange, for example, it is difficult to determine where the citation of social discourse ends and a direct challenge to the researcher begins:

- Peadar: I'd agree with what they're [lads' magazines] saying like just...just don't get worked up about it...just take everything with a pinch of salt like it's not...the films and the magazines are not necessarily saying this is what happens or this must happen or...they're not saying that if people see this they're going to go out and do it
- Patrick: It's just a movie
- Michael: It's only a film...it's only a bit of crack...don't read too much into it like
- Liam: It's just a bit of crack
- Peadar: I just think that people are too worked up if they're getting worried about that kind of thing...there's a lot more important things to be worried about...something that gives a bit of relief or light relief or whatever should be a good thing not a bad thing

Here, participants seem to be conflating anti-effects rhetoric with discourses that are common to both postfeminism and lad culture. This serves as a useful illustration of how discourses of the active audience and ideological resistance have become sutured into popular understandings of postmodern and postfeminist culture and, more importantly, into the ways in which viewers discursively construct themselves in relation to postmodern and postfeminist texts. This rejection of mediated images and representations as socially significant can thus be read as a way of deflecting ideological critique away from images of and discourses on gender that are understood by some as problematic or contentious. Even though the GAA Group were unable or reluctant to engage ideologically with lad culture, they clearly understood not only how these texts are supposed to be consumed but also how descriptions of their usage are supposed to be performed. They felt that the quotes by *FHM* and *Maxim* set *Intermission* up as a lads' film, and they had little or no argument with this. This perception of *Intermission* as coterminous with Lad Culture was facilitated by their general attitudes toward gender equality, their uncritical enjoyment of the magazines in question, their positioning of Lehiff as central, their consideration of the female characters as marginal and their lack of interest in John and Oscar's stories as serious commentaries about contemporary male problems.

The Urban Professional Group differed considerably from both the Youthreach and GAA groups, firstly in that their involvements with *Intermission* were considerably more rhetorical (both ideological and constructional) and secondly, in that they identified (with) John and Oscar as the film's protagonists. Unlike the majority of the other participants, they demonstrated an awareness or constructional / ideological understanding of what the film was trying to do which, in their opinion, was to show up traditional masculinity as macho performance and to valorise new mannism. The following conversation is worth quoting at length because it offers rich insights not only into their attitudes about masculinity but also their capacity to engage ideologically with issues of media representation:

- Interviewer: Em...just to go back to this film being realistic, what do you think it has to say about men and men's lives?
- Sean: That they probably try most of the time to be kind of tough on the outside but then they'd be kind of weak, there's times when they're weak...well, they show weakness like, especially when the guy loses his job and he goes into the pub and the real tough guy says it's OK do you wanna talk about it and that's the typical kinda thing it's always done over a pint or two, or usually it takes like a couple of pints...[laughs] to like, just for fellas like talk to each other about stuff they wouldn't just generally talk about, whereas women would just talk about it over a cup of coffee or the phone
- Ryan: At the end they're showing like
[Laughter]
- Sean: By the end they're trying to show what genuine love is like I suppose the only ones that are, you know they were trying to demonise let's say, particularly when the credits were rolling, you know demonise the guy from the bank who didn't really care about his wife or wasn't really interested in that like, you know, and the other guys, well let's say one of them...overlooked the ronnie
[Laughter]
and eh, the other one was just you know a kind of genuine bloke, you know these guys were happy and he was...you know, getting hit with remote control
- Interviewer: Yeah...Do you think there's a message about change? Would it have made sense twenty years ago?
- Graham: Well yeah I think there is...because the manager and eh Colm Meaney, they're both kind of the older men, they're trying to be real in authority and have all this power, and show that they're real masculine and you know, they're
- Ryan: They're the bosses
- Graham: Yeah they're hard and stuff...whereas the new lads are all kind of, they don't even care they're after the girls they just want to settle down and find someone, whereas the old supermarket manager and Colm

Meaney are about concerning themselves with being hard guys or whatever and those two sets are opposed to each other.

For these participants, Lynch and the supermarket manager were laughable yet realistic figures who represented an outmoded machismo, while Lehiff was perceived to be a stereotypical “eighties light criminal” whose primary function was to link the film’s main plots. Although participants in this group compared *Intermisison* with *Snatch*, they also thought it was similar to *About a Boy*, *Magnolia* and *Love Actually*. Their core interest in John and Oscar and their greater familiarity with contemporary gender discourses enabled them to read the film as an exploration of changing masculine identity in Ireland. Moreover, because they considered John and Oscar to be central, they did not marginalise the female characters: while Noleen’s violence toward Oscar was considered comical at first, her pain and her attempts to regain lost confidence through group therapy were taken seriously:

- Sean: Yeah it’s comical, just funny
 William: Nothing but funny
 Cian: Although I dunno, she was very angry after the fella her husband left, so
 Graham: It was two middle-aged women who both got the worst and then they’re trying to make an effort to get back into life, maybe that’s something kind of modern, you know they’re going to these lectures and all that kind of stuff
 Cian: Yeah...empowering themselves

Similarly, even though they found the ‘ronnie’ jokes funny, they also understood that the film was interpellating them to identify with John’s emotional development and with Oscar’s ability to overlook Sally’s eccentricities in the pursuit of happiness. When Sean suggested that Noleen’s hitting Oscar should not be taken seriously because the film was a comedy, the others disagreed: Graham felt that it was also sad and serious in parts because it explored everyone’s low points, while William contended that there was a serious message about change in the evolution of Oscar and Sally’s relationship:

- Sean: When she hits him across the face, that’s with eh your one Christina, I dunno I don’t think it’s a sad part, it’s just a total comedy
 Graham: There’s a sad part though when they’re all upset, when Noleen’s on the bed and eh the Cillian Murphy character whatever his name is, is at home in his apartment and poor old Oscar is...having a bit of trouble

- Ryan: Yeah
 Graham: That was kind of everybody showing their low points but the fact that you've got to get on with it and try and make a go of something else, I suppose in the end everyone lives happily ever after...eh, because what's his name at the end?
 Ryan: Ah the other boy
 William: And eh maybe it's when Oscar and the...girl with the ronnie [laughs] they're talking in the café and you can see that kind of development there, about what people are looking for in life...em perseverance I suppose...and change is necessary.

While it is easy to conclude that it was the Urban Professionals' espousal of a more 'progressive' politics of gender equality that foreclosed engagement with *Intermission* as a 'laddish' film, other issues emerged in the focus-group discussion which indicate that this was not the only reason. Along with the Youthreach Group, these participants were the most avid fans and consumers of crime, underclass and gangster films. Although they considered *Intermission* to be similar to the London gangster films, they also saw it as "much lighter" and, as Sean put it, "it's got the romantic kind of themes coming through it so women probably would like it as well". Arguably, therefore, although participants in this group were cognisant of *Intermission's* borrowings from the gangster / crime genre, they read it more as part Irish comedy and part serious drama about masculinity. Colin Farrell's perceived lack of success in setting himself up as a tough gangster figure, combined with the fact that this group was uncomfortable with the figure of the local criminal, played a part in this interpretation. Unlike the slick, authentic criminals of the London gangster films or *The Sopranos*, the Dublin underclass criminal epitomised by Farrell was a figure with whom they wished to disassociate rather than identify. As Sean put it, "Normally we'd know in real life if people were like that...if you were on the bus and you heard lads your age talking about robbing something you'd be shocked, it wouldn't happen like that, you wouldn't want to associate with them."

When participants in this group were asked whether they thought the reviews from *FHM* and *Maxim* pitched *Intermission* as a lads' film, and whether or not this was appropriate, Cian felt that it was unfair to sell it as a lads' film because it would be equally enjoyable for men and women. However, they liked the quote "Rivals *Trainspotting* for balls, brains and back-alley wit" and agreed that reviews from these types of magazines, while they might put some people off, would certainly not turn

them off watching the film. Although participants in the Urban Professional Group did not perceive *Intermission* to be first and foremost a lads' film, they were keen consumers both of lad magazines and of crime, underclass and gangster films and were highly aware of Lad Culture's fascination with the figure of the gangster. In spite of the 'progressive' discourses of new manhood through which they mediated their readings of *Intermission*, their discursive citations changed somewhat when the conversation switched to gangsters and to lad magazines. When asked why the gangster was so appealing, they cited power, money, respect and having beautiful women - the hallmarks of success of patriarchal masculinity - as the main attractions. The gangster was also considered to be a tough, self-made man, and the invisibility of his work was also cited as a key attraction:

- Sean: I'd say it's because they're always dressed sharply, they have power, they have money, they generally have the good-looking girlfriend, and they're respected by all their peers
- Ryan: Yeah it's easy success
- Graham: Yeah
- William: And it's not considered stuffy
- Graham: Yeah and they didn't start out successful
- Ryan: And they're tough
- William: You can't see the work
- Graham: Yeah you can't

Thus, although these participants dismissed Lynch and the supermarket manager as outmoded 'hard men' and totally approved of John and Oscar's trajectories from emotionally and sexually repressed to more emotionally mature, relationship-oriented articulations of masculinity, they also exhibited a fascination with mafia hard men. This is no doubt partly attributable to the exotic Otherness of the mafia icon and the tendency among viewers to relax their concerns about verisimilitude when it comes to non-indigenous representations (Liebes and Katz 1990 p16). As Ryan pointed out:

It's a fascination or a fantasy or something that...you know you're totally separated from it but...it's how, not really how the other half live but it's...I dunno...maybe it's like kids and cops and robbers.

However, even though mafia masculinity was consciously understood here as fantasy or as performance, further discussions about lad magazines raised some interesting questions, and provided deeper insights into these men's perceptions of gender equality, gender representation in the media and the gaze economy of contemporary

mass culture. Participants in this group felt that men's magazines got a lot of bad press, mostly because of the covers, and were keen to stress that naked or scantily-clad women, even though they are used to sell the magazines, account for a small percentage of content, which in the case of *FHM* was mostly "lads' stuff" like cars, fashion, CDs, books, films and quirky stories. Moreover, they claimed that women's magazines such as *Cosmo* were much more "shocking" and "far dirtier" than lads' magazines. Graham, in particular, was resentful about the way in which men's magazines have been stigmatised:

Graham: In the UK it's been moved to the top shelf with like actual porn, men's magazines have...yeah...when at the end of the day it's like only because of what's on the cover, not what's in it like...whereas and if at the same time some guys might be embarrassed to be reading say *FHM* on the train or on the airplane and like if a girl's flicking through *Cosmo* or whatever like *In-Style* or *Marie-Claire* or whatever em you know it's perfectly acceptable when the guy could be reading about like eh *Blur*'s new CD or a film or a book or an article about some weird country in the Amazon and the girl could be reading like the top ten sex tips of the month

Graham's comments were similar to the sentiments expressed by Peadar in the GAA Group, although Peadar was more confrontational and his attitude suggested a more direct appropriation of lad culture's rhetoric of defiance:

Peadar: If I'm on a train and I'm reading *Loaded* what's that woman over there thinking of me...is she thinking I'm looking at pictures of naked women or what
[Laughter]
I just don't care like...it's just a bit of crack like if she thinks that let her think it

The comparative framework within which *FHM* and *Cosmo* were discussed in the Urban Professional Group brought up a number of important issues. The contention that *Cosmo* gets away with more than *FHM*, in spite of the fact that it is more sexually explicit, suggests that sexual explicitness – rather than misogynistic discourse or the sexual objectification of women – was seen as the cause of public concern or disapproval. The fact that both publications have "hot girls on the front" was not questioned or critiqued as evidence of an inequitable gaze economy: on the contrary, participants felt it unjust that the same types of images of women were understood in

such radically different ways depending on which magazine cover they appeared. According to Graham, if *Cosmo* really was about women's issues and lifestyle things, it should have pictures of successful women on the front, although he himself had argued that *FHM*'s primarily features-driven content was misunderstood because of the women on the cover page. The reasons why *FHM* does not have successful men on its front cover or why *Cosmo* does not feature naked or scantily-clad men was something they had not considered:

- Interviewer: It's interesting that *Cosmo* doesn't have naked men
 William: Yeah
 Sean: Does it not?
 Cian: True
 William: Very good point
 Sean: I suppose well...it's generally accepted though that women, the female form is far more beautiful
 [Laughter]
 And women will say that as well
 [Laughter]
 I'm not just saying this...in art, why do women
 [laughter]
 It's still, even in *Cosmo* though, it's still hot girls like...it's still models, like the *Cosmo* girls could easily be on *FHM* covers
 Graham: Yeah exactly yeah they're just wearing whatever dress they're modelling
 Sean: Or here the hot model is wearing the make-up of choice
 Graham: I suppose the common perception would be em that *Cosmo* is about women's issues and information for women on their lifestyle whereas *FHM* would be so men can look at hot girls
 Sean: Yeah
 Graham: Or half-naked girls
 Sean: Yeah
 William: I think that's spot on
 Sean: That's...but they both have the same girls on the front, if *Cosmo* was this magazine about women's issues and
 Cian: Rachel Stevens
 Sean: Women's lifestyles, surely they'd have some pictures of successful women that would reflect all these issues and lifestyle things that *Cosmo* is supposed to be about, rather than a hot model
 Graham: Well, how about this right...there's a picture of Kylie Minogue and the headline is Kylie Minogue and her breasts and you put it on *Cosmo* and it's fine and you put it on *FHM*
 Sean: And it's smutty
 Graham: And it's smutty...right...and OK it's gonna talk in *Cosmo* about breast cancer, and she could easily be talking about breast cancer or whatever, or just about it could be just about her life at the moment in *FHM*, but people...OK well fair enough and rightly probably presume

[laughs] that she was talking about that thing but like the exact same thing then goes on each cover

While this exchange did not relate directly to film-viewing, it was indicative of the gender-blindness that characterised most participants' perspectives on the gaze economy of popular culture. It also indicates that numerous, often contradictory discourses on gender compete with one another in struggles over meaning. Although the Urban Professional group were largely sympathetic toward new mannism, they were also uncritical of lad culture's dominant male gaze and of its fascination with unreconstructed masculinities. However, rather than appropriate the evasive rhetorical device of describing lad culture as harmless fun or ironic sexism, they endeavoured instead to point out its more serious or 'middle-brow' elements. To a large extent, this attitude also characterised their approach to film-viewing, whereby predominantly rhetorical – both ideological and constructional – engagements enabled them to talk about films enthusiastically but always at a remove and demonstrably cognisant of what the filmmakers were trying to do. Their negotiation of *The Sopranos*, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8, is a key example of this, whereby participants were keen to demonstrate their awareness of the programme as a study of male weakness, powerlessness and failure rather than of male power and machismo.

What emerged from this group was a certain tension or overlap between the discourses of new mannism and new laddism. These men were comfortable with discussing relationships and masculinity as discourse, and were critical of *Intermission*'s unreconstructed male characters as well as of the bank manager's treatment of his wife. However, they also expressed a certain sense of disaffection and indignation in relation to the way in which men were stigmatised for looking at certain images of women and for reading about sex, whereas women got away with it. This rhetoric of disentitlement, whereby it is often suggested that things have 'swung the other way', is a common feature of the discourse of laddism and of the masculinist strands of the men's movement. Although the scene in which Noleen beats up Oscar was regarded by most of the group as comical ("whatever you're into"), Ryan offered the following comment: "I don't know what was going on there...women's liberation? I dunno". Similarly, the GAA Group felt that female-on-male violence, while primarily comical, was related to women's liberation from the domestic and

from marriage, their ability to get jobs and “all that kind of stuff”. While watching and discussing *Intermission*, the identifications and involvements of the Urban Professional Group were largely mediated through the discourse of what Beynon (2002) refers to as the ‘new man as nurturer’. However, a certain tension arose between the rhetoric of new mannism and new laddism in their discussions about the (British/American) gangster genre and figure, which encapsulates strong elements of both: on the one hand, a masculinity defined by style, image and conspicuous consumption or what Beynon (2002) describes as the “new man as narcissist”, and, on the other, a tough, working-class criminal masculinity which is not defined by conventional work.

That such ostensibly contradictory discourses can be cited or evoked to discuss different masculine identities and images is indicative of the complexity of the “gender scripts” (Nixon 1997) through which meaning is negotiated. However, the fact that a new-man-as-nurturer discourse dominated their understanding of an indigenous comedy with whose imperfect yet transformed protagonists they identified, whereas a predominantly new-man-as-narcissist / new-lad rhetoric emerged when the discussion switched to lad magazines and gangster films, indicates that different meanings, pleasures and performances of usage (Lohan 2000) are mobilised, depending on where a particular text is imagined on the realist-fantasy scale. The greater the commuting between referential and rhetorical engagements and the greater the overall tendency toward constructional and ideological involvement, the greater the range of gender discourses that were used to talk about texts. Of all the participants interviewed, the Urban Professionals were the group that best demonstrated what Beynon refers to as a “hybridised masculinity that is experienced and displayed differently at different times in different situations (ibid. p6).” These findings indicate that the “more fluid, bricolage masculinity” described by Beynon, which is the result of “channel-hopping across versions of the masculine” (opt. cit.), is more readily available to audiences who are familiar with gender-political discourses and who are more inclined toward rhetorical rather than referential involvement in film.

Of all the men interviewed, the participants in the Rural Men’s Group were the least engaged both with contemporary film culture and popular discourses on gender.

Although most of the participants in this group said they did not identify with *Intermission*'s urban location and characters or depiction of the criminal underworld, their readings remained primarily referential in that they felt it was probably an accurate depiction of Dublin, judging by what they read in the newspapers. Generally speaking, they did not watch many films and *Intermission* was not the sort of film they usually watched. Although Jim, who had lived in Glasgow, and Matthew, who had lived in London, saw similarities between *Intermission* and *Trainspotting* and *Lock Stock*, the majority of the group, unlike other participants, did not naturally engage in comparisons with other films or other media texts. Moreover, they did not see the film as addressing men or masculinity but rather as a film about crime and working-class life in Dublin, and were somewhat uncomfortable with its violence and bad language. In the questionnaires, one participant from this group commented that *The General* was "too violent and disturbing", while another felt that it "romanticised mass murderers". This overtly critical attitude toward media violence was not evident in any of the other groups.

Frank, the group leader, and Matthew, an English man of 40 who was not from the village, stood out as notable exceptions in this regard. Frank, in particular, was keenly engaged in contemporary discourses and debates on masculinity, and read *Intermission* almost exclusively as a study of the social problematisation of masculinity. However, given that he was watching the film for the first time in his working environment (unlike the others, for whom the drop-in centre was a place of leisure), had more background knowledge about the study and was familiar with this type of research, his engagements must be considered as more self-consciously rhetorical than was the case with most other participants. To a large degree, he mediated the reception of the film for the rest of the group, who would not normally or naturally talk about films in such a critically removed or analytical way. Frank, who didn't identify with any of the characters, was interpellated by what he understood to be the film's critique of patriarchal behavioural norms, such as men's inability to communicate emotionally. For him, John typified male emotional inarticulacy: "it was pure macho that was holding him back from going...like he bought into the whole thing of sorting her out in a macho fashion rather than going and just talking to her."

Interestingly, Frank's critique of the patriarchal constraints imposed on men extended to society's reluctance to listen to men's problems, a discourse which frequently overlaps with the masculinist argument that female issues and concerns are increasingly prioritised in a feminised culture of self-help:

Frank: ...eh there was also the time when the class was going on where the man was facilitating and you had the women saying what they felt and he was writing away but everytime a man spoke up to say he says that's negative, you know, we're talking about negatives here, so their point of view is never taken on board

This awareness of men as both beneficiaries and victims of patriarchy as well as of men as disenfranchised by female power was evident only among the older participants. As was the case in Lacey's (2002) study with British male viewers of *The Sopranos*, it was primarily the middle-aged respondents who identified with the pressures and frustrations of Tony's life, and who could articulate these feelings within the discursive parameters of masculinity politics. Similarly, Matthew, although he did not overtly sympathise with the rhetoric of male disadvantage, was familiar with its logic and felt that *Intermission* captured these very contemporary sentiments:

Interviewer: Does the film in that sense talk about reality do you think?

Matthew: Yeah...well there's a new sort of axe among men about that kind of thing I think that sort of captures it a bit...it's very timely that film...

Although Matthew felt that the film indexed very real gender issues, he was also the only participant in the study who directly addressed the question of ironic readings. He felt that *Intermission* poked fun at machismo and thought Lehiff's character was very much a parody of the hard man, who worried about buying a wok and settling down as much as anybody else. He was also the only participant in the study who suggested that the violence was intended to be read as parody: "I think that there are parts that rather than accept the amount of violence you kind of laugh at it." However, this conscious foregrounding of irony as a reading strategy was not suggestive of the defensive escape-clause rhetoric of new laddism described by Imelda Wheehan (2000), whereby irony is cited to deflect ideological critique, but rather of an awareness of irony as a form of political intervention. In this sense, Matthew was the only participant who read *Intermission* as a "smart film" (Sconce 2002) or, at least, who consciously articulated this type of reading. This is supported not only by his reading of the film as a send-up of men's "floundering about" in the face of change,

but also by the fact that he considered the reviews by *FHM* and *Maxim* to be inappropriate because the film, in his opinion, was more an exploration of human emotions and issues than it was a crime caper:

Interviewer: Just going back to your point again you thought the film would appeal more to women?

Matthew: Yes

Interviewer: Why is that?

Matthew: [To Frank] Because like you say it was about emotion rather than a bank job and eh Cillian Murphy and Colin Farrell would appeal to women more than men...although fellows would go and see Colin Farrell in a movie I suppose

7.4 Irony and the Postmodern Audience

One of the key considerations that emerges from these conversations is the extent to which textual irony is received and performed by viewers. As discussed in the earlier chapters of this study, the claim that outmoded or 'regressive' images of masculinity are intended to be read ironically is a common feature of postmodern discourses – both popular and academic - on media reception. However, precisely what constitutes irony and exactly how it functions as a reading strategy is generally overlooked in these debates. According to Fischer, irony is a "survival skill, a tool for acknowledging complexity, a means of exposing or subverting oppressive hegemonic ideologies, and an art for affirming life in the face of objective troubles" (1986 p 224 cited in Hutcheon 1994 p26). However, as Linda Hutcheon points out, irony is "transideological" (White 1973 p38) in the sense that it can be used to reinforce rather than to question established attitudes, depending on who is using or attributing it and at whose expense it is seen to be. Insofar as representations of masculinity in film are concerned, some theorists point to irony as anti-hegemonic critique, as in MacKinnon's (1997) reading of Schwarzenegger movies as counter-cultural deployment of the "parodic super-phallus" (MacKinnon 1997 p88), while others perceive it as a means of deflecting ideological critique, as in Chibnall's (2001) account of Guy Ritchie's *oeuvre* as a discursive space he calls "Ladland", in which self-referentiality, plasticity and playfulness are, in his opinion, unable to disavow the normalisation and celebration of male bullying, homophobia and misogyny.

Hutcheon (ibid.) points out that most theorising on irony is intentionalist in the sense that it has been done from the perspective of the ironist or of those who understand the ironist's perspective. However, irony, unlike sarcasm or intentional deception, infers additional, relational and inclusive meaning. According to Hutcheon, "it 'happens' in the tricky, unpredictable space between expression and understanding." Thus, without collusion between performer and audience, or unless the spectator understands the political or subversive intention of the performance, the "evaluative edge" (ibid.) of irony is lost. Irony as a communicative process, therefore, only works if the audience understands the intentionality of the producer. Although some of the participants in this study exhibited constructional involvements with *Intermission*, in that they spoke about what the filmmakers were trying to do, they did not do this in

relation to intentional irony. In fact, what is notably absent in the transcripts is evidence of a conscious collusion between authorial intention and viewer response in relation to ironic or parodic articulations of masculinity.

Mary-Ellen Brown (1996), in her study of fans of *Twin Peaks*, sketches out what she considers to be the core readings strategies of the postmodern audience, defined in this instance by their self-identification as fans of the text and high levels of investment in its codes and conventions. She distinguishes between postmodern reading strategies, which include surface, technical/aesthetic and intellectual reading strategies, and the realistic reading strategy of identification. The Urban Professional participants, by virtue of their predominantly surface, technical/aesthetic and intellectual reading strategies – or what Liebes and Katz (1990) refer to as constructional and ideological engagements – as well as their familiarity with popular discourses on masculinity, were, in theory, the most pre-disposed toward ‘getting’ irony. In spite of this, however, they chose to read Detective Lynch as a realistic character who was merely funny because his outdated machismo did not fit with the modern metropolis (as opposed to a self-conscious parody of nationalist machismo), while their engagements with Lehigh oscillated between postmodern and realistic reading strategies in such a way that they could not consider his laddish image as ironic. The GAA Group, on the other hand, readily embraced and adopted the defensive, anti-pc rhetoric of laddism, by refusing to take incidences of violence and sexism in the film seriously. However, while they clearly found Lehigh both appealing and funny, they did not adopt the discourse of irony to explain this appeal. Similarly, although they did not take Detective Lynch seriously (“He thinks he’s Bruce Willis from Die Hard”) and found his interest in Celtic music highly amusing, their readings of both Lynch and the supermarket manager were still primarily referential: that these characters could not be taken seriously did not mean that they couldn’t be understood realistically, and the supermarket manager was compared to a bouncer they had encountered the previous weekend (“He...he was like the few bouncers at the weekend...do you know that put Peter up against a wall”).

By contrast, the Youthreach Group readily embraced the content of the film but did not engage rhetorically with its gender politics. Although they perceived it to be similar to other British gangster films that they liked, this was ostensibly on account

of its thematic concern with working-class characters, gangsters and the criminal underworld rather than with its stylistic features or ideological / gender-political messages. In general, rather than attempting to deflect ideological critique away from their enjoyment of cinematic violence or of incidences of sexism by mobilising the active-audience, postmodern and/or laddish discourses that insist upon intentional irony, they engaged head-on with the discourse of media effects ("It makes you want to go out and fuckin' kill someone"). There is the possibility, as suggested by Tobin (2000), that such comments are deliberately intended to play into the researcher's expectations with a view to confusing or subverting them. While participants may have been doing this, there is little evidence that they were actively colluding with the intentional irony which, it is argued, is a key feature of smart, underclass, neo-gangster, male-rampage and teen-comedy films. Their predominantly referential involvements and their lack of familiarity with or interest in contemporary discourses on masculinity would appear to foreclose the type of self-conscious, ironic engagement that is described, for example, by David Gauntlett (2002) in relation to the new, hard masculinities of Lad Culture.

Interestingly, Matthew from the Rural Men's Group was the only participant to speak about *Intermission* and the London gangster films in terms similar to those of film critic Maureen Buggy who claims that, "You can't help feeling that you are meant to be aware of the film's unreality, that these are actors playing out a script and that you the audience should know that this is just a movie (2003 p34)." Rather than engaging realistically or mobilising a defensive strategy, whereby irony is cited as synonymous with not taking media images seriously, Matthew saw *Intermission's* irony as a discursive strategy that was being used to deconstruct and comment on machismo, media violence and female empowerment. According to Ackerman (1983), the correct interpretation of irony involves two processes: firstly detection, which requires a judgement about the likelihood of the information contained in the utterance, and secondly inference, which requires judgement of the speaker's intent and the function of the utterance. Ackerman claims that, in the case of children, even if contextual discrepancy is detected or altered intonation is recognised, they may not be experienced enough to infer non-literal meaning in an utterance. Similarly, in the context of mediated images of masculinity, there is a distinction between performing enjoyment of the text because of an awareness of its provocative or controversial

nature (detection) as opposed to an awareness of exactly why and how it is provocative or controversial (inference).

Given the ubiquitous claims of intentional irony that underpin postmodern discourse, it is unsurprising that detection is widely evident: most audiences know that Guy Ritchie's films are intended to be ironic, just as most participants in this study felt that they were supposed to laugh at Lehiff's punching the sales assistant. However, as Gauntlett (2002) rightly asserts, younger men are becoming increasingly unfamiliar with the politics of second-wave feminism and with its attendant debates about female objectification and gender as a social construct. Given this, it is unsurprising that only the older participants in this study were manifestly aware of the 'old debates' about feminism and notions of masculinity in crisis, since they are the ones who have experienced or witnessed the most radical change in their lifetimes as a result of feminism (Lacey 2002). In the absence of an understanding of the new-macho iconography as an antagonistic dialogue with feminism (Gauntlett 2002), new mannism and political correctness, the "evaluative edge" (Hutcheon 1994) of irony is lost. In the contemporary discursive terrain of postmodernism and postfeminism, in which irony has become "a commodity in its own right" (Austin-Smith 1990 p51 cited in Hutcheon *ibid.* p28), irony becomes less a self-reflexive commentary on or parody of the outmoded status of former gender codes and more a cue not to take the text seriously. In this scenario, it is not just the dynamic of irony as a reading strategy but also that of intentional irony that is transformed, whereby filmmakers themselves talk about irony in these terms, namely as "morally suspect evasion masquerading as healthy suspension of certainty" (Hutcheon 1994).

Generally speaking, even though *Intermission* was regularly compared to 'smart films' such as *Magnolia*, *Traffic* and *Reservoir Dogs*, as well as *Trainspotting*, *Twin Town* and the British gangster films, all of which have been extensively analysed in terms of the ideological functioning of irony, there was little overt demonstration that irony was 'happening' as a reading strategy among these groups. While there was evidence among the Youthreach and GAA groups, in particular, of collusion with a straightforward reading of Lehiff as espousing an admirable, antiheroic masculinity that shouldn't be taken too seriously, there was little or no self-reflexive articulation of why such a reading might be considered ironic. Although the performance of other

postmodern reading strategies was evident, such as recognising intertextuality, taking pleasure in what Brown (1996) describes as “being fooled” (joy in unpredictability, humour) and claiming that the text has no ideological significance, a conscious performance of the description of irony as a reading strategy did not emerge. These findings show that evidence of constructional, ludic and ideological work (what Brown refers to as postmodern reading strategies) should not be conflated with an ability to decode irony’s “evaluative edge” (opt. cit.). In spite of their immersion in postmodern media culture and postfeminist gender-political discourses, very few participants could explain exactly why they found overtly sexist or macho images of masculinity amusing or appealing.

7.5 Conclusion

The focus-group discussions about *Intermission* and other films demonstrate that contemporary discourses on gender are widely used to make sense of gender representations in cinema. As Connolly and Ryan (2000 p6) point out in relation to television and other media, they are a “site for both the exchange and the establishment of meaning and value...the structures and forms of television are not simply an object of enquiry but become the frames through which competing discourses can be analysed”. Significantly, the discussions also point to the fluidity and dynamism of the meaning-making process, whereby different, often contradictory, discourses can be identified in participants’ conversations and whereby viewers frequently commute between different types and levels of involvement with the text. However, evidence of the multiplicity of meaning in the text and the diverse meanings and pleasures that different viewers derive from it does not render obsolete an ideological critique of gender representations in film: instead it draws attention to the way in which film texts cite wider, often competing social discourses on masculinity, femininity and gender equality. The discussions viewers have about films show that they variously internalise, resist and question the validity of commonsense views on masculinity, depending on how they are (economically, socially, culturally) positioned in relation to those discourses. In their various utterances are “local manifestations of a larger social discourse” (Tobin 2000 p22).

For many, postmodernism’s foregrounding of playfulness and irony and its accommodation of multiple readings produces a cultural landscape that evades political or ideological analysis. According to Giroux and Szeman, “rather than turning a critical light on important social issues, such films often trivialize them within a stylized aesthetics that revels in irony, cynicism, and excessive violence” (Giroux and Szeman 2001 p 96-97). However, a recognition of postmodern elements at play within texts and of the multiplicity of meanings that such devices engender need not occlude political analysis. In spite of *Intermission*’s hybridity and heterodoxy, there was nonetheless a recognisable and relatively coherent “clustering of beliefs” (Schlesinger et al. 1998) in relation to how the different groups responded to and talked about men and masculinity in relation to the film. While participants themselves were dismissive of media effects, they displayed none of the hyper-

conscious, political engagement with irony that is assumed by Sconce (2002) to be present among contemporary film-viewers. In fact, the group which were the most overtly resistant to the idea that the film might have any serious social significance (the GAA Group) were also those who appeared to have internalised most subconsciously the rhetoric of lad culture. On the other hand, while the majority were relatively “irony-blind” (Monk 2000) and appeared to accept unquestioningly postfeminist accounts of gender equality, nor were they passive recipients of the film’s messages about men and masculinity. On the contrary, *Intermission*’s male characters were understood and identified with in radically different ways by the various groups, distinctions which were largely attributable to social class, urban-rural background and age. Thus, while Giroux and Szeman’s claim that ostensibly anti-hegemonic images of masculinity are in fact reinforcing dominant ideologies of gender, the supposed power and coherence of the pedagogical influence of the current “culture of cynicism and senseless violence” (ibid.) is called into question by the multiplicity and fluidity of viewer responses, pleasures and identifications.

Thus, while relatively coherent differences could be identified between the various groups, there was also considerable overlapping at the edges, as well as considerable inconsistencies within the groups. While the Urban Professional Group, for example, adopted the discourse of new mannism to discuss *Intermission*, their gender-political rhetoric changed significantly when the conversation moved to conventional gangster films and to men’s magazines. In this sense, performances of descriptions of media usage (Lohan 2000) are an important part of the performance of different masculinities. The multiple, simultaneous and often overlapping engagements of viewers, combined with the multiplicity of discourses on gender that they mobilise in their conversations about film indicate that there is no easy way to understand the ideological significance of the new ‘hard’ masculinities of contemporary Irish cinema.

As Attwood points out in relation to men’s style magazines:

Although it is tempting to rush into a reading of these elements as evidence of a whole new regime of masculine representation or, on the other hand, as evidence of no change at all, there is a need to develop far more situated and careful analyses in order to interpret and contextualise contemporary constructions of male heterosexuality (2005 p97).

Even if irony's evaluative edge often appears to be lost in the process of reception and meaning-making, the ubiquitous pointers to the presence of irony where representations of contemporary masculinity are concerned seem to signal that this is, for many, a time of rapid change, "a fundamental cultural shift, marked by discontinuity, fragmentation and uncertainty" (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2003 p146). Richard Rorty (1989) claims that irony is used to draw attention to the fact that something is uncertain or contested. Its centrality in contemporary male-oriented and male-themed films and in the discussions that surround these films may therefore be a way of articulating – without taking a stance on – the confusion and discord that surrounds this topic in society at large. As this research shows, audiences may ignore or be oblivious to this marker of uncertainty (Youthreach), may detect and use it to shirk serious critique (GAA), may detect it but not infer its full meaning (Urban Professionals) or may fully embrace it as a critical strategy (Matthew from the Rural Men's Group). Exploring how male viewers respond to and use irony thus becomes a useful means of determining how men are responding to - and performing their responses to - changing conceptualisations of masculinity.

Perhaps the most important finding, however, to emerge from this chapter is the varying awareness and importance of gender discourse to different "interpretive communities" (Fish 1980) as a means of understanding and discussing film. While every film produces different meanings and pleasures for each individual viewer, there are nonetheless important collective distinctions to be made, particularly along lines of gender, class and national identity and the various intersection of these categories. These findings indicate that the underclass anti-hero carries profoundly different meanings for men of different socio-economic backgrounds: for the GAA Group, Lehiff was an appealing signifier of unapologetically unreconstructed masculinity, whereas for the Urban Professional Group, his status as a recognisably Irish underclass male foreclosed identification or psychic alignment with this character, in a way that did not appear to be the case when it came to underclass, gangster or criminal characters from British or American films. For the Youthreach Group, for whom the gender politics of the film were largely insignificant, Lehiff was an underclass antihero whose struggle against the law and rejection of the drudgery of working life offered fantasies of empowerment and escape.

Insofar as it could be said that either the GAA Group or the Urban Professional groups felt any sense of disempowerment or injustice as men, this was articulated exclusively in terms of gender, whereby men were seen as unjustly judged by society for reading about sex or consuming cultural products which objectified women. Both Frank and Matthew from the Rural Men's Group, although they did not embrace the ideology of the masculinist men's movement, were nonetheless familiar with its rhetoric. Although male economic disadvantage and marginalisation were the *raison d'être* of this group and therefore a key concern in these men's lives, *Intermission* was not perceived to be in any way relevant to these issues and they did not come up for discussion. For the Youthreach Group, on the other hand, *Intermission* and other Irish films such as *Accelerator* and *Crush Proof* were seen as dealing with a specific cultural manifestation of male social exclusion to which they could readily relate. In a community which still suffers the effects of drugs, crime and unemployment, *Intermission* seemed to offer a symbolic sense of personal triumph over larger and inexplicable systems of oppression and alienation. Even though the law won, Lehiff's attempt to challenge it was seen as a reckless and highly pleasurable act of rebellion.

It is important to note that such attempts to theorise the various groups' responses are not rooted in an essentialist theorisation of working-class or middle-class masculinity but rather in a sociological critique of how cultural images are understood differently by and offer different pleasures and meanings to men whose socio-economic and cultural conditions vary. The findings of this study indicate that the recent commodification of tough, working-class masculinity, especially in the figure of the underclass antihero or local gangster, is understood in highly gendered terms by rural and urban middle-class men, but primarily in terms of class identification by urban, working-class men. There was no evidence of a racial or ethnic dimension of the type described by Leigh (2000) or Chibnall (2001), who explain the British neo-gangster as a fantasy about the restoration of a mono-ethnic, Anglo-Saxon cultural identity². The varying types of involvement exhibited by the different groups and the general absence of irony as a reading strategy raise important concerns about how such

² Given Ireland's relatively recent ethnic diversity, it remains to be seen whether the focus of the contemporary films on almost exclusively white working-class male identities is attributable to a similar resurgence of patriotism in the face of emergent multi-ethnicity, to the slowness of the film industry to reflect recent demographic changes or to the fact that they borrow so heavily from the British and American films in question.

images configure socially-excluded masculinity in the wider popular imaginary. Even if these films offer the male working-class viewer anti-social or anti-hegemonic moments (Fiske and Dawson 1996), they may be serving to essentialise and thus further marginalise working-class male youth, as well as to reinforce dominant ideologies of gender across all groups.

The relatively uncritical readings that emerged of the criminal and underclass masculinities in question, as well as the absence of irony as a reading strategy, indicate that, from the point of view of gender, these films serve primarily to reinforce rather than to perturb or destabilise heteronormative constructions of gender. While the study participants did not consciously espouse the politics of anti-feminism, the fact that they did not readily identify these images of masculinity as parody or performance lends support to Robert Nye's contention that episodes of 'remasculinisation' are subtle:

...in crises, whether real or invented, societies tend to revert reflexively to what appear to be stable gender norms centred squarely on bodies, despite the growing absurdity of treating biological sex as foundational in any respect. On its face, each episode of "remasculinisation" we identify ought to undermine fatally the universalistic pretensions of a category so unstable that it must be wholly reconfigured every generation or so, but those of us who teach gender and sexuality know the subtle forms resistance to this conclusion can take, even within the age groups in our culture most disposed to flexibility (see Brod 2002; Newton 2002a) (Nye 2005 pp1955-6).

While a socially-specific study of this scale cannot claim representativeness, these findings suggest that the ideological dynamics of irony in contemporary male-oriented cinema require further investigation. As chapter 8 demonstrates, shifting the focus of the study from the gender-political significance of contemporary images of working-class masculinity to the significance of class identity in the debates about subversion, resistance and subcultural identity, facilitates a broader picture of the dynamic that emerged between class and gender in the cultural commodification of male social exclusion.

Chapter 8 -

Class and Protest, Resistance and Subcultural Identity

8.1 Introduction

Chapters 6 and 7 have considered the significance of national/local identity and gender as well as of urban/rural identity and age in determining the pleasures and meanings that particular films have to offer. The findings illustrate that the viewer's multiple subject positions influence spectatorship in ways that cannot be easily separated out but rather articulate with one another to form an infinite number of new, highly individual subject positions. Chapter 6 demonstrates that how audience members think of themselves as men, as working-class or middle-class, as city or urban dwellers or as young/old mediates their understanding of and identification with Irish films. Chapter 7 considers the various ways in which viewers' subject positions as working-class or middle-class, as city or urban dwellers and as young/old influenced their understandings of gender and masculinity which, in turn, shaped their readings of and engagements with representations of and discourses on masculinity in *Intermission*. The purpose of the present chapter is to explore the significance of all of these factors in determining how the discursive construction of class in contemporary Irish cinema is understood and negotiated by different interpretive communities.

As Andrew Spicer's (2001) typology of masculine identities in British cinema illustrates, the trope of the working-class hero as antidote or challenge to the potential emasculation associated with middle-class masculinity is not new. However, each era is characterised by different constellations of social, economic, cultural and technological factors, whereby hegemonic masculinity is threatened or perceived to be under threat by different forces. In contemporary Irish cinema, the stalwart family man epitomised by Jimmy Rabbitte in *The Commitments*, Larry in *The Van* and Dessie Curley in *The Snapper*, all played by Colm Meaney, has been replaced by a new underclass antihero. This trajectory from working-class hero to underclass antihero has been prevalent in British cinema since the 1990s, and is a key feature of the lads' magazine market, with its emphasis on criminal, 'jackass' and adolescent masculinities and fascination with "low forms of sexuality" (Attwood 2005 p97). According to Michael Messner and Jeffrey Montez de Oca, the figure of the "loser"

has become a staple of recent American beer advertising, and they attribute its appeal to changing constructions of masculine identity and paid labour:

To the extent that these themes find resonance with young men of today, it is likely because they speak to basic insecurities that are grounded in a combination of historic shifts: deindustrialization, the declining real value of wages and the male breadwinner role, significant cultural shifts brought about by more than three decades of struggle by feminists and sexual minorities, and the challenges to white male supremacy by people of color and immigrants (Messner and Montez de Oca 2005 p1882).

It has been noted in the earlier chapters of this study that new cinematic representations of masculinity have become increasingly preoccupied with the styles and cultural practices of the street. Work and the workplace are either ignored or they are dismissed as suffocating, feminised and emasculating spaces, while the domestic is also largely absent. Increasingly, bleak urban landscapes or traditionally male-dominated public spaces such as the pub, the soccer stadium and the racing track provide the backdrop in which these characters' narratives unfold. While these spaces partly evoke the gritty social realism associated with the films of Ken Loach and their attendant connotations of social disadvantage, they are also associated with certain freedoms and their unhampered expression. As was the case with the earlier social-realist films, the audience is invited to view events from the subject position of the films' socially-marginalised characters. However, stylistic devices such as black-and-white cinematography (*La Haine*, *Last Days in Dublin*), fast-paced soundtracks (*Crush Proof*, *Accelerator*) and sophisticated editing and plots (*Fight Club*, *Intermission*) suggest the celebration of a subcultural lifestyle as well as the exploration of a social problem.

The protagonists of the Irish films under analysis here are frequently presented as members of established urban subcultures. The boy racers of *Accelerator*, in the absence of more organised forms of social protest or more constructive routes toward personal development, steal and modify cars. Similarly, the Urban Cowboys of *Crush Proof* appear to derive from the pony clubs a sense of collective identity as social outlaws. In *Man About Dog* and *The Mighty Celt*, greyhound racing, training and betting are used as signifiers of traditional working-class culture, while the organised criminals of *The General*, *Ordinary Decent Criminal*, *Vicious Circle*, *When the Sky Falls* and *Veronica Guerin* draw heavily on the stylistic features of the much

mythicised British and American gangster (sub)cultures (Pettitt 2004). However, many of these films also appear to frame male social exclusion as a subculture in itself, by treating it as a cultural identity with its own unique linguistic, stylistic and musical codes. Adam and Paul in *Adam and Paul*, Rats in *Spin the Bottle*, Monster in *Last Days in Dublin*, T-Bag in *Head Rush* and Lehiff in *Intermission* are presented as amicable no-hopers whose various states of exclusion are neither explained nor treated as redeemable. A core objective of this study has been to determine to what extent these characters highlight the injustice of the ghetto by giving voice and cultural status to its inhabitants or to what extent the culture industries merely perpetuate and profit by it by selling the hallmarks of subversion to audiences whose discontents may lie elsewhere (Kelley 1994).

The findings of the questionnaires and focus-group discussions indicate that, although the way of life portrayed in the crime and underclass films is neither enviable nor desirable to most viewers, it has different symbolic appeal for different interpretive communities. This chapter thus interrogates the social significance of underclass masculinities in film from the perspective of media as practice (Couldry 2004): it demonstrates that whether the films and their underclass masculinities operate or are understood as protest masculinities, as subcultural lifestyles, as social critiques of inequality or as ciphers for other struggles (Lacey 2002) depends largely on the material and psychical realities of viewers' lives (Walkerdine 1996). While cognisant of the multiplicity of different and often competing discourses that inform processes of production and reception in mediated communication, this analysis attempts to move beyond an understanding of polysemy as indicative of the non-ideological or free-floating nature of meaning. It is argued that even if, for some, these narratives and images represent genuine resistance and are seen as valorising particular subcultural practices and identities, they must also be understood as part of a larger commodity culture whose shaping of dominant discourses on gender and class has a significant impact on how society as a whole views and responds to male social exclusion. This chapter, therefore, considers not only how a variety of factors and their inter-dynamic relations mediate viewers' attitudes toward the cinematic portrayal of underclass masculinity, work, crime and tropes of protest and rebellion

but also considers what longer-term impact the commodification of such images might have on the groups represented.

8.2 Underclass Masculinity as Protest

As previous chapters have pointed out, the Youthreach Group engaged with *Intermission* as a narrative about the struggle between law and lawlessness, and thus perceived it to be similar to *Accelerator* and *Crush Proof*. For these participants, there was little or no moral ambiguity when it came to whose side they were on. As Shane commented, “nearly all the films you wouldn’t be on the guards side”. Interestingly, this was also the case with *Veronica Guerin*, a film which, unlike most of the other crime, gangster and underclass films that were popular among this group, does not position the spectator in sympathy with the criminals. Gary, for example, commented that at first he didn’t like John Gilligan in the film, implying that he did so later on, while a subsequent conversation indicated that, although morally problematic, Guerin’s murderers were not automatically held in disdain:

- David: Yeah you nearly always are, like the ones that you like in the films are always...you wouldn’t be up for the Guards but
- Interviewer: Was Veronica Guerin different?
- David: Yeah you’d be up for Veronica Guerin sometimes but she deserved some of the stuff that she got
- Declan: But she didn’t deserve to get shot
- Tommy: She didn’t deserve to get shot and John Gilligan look what he did
- Interviewer: Why did she deserve some of the trouble she got?
- Declan: Yeah because she went to their gaffs and all, she went a bit too far, she’s good but she lost the plot a bit but she didn’t deserve to get killed because she had a kid and all... there’s a man like that now, what’s his name, he does all the westies¹ and all, he’s meant to be the next Veronica Guerin

What is framed in the film as a relatively clear-cut moral dichotomy between the law and journalism on the one hand and organised crime on the other was perceived in more ambivalent terms by this group. Even though *Veronica Guerin* does not qualify as a gangster film because it does not focus on the perpetrators of organised, violent crime (Smith 2004), these participants attempted, at least partly, to apply the codes and conventions of the genre to their understanding of it. As self-declared aficionados of films about real criminals, it is possible that they anticipated the film would deal with John Gilligan in a similar way that *The General* dealt with Martin Cahill; as an

¹ Gangs from West Finglas, an area of north Dublin which has become associated with gangland stabbings and shootings

outlaw who rails against the "oppressors of the poor. Civil fucking servants, Garda fucking Siochána, parish fucking priests" (Pettitt 2004).

Clearly, there is a danger in suggesting that the appeal of crime films to working-class youths from socially-disadvantaged areas is somehow transparent or easily understandable. As Chapter 5 demonstrates, growing up in an area which has been the subject of numerous news reports, documentaries and dramas evokes a particular interest in one's own location as it appears in feature films. Moreover, as an earlier study (Ging 2005) with 15-17 year old boys shows, the appeal of cinematic violence sometimes lies in its provision of an imaginary space in which to work through the often contradictory discourses surrounding male violence: on the one hand, the peer approval that comes with being able to defend oneself and, on the other, a fear of violence and an awareness of its futility as a means of resolving conflict. For young men who have grown up in areas where levels of crime and drug use are high, cinematic representations of these issues and locations provide pleasures of recognition and familiarity ("I love watching Dublin films and shit and seeing places that you know"): as well as drawing attention to the social problems of certain areas, they also validate the identity of such communities in a way that differs considerably from the discourses of social decline, hopelessness and victimhood that characterise many news reports.

For the Youthreach participants, narratives about working-class criminals or notorious crime lords were the stuff of local folklore. The awesome regard in which they held real criminals such as Martin Cahill (*The General*) and Mark Brandon 'Chopper' Read appeared to stem primarily from these characters' ability to outsmart the law and to triumph over adversity. The fact that Mark Brandon Read couldn't read or write, for example, but went on to publish three bestsellers was a point of considerable fascination and admiration. It is difficult to determine whether the sense of antagonism displayed by these participants toward the law and the guards is rooted in the material realities of their lives or in the narrative dynamic that underpins the films, or both. In a Citizens' Jury Report (Breeze, Turner and Patterson 2003) on anti-community behaviour in this area, the authors cite poor relationships with the Gardai as one of the causes of anti-community behaviour:

We are impressed by many of the corporate policies of the Gardai nationally, but we don't think they reach us on the ground. We don't see enough Gardai walking through the estates, and we're not sure they're on our side. We think a lot of work needs to be done to build a better relationship with local people (Anti-Community Behaviour Ballymun Citizens' Jury Report, 2003 p9).

Judging by their conversations about films such as *Crush Proof*, *Accelerator* and *Intermission*, it was clear that these participants derived immense pleasure from 'rooting for' their rebel protagonists in their struggles against the Gardai, even if they were doomed from the outset:

Interviewer: And eh whose side are you on in the film?

Ray: The young fellows you wouldn't be on the guards side...nearly all the films you wouldn't be on the guards side

However, while the participants in this group were avid fans of *Accelerator* and *Crush Proof*, identified most closely with Lehiff in *Intermission* and were the most outspoken regarding opposition to the Gardaí, they were generally keen to show that the pleasures they derived from on-screen violence were consciously divorced from reality. As Ray said of the opening scene in *Intermission*, "It wouldn't be funny if you saw it in real life". Even his provocative comment about *Fight Club* ("It makes you want to go out and fuckin' kill someone") was later followed by a qualifying statement, which alluded to the film's unrealistic portrayal of fighting and violence:

Ray: It made it look good, like in *Fight Club* nothing happens like, they just fight and that's the end of it, they shake hands after it when the fights over.

Taken together, the findings indicate that these boys, while acutely aware of the problems facing their communities, also derive considerable pleasure from the fantasies of empowerment that are played out in the films. In addition to being among the target audience for crime, gangster and underclass films, their interest in the films appeared to be intensified by their connection to the community or type of community being represented and by the films' presentation of a sympathetic 'insider' perspective that is rarely evident in news reports or documentaries. Most importantly, however, it was suspension of disbelief that appeared to enable the greatest pleasures, whereby identifiable protagonists were temporarily relieved of their role as problematised youth and allowed instead to win tactical battles against forces that were seen to oppress them. In Fiske and Dawson's (1996) study, the homeless men watching *Die*

Hard took pleasure in violent attacks not because they had any interest in or experience of violence itself but because these struggles symbolised momentary victories for the oppressed. Similarly, these boys, who appeared to have no interest or involvement in real “anti-community behaviour”, nonetheless revelled in the fantasy of local youths achieving (anti)heroic status, as rebels running through shopping centres or riding around their communities on horseback or in modified cars to fast-paced techno soundtracks. Interestingly, when asked whether they thought the characters in the films they liked were rebels, Ray wanted to clarify that the interviewer was talking about rebels in the films:

- Interviewer: Are they rebels?
 Ray: In the film...in the yoke?
 Interviewer: In the films yeah
 Ray: Yeah
 Declan: Yeah that dude when he throws a can of beans at the man, peas at the manager, that was unbelievable
 Ray: Like in eh *The General* and all you knew they were, that’s true, they were all rebels, like they were all in gangs and all, an eh...not really *Crush Proof* they were just a gang a youngfellas
 Peter: And Veronica Guerin did you ever see that
 Ray: Yeah that’s
 Declan: Ah *Crush Proof* they were rebels, do you ever see your man when he is up in the mountains he draws a yoke
 David: He gets shot in the head
 Declan: Celtic...bulls eye, bulls eye or something

The protagonists of *Crush Proof*, in particular, were considered to be rebelling against an unfair justice system:

- Interviewer: And are they rebels do you think?
 Declan: Yeah...after they do that
 David: And just a bit before it as well
 Peter: They rob a chip shop and all
 Interviewer: And what do you think they’re rebelling against?
 Declan: Because they don’t want to get locked up...your man just got out he did and he didn’t mean to kill your man
 David: He got out and he has a kid that he goes back to see...and she, she catches his hand in the door and all at the start, and he just looks at the police and legs it

Although the appeal of these ‘alternative’ lifestyles was not something that this group analysed in much detail, it was clear that rebels and the trope of rebellion in the films they watched were understood from a predominantly class-based perspective, as a struggle to escape limited financial resources and the constraining forces of authority.

While the masculinities they admired were undoubtedly traditional or patriarchal, they made no excuses for this: the film was perceived to be mainly about men and the female characters were considered marginal and insignificant. Because the struggle between Lynch and Lehiff was seen as the central plot and because Oscar's and John's relationship issues were not regarded as important, the problems experienced by *Intermission's* male protagonists were interpreted as being related almost exclusively to work and to lack of finances. This sense of disaffection with the drudgery of the world of employment and unemployment was considered to be realistic:

- Interviewer: You know the way they hate their jobs, is that realistic?
 Tommy: Yes
 Peter: Nearly everyone complains about their job
 Ray: Yeah
 Gary: Nobody really loves their job I don't think, not unless it is a good job

This deflated attitude toward employment prospects and career fulfilment contrasted significantly with that of participants in the Urban Professional Group. While Graham identified with the frustrations of working for an unpleasant manager, Sean felt that John and Oscar lacked ambition. William, on the other hand, felt that this was normal for what they were doing.

- Interviewer: Em, what about work?
 Graham: The older guys take pride in their work and then the two younger central characters, I mean work's not for them it's all more about being happy and...
 Interviewer: Does that makes sense?
 Graham: I think the younger lads are just doing it to get by, to get a few quid, that's why they're not getting the...the older lads have more prestigious em positions em, and that's another thing you can relate to, everyone's had a horrible manager that they've worked for, and they know what it's like to be treated like that as well, so you have relative kind of sympathy for the two lads
 Sean: Yeah but at the same time they don't show any ambition, it's just not very eh, at least I don't think
 William: It's normal for what they're doing like
 Graham: They're stacking shelves

Although the Urban Professional Group identified most closely with John and Oscar, there was evidence of a certain distancing when the conversation turned to their work.

Although they could identify with disliking a disagreeable boss, Sean's comment that Oscar and John were just like characters he knew or recognised from local supermarkets indicated that the level or intensity of referential involvement was variable. While they strongly identified with their transition from repressed to sexually and emotionally fulfilled males, they were less engaged when it came to Oscar and John's career aspirations and unrealistic escape from working life.

- Sean: But the supermarket guys are classic they're real genuine, like they're just like people I know around supermarkets, identical to them, you know exactly in everything
- Ryan: Your man Oscar has [inaudible]
- Graham: That's the only difference actually yeah, they kind of surmount it and they leave, get fired yeah but they kind of have to be romantic in the film but most people just end up having to stay in the job

Whereas "most people" for the Youthreach group seemed to relate to most people like them, for the Urban Professionals "most people" appeared to describe people other than them. While they may have stacked shelves in the past, this type of job did not fit with their current occupations or with their future career prospects. Thus, while for the Youthreach participants, the question of whether or not people liked their jobs was largely speculative ("A lot of people love their jobs I'd say"), the Urban Professionals knew from experience that, while most people didn't like their jobs, some people did. From their perspective, even the supermarket manager's position was not particularly desirable: rather than resent his power, as the Youthreach Group did, they felt sufficiently confident to critique his inflated sense of self and use of Americanisms to talk himself up:

- Sean: Yeah I'm not sure if this is very relevant but there was a survey done last week by Irishjobs dot ie about all these kind of buzzwords like eh touch base and you know all that kind of thing and eh that it shows em lack of communication skills and it shows that you're not very informed at all and you're just using the words to kind of make yourself sound more intelligent than it is, I think that's exactly what he's trying to do, like saying em, what's the one he says...TC...what is it
- Cian: TCB
- Sean: Yeah exactly TCB, take care of business, that's him trying to show that he's really important but at the end of the day he's in charge of a pretty crappy supermarket

The participants in the Urban Professional group also felt that John's and Oscar's liberation from employment at the end of the film was unrealistic, a point which was also raised by the GAA group:

- Liam: Exactly... there's nothing like about worrying about your career or your this grade or your income or any of that
- Patrick: It's great having no job like but what about...yer man's after tried to rob her and like threatened to kill her but ah no I'll get back with him...they don't worry about that

With the exception of the Urban Professionals, therefore, nearly all the participants identified in some way or other with *Intermission's* rejection of work. Those characters who identified themselves by what they did, such as Lynch and the supermarket manager, were regarded as figures of fun or disdain. It is difficult to interpret the popularity of the trope of men's rejection of work in contemporary male-oriented cinema: whether it is inspired by a common fantasy of not having to work for a living or whether it is related to more specific struggles and discontents. With work, as with other recent scholarly enquiries into men's lives, the extent and nature of change is widely contested (McMahon 1999). In spite of the popularity of discourses on the feminisation of the workplace and the cultural marketplace, expounded in films such as *Fight Club* and *Trainspotting*, there is little economic evidence of substantial change. As Connell (2005 p1808) argues:

There is something surprising about the worldwide problematizing of men and masculinities, because in many ways the position of men has not greatly changed. For instance, men remain a very large majority of corporate executives, top professionals, and holders of public office...Men, collectively, receive approximately twice the income that women receive and also receive the benefits of a great deal of unpaid household labor, not to mention emotional support from women (Gierycz 1999; Godenzi 2000; Inter-Parliamentary Union 2003).

However, while from the perspective of gender, the balance of economic power may not have changed substantially, significant changes have occurred in the Irish labour market which affect working-class men most adversely. In spite of the economic boom of the 1990s, poverty and long-term unemployment persist among some groups (Fitzgerald et al. 2000 cited in Cleary et al.). Economic disadvantage tends to be

concentrated in specific geographical areas, where multiple deprivations go hand in hand (Gamma 1991 cited in Cleary et al.). According to Cleary et al. (2004 p37):

The long-term unemployed are predominantly male and those who remain unemployed in a buoyant economy are generally those with fewest educational and vocational skills, have health (or substance abuse) problems and perhaps a history of crime (Fitzgerald et al. 2000).

Moreover, the decline in traditional male employment sectors, especially manufacturing and agriculture, and the fact that these jobs tend to be unstable and low-paid has not deterred Irish males from entering these sectors. This, in turn, makes them more vulnerable in times of recession or restructuring and less inclined than women to adapt to change, for whom work is not such an important marker of gender identity and for whom motherhood is often an acceptable alternative to work (National Economic and Social Forum 1997 cited in Cleary et al 2004 p39). Meanwhile, increased affluence has created increased opportunities for criminal activity (McCullagh 1996).

Given these factors, combined with evidence that “males are more likely to feel relatively deprived if economically disadvantaged in a boom economy” (Cleary et al. 2004 p40), it is unsurprising that exaggerated or “protest masculinities” (Connell 1995) have become a way of reclaiming a strong sense of masculine identity. For the Youthreach boys, the underclass (anti)heroes of contemporary films were recognisable figures who succeeded in achieving fame/notoriety and peer approval through their – often criminal – subcultural identities and activities. Even though Lehiff, Martin Cahill and the protagonists of *Accelerator* and *Crush Proof* met with tragic ends, for this audience they fulfilled the key symbolic functions of the ‘social bandit’ as described by Eric Hobsbawm (1959/1965) in his study of 19th and 20th Century ‘primitive rebels’: they challenged State authority, were idealised and championed by the poor and yet were doomed to (political) failure because of lack of organisation. Although Clare Monk (2000) argues that the underclass antiheroes of contemporary British cinema appeal to a post-political male audience, it is also possible to regard such characters and the viewers who identify with them as “pre-political” in the sense that they are people who “have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world”

(Hobsbawm 1959/1965). Like the disaffected male characters of the films they liked, the Youthreach participants did not have a well-articulated politics of resistance: yet the pleasure they derived from stories of triumph over adversity through non-conventional heroics – however transient and precarious – seemed to be inextricably linked to their provision of an affirmative and well respected, yet partly feared and demonised, image of working-class, unemployed masculinity.

This direct sense of identification with socially-excluded masculinities was largely absent among the other groups. For the Rural Men's Group, *Lehiff* had little or no appeal as an exemplary of protest masculinity, except for Jim and Martin who had lived in urban centres before moving to the rural area in which they now lived.

Interviewer: They hate their jobs?

Matthew: Yeah yeah...that's why Colin Farrell like...the rest of them were trying to fit in...he didn't want to...he just wanted to rebel he wanted to kick it like...this whole system

Joseph: Yeah

Interviewer: And would you sympathise with him at all because of that?

Matthew: Yeah yeah I would...he lost his morals on the way like

For the rest of this group, the film's urban locations and depiction of unemployment, crime and violence were familiar only from newspaper accounts. Although many of these men had become socially-marginalised through population decline, the rationalisation of community services, rationalisation and out-migration in the agricultural sector, changes in family networks and the decline in customs and traditions (North Leitrim Men's Group Research Project 2001), they exhibited no evidence of psychic alignment with *Lehiff*, and they had little or no interest in contemporary crime and gangster films. While this was partly attributable to their age and lack of engagement with postmodern film culture, it was also clearly linked to their espousal of more traditional masculine values such as breadwinning and respect for one's elders and to their disapproval of violence against women. For these men, underclass masculinity was seen as a social problem, in line with news media discourses, and there was little or no identification with the notion of protest masculinities or of underclass masculinity as subculture.

8.3 Underclass Masculinity as Subculture

The relevance of class and of underclass masculinities to the other two groups differed considerably. For the GAA group, whose engagements with Lehiff were primarily ludic, imitating urban working-class masculinity provided a way of performing or enacting machismo without having to identify directly with it or with working-class identity. As Chapter 6 illustrates, gross-out and shock humour were key pleasures associated not only with *Intermission* but with film-viewing generally, and these participants were the most demonstrative when it came to performing “descriptions of their usage” (Lohan 2000 p172) in the group discussions. Although for these participants, the Lynch/Lehiff dynamic was central, these characters were not afforded the same degree of seriousness as by the Youthreach group. Rather than relating them to a reality with which they were familiar, the GAA participants derived most pleasure from laughing at them and parodying their idiosyncrasies. These performances were highly ambivalent, suggesting as they did both reverence for these hard-boiled, rebellious characters as well as elements of discourses which problematise working-class male youth:

- Interviewer: Do you think is the film or are the characters in the film rebels?
 Liam: I think they're more trying to be than they are
 Peadar: Colin Farrell is the only one who really is
 Liam: Oh absolute rebel
 Peadar: Oh he is yeah...he's trying his best
 Patrick: The wee fella
 Martin: The little fella's a bit of a rebel all the same
 Peadar: He's like Colin Farrell fifteen years ago
 Liam: He's gonna end up like that
 Patrick: Yeah Colin Farrell was him when he was a child throwing stones at the buses and stuff
 Peadar: And then the cop's a bit of a rebel too
 Patrick: He's only
 Liam: They're all wannabe rebels
 Peadar: I suppose your man Ben becomes a bit of a rebel...who does the film
 Patrick: Yeah
 Liam: Yeah

There was some recognition here of *Intermission*'s simultaneous parodying and endorsement of rebel machismo, and it was clear from their responses during the screenings that these participants were simultaneously attracted to and alienated by

Lehiff's exotic underclass status. Timothy Shary (2004) has highlighted this moral ambiguity in relation to what he calls Hollywood's juvenile-delinquency films:

The consequences of being bad are always implied in JD films, but by leaving such likely possibilities at a distance, the films were able to frolic in the intensity of violence and danger, whether or not they glorified the criminality of their characters." (Shary 2004 p 31).

In the present study, favourite parts of *Intermission* included the scene in which Lynch urinates on Lehiff's trainers and the film's opening scene, in which Lehiff punches the sales assistant in the face. Unlike the Youthreach Group, the GAA participants exhibited a certain jokey defensiveness when talking about this. As was the case when they were discussing the film reviews by *Maxim* and *FHM*, they tended to mobilise the laddish rhetoric of "not taking things too seriously" and "just having a laugh". Interestingly, they also considered that the filmmaker Ben turned out to be "a bit of a rebel" and "a bit of a hero" because of his involvement in the final shootout between Lynch and Lehiff. This was in marked contrast to Declan in the Youthreach Group, who saw Ben as a marginal and uninteresting character and who considered his foray into crime to be related to the same sense of boredom with work experienced by the other characters:

Declan: Yeah he's just some dude that is bored with his job as well like...he hated all that fuckin' pussy shit and stuff and he wants to do the detective

For the GAA group, however, Ben's interest in the criminal underworld was considered to be more significant:

Interviewer: Why was Ben so fascinated do you think with crime?

Liam: He seems very...he seemed very with his eh shirt and his jumper and his image

Patrick: Very conservative

Martin: Yeah

Peadar: Crime is kind of...exciting

Patrick: This was like a whole different world for him existed

Liam: Yeah he was excited about it... 'cos it was a change for him

However, because this group did not generally engage in detailed analysis or commentary about the film and tended to eschew serious comment in favour of in-jokes and 'slagging', it was difficult to establish what underclass masculinity meant to

them on the basis of what they said. More revealing was their laughter at what Attwood (2005) refers to “grotesquerie” and their exaggerated performances of Lehiff’s accent, so that the interview revealed more as a topic in its own right rather than as a resource (Seale 1998 p215). As an earlier study (Ging 2005) with 15-17-year old boys indicated, certain media texts allow for exaggerated displays of machismo in all-male groups. In a sense, these displays are the living embodiment or enactment of lad culture’s discursive politics: the self-conscious parody or performance of hypermasculinity provides the necessary guise beneath which the ‘real’ issues are being negotiated (Gauntlett 2002). However, the extent to which hegemonic masculinity is being interrogated, negotiated or endorsed remains unclear. Although these participants cited elements of a progressive rhetoric of gender equality (McMahon 1999), they were quick to dismiss any detailed analysis as “taking things too seriously”. Like the Youthreach participants, who identified with the way in which work was addressed in *Intermission*, the GAA group brought up the subject of disaffection with work in relation to *Fight Club*. However, their attitudes toward work were discussed in the context of the boredom and anonymity associated with office jobs (a theme which was not picked up on by the Youthreach group in discussions about *Fight Club*) as opposed to concerns about the prospect of menial, low-paid or unrewarding work:

Patrick: Sure who doesn’t like if they’re working in a boring office job who doesn’t dream of what you could be doing or what you’d like to do or crack the boss with a tin of peas or something

It seems unlikely that, for these third-level students from rural backgrounds with good career prospects, the appeal of urban rebels and protest masculinities is linked to real anxieties about unemployment, authority or social exclusion. However, the sense of disaffection with work that was common to almost all participants, except the Urban Professional Group, indicates a certain renegotiation of work as a signifier of masculinity. Arguably, the significance of working-class male subcultures is more or less real and symbolic to different groups, and whether the popularity of this imagery is merely a metaphor for anti-conformism or a response to real changes in the workplace requires further investigation. For the Youthreach participants, films such as *Intermission*, *Accelerator* and *Crushproof* depict certain subcultures as a way of life with which they are familiar (if not directly involved), whereas the discourses used by the GAA and Urban Professional groups suggest that these subcultures

represent both a way of life (often discussed at a remove, as social problem) and a lifestyle identity with which they are familiar from the wider media cultures in which they operate. According to Rosengren (1996), a way of life differs from a lifestyle in the sense that, in the case of the former, the patterns of life are determined not only by the societal structure but also by the individual's position in the structure (social class), whereas in the case of the latter, patterns of life are determined not only by the societal structure and the individual's position therein, but also by the individual's more or less conscious, more or less idiosyncratic, choice (values, norms, attitudes, tastes).

The predominantly real (closed, referential) engagements of the Youthreach group with *Intermission* and with the other Irish films that feature urban subcultures such as bareback horse-riding and modifying / racing cars indicate that these representations of masculinity are understood as depicting a familiar way of life. This does not occlude the fact, however, that this way of life has also been widely commodified as a subcultural lifestyle, and that it is also consumed by working-class men in this way. As was the case with British mods' original parodying of the consumer society in which they found themselves (Hebdige 1993/1975), recent rituals and styles that originated from within socially-marginalised communities, such the wearing of hoodies, branded sportswear and Burberry and the modification of small, inexpensive cars into markers of tough or reckless masculinity, have become mass-commercialised by clothing and sportswear companies and by films such as *The Fast and the Furious* and MTV's *Pimp my Ride*. According to Hebdige, over time:

...the consumer rituals were refined and multiplied ad infinitum and came to involve the use of commodities directed specifically at a mod market by a rapidly expanding pop industry. Dress was no longer innovative – nobody 'discovered' items like Levi jeans or Hush Puppies any more. Style was manufactured from above instead of being spontaneously created from within" (Hebdige 1993 cited in Duncombe 2002 p174).

Similarly, Robin D.G. Kelley (1994) argues that in the United States, the gangsta rap that emerged from LA's black working-class communities has been commodified to such an extent that the ghetto has become "a place of adventure, unbridled violence, erotic fantasy, and/or an imaginary alternative to suburban boredom" (Kelley cited in Duncombe 2002 p154). Stephen Duncombe (2002) claims that the culture of "social banditry" described by Eric Hobsbawm (1959/1965) "takes a new twist at the end of

the twentieth century when the message of poor, urban black rage is bought and sold by multi-national corporations and eagerly consumed by, among others, white, middle-class, suburban teenagers (Duncombe 2002 p 149). It is within this economic context of gangsta rap commodified by MTV and designer sportswear sold to working-class teenagers that Mike Hodges' classic *Get Carter* (1971) has been re-packaged on DVD and the legend of the Kray twins is resurrected by Lad Magazines for consumption by a new generation. Implicit in this shift in the political economy of subcultures is a reconceptualisation of the fan from self-identified "subcultural stylist" (Muggleton 2000) to consumer of mass culture. Also implicit, however, is a traversal of class boundaries, whereby particular subcultural identities, previously associated with working-class men, become available for consumption by all. Divorced from their original class-political significance, these styles and their political or ideological meanings and uses become less grounded in a particular place or time, and are consumed differently in different contexts. While for the Youthreach Group, Lehiff and other, similar characters from *Accelerator* and *Crush Proof* performed subcultural identities with which the participants could identify from the perspective of both class and masculinity, for the GAA Group, they represented an irreverent and somewhat out-of-control masculinity, which seemed to fit well with their general attitude toward machismo in the media as "just a bit of crack". For the Urban Professional group, however, familiarity with this masculine type as social problem occluded any real consideration of Lehiff as a subcultural male icon (unlike the protagonists of the London gangster films, which they held in high regard).

Although processes of cultural reinvention are especially conducive, indeed intrinsic, to postmodernism's proclivity for intertextual borrowing and recycling, there has long been a tradition of stylistic reappropriation among working-class (sub)cultures. According to Melly (1972), the 1960s British mod was inspired by a group of working-class dandies who, he claims, may have evolved out of the Italianate style. Dick Hebdige (1993) has identified more recent progenitors of mod style, such as the "wide boy" and the post war "spiv", both emulations of the Brooklyn sharp kid, the Jamaican hustler or "rudie", characterised by the pork-pie hat and dark glasses, and the indigenous British gangster that emerged in the early 1960s. Like the 'chavs' of contemporary Britain, who have taken smart designer labels such as Prada and, most notably, the upper-class Burberry brand as their trademark, the mods transformed

markers of respectability such as short hair cuts, suits and scooters into “symbols of subversion” (Hebdidge 1993). Similarly, in Ireland, the clean, preppy American look of the Tommy Hilfigger brand has been reappropriated as working-class street wear, and the “hoodie”, formerly associated with American fraternity sportswear, has increasingly become associated with underclass criminality due to its ability to cover the face and thus the individuals’ identity in response to the growing presence of CCTV surveillance in urban and suburban spaces. In Britain, this item of clothing is considered to present such a threat to public safety that Tony Blair has come out in strong support of a decision made by Britain’s largest shopping centre to ban all hooded sweatshirts and baseball caps².

It is clear, therefore, that multiple and dynamic processes are at work, whereby the flows between subcultures and mainstream or mass culture have become inextricably intertwined. However, images, styles and behaviours, irrespective of how commodified they have become, are used in different ways by different people, as is evidenced by the reappropriation of Burberry by ‘chavs’, a practice which has rendered the significance of the brand highly ambivalent: as a marker of quintessential, upper-class Englishness as well as a signifier of underclass English identity³. This appears to have occurred in tandem with the appropriation of the St. George’s flag as an icon of Cool Britannia, a fashion phenomenon which arguably carries little or none of the subversive or ironic significance of 1960s mod culture’s use of the Union Jack. Nevertheless, we are constantly returned to an endless array of cultural signs and symbols whose meanings are never fixed, precisely because they are modified through different practices of consumption and use. As Stuart Hall comments, “What matters is *not* the intrinsic or historically fixed objects of culture, but the state of play in cultural relations: to put it bluntly and in an over-simplified form – what counts is the class struggle in and over culture” (Hall 1981 cited in Duncombe 2002 p190).

² On 11th May 2005, managers of the Bluewater shopping centre introduced a new code of conduct aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour. It prohibits swearing and the wearing of clothing which obscures the face, such as hooded tops and baseball caps. Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed support for the decision, and a heated media debate ensued. The ban has been criticised by children’s charities, human rights groups and England’s new Children’s Commissioner, Al Aynsley-Green.

³ The Burberry website suggests a brand identity that has strong associations with middle- and upper-class English culture. See <http://www.burberry.com/>

What often makes the diverse meanings of subcultures difficult to understand or determine is the lack of a coherent or unanimous public forum through which to articulate the concerns of the groups involved. Unlike political or intellectual movements, whose goals tend to be relatively clear and consensual, the ideological motivations of contemporary ‘social bandits’ are generally more diffuse and less intelligible. Eric Hobsbawm (1959/1965) claims that social historians do not make sufficient effort to understand people who do not read books, and who are often illiterate and inarticulate. In his analysis of anarchic forms of social movement in the 19th and 20th centuries, he describes the mythicised rebels of local cultures as social bandits who, although “pre-political”, are neither unimportant nor marginal in terms of their impact. Similarly, because the disaffected male characters of contemporary film culture express a largely untheorised rejection of the *status quo*, they have been understood by different audiences and by different film theorists as representing different types of struggles against a range of different threats – both real and imagined. As Fiske and Dawson’s (1996) study with homeless men illustrates, even though film violence enabled their respondents to vent their anger against social injustice and to derive momentary pleasures from the fantasy of winning, these performances of victory were nonetheless regressive in terms of gender.

Subcultures and the “meaning of style” (Hebdige *ibid.*) thus remain highly contested. However, the popular tendency to view subcultural authenticity as inversely related to processes of commodification or mainstream consumption can obviate the complexity of media as practice (Couldry 2004) by failing to acknowledge that, among those who identify with a widely commodified (sub)culture such as hip hop or gangsta rap, there are different types of allegiances and that, in an increasingly globalised culture, cultural manifestations of resistance against socio-economic circumstances have widespread adaptability: the first-person narratives of gangsta rap can apply as readily to the housing projects of north inner-city Dublin as the streets of LA. Thus, although in Ging’s (2005) study of Irish male teenagers’ media use, Eminem was generally considered to be a ‘cool’ figure on account of being controversial, at least one participant related to his lyrics in terms that were both personal and political:

John: When Eminem was younger his father left and he thought his mother hated him, I was the same. He was also brought up in a

poor family so was I. Nobody understands what he says in his music about his childhood and family because they don't know what he went through but I can relate to him a lot (cited in Ging 2005 p45).

Studying viewers' descriptions of their media usage can thus become an important way of determining how and to what extent 'subcultural' images of and discourses on class, however commodified, are understood as political or resistant and to what extent they are consumed as part of a dominant culture which merely reinforces patriarchal gender norms. Magazine circulation, box-office figures and CD sales clearly indicate that the appeal of the New Lad – in all his cultural manifestations from latter-day "wide boy", "spiv" or "chav" to underclass criminal, neo-gangster, white rapper or soccer 'firm' member – reaches far beyond those who consciously align themselves with or enact these particular social identities. Even though West Coast gangsta rap remains deeply rooted in the politics of LA's black working-class communities (Kelley 1994), it has become hybridised and reappropriated in other contexts, not only due to processes of mass commodification but also because it is actively and creatively used to articulate the concerns and experiences of marginalised communities elsewhere. This is particularly evident in the French film *Ma 6-T va crack-er* (1997), in which rap is used to protest about the state of the estate and the role of the Police (Tarr 2004). Similarly, the 'boy racers' of Dublin's disadvantaged areas are simultaneously part of a local subculture and a mass-commodified culture that is celebrated in MTV programmes such as *Pimp my Ride* and films such as *The Fast and the Furious* and *Accelerator*. There is a sense among these communities that, in spite of mass commodification, certain styles and behaviours continue to be perceived as a threat to the *status quo*.

For the urban professional participants in this study, however, these 'protest masculinities' had little appeal. They considered films such as *Adam and Paul* and *Trainspotting* to be more serious films about the problems of drug-taking and social marginalisation, and they had little or no affinity with Lehiff in *Intermission*, who they considered to be an unsuccessful gangster. As Sean explained, he did not fit in with the fantasy because he was a recognisable character with whom they could not identify. The only subcultural identity with which these participants readily identified was that of the neo-gangster, which had huge appeal, not only in relation to the films

but also in the context of *The Sopranos*, men's magazine articles and the wider media preoccupation with the subject. As William commented, "if I was flicking through [FHM] I would actually stop at eh, ah you know, some mafia assassin thing or the top ten mafia gigs or something like that...eh I don't know why it is but it's interesting." Unlike the Youthreach Group, whose interest in the gangster genre focussed primarily on real criminals and criminal gangs (*The General*, *Chopper*) and their triumphs over the state and the forces of law and order (*Mean Machine*), the Urban Professionals were more interested in the (stereo)typical (Mafia/London) gangster, which they consciously understood as a style or fantasy for consumption.

This consideration of the gangster as a character type and genre worthy of substantial analysis became particularly evident in their discussion about *The Sopranos*, in which many of their comments were remarkably similar to those of the participants in Joanne Lacey's (2002) study with British male viewers of the programme. Like Lacey's respondents, the Urban Professionals were drawn to *The Sopranos* by its quality and attention to detail:

Ryan: It's just really...it's really good quality
 Graham: Yeah it is, there's just the little things that you might notice but at the same time there's things there that you wouldn't notice, that's why if you watch it twice you pick things up

In support of both Martha Nochimson's (2002/2003) and Joanne Lacey's (2002) claims that *The Sopranos* functions as a male soap opera which allows men to become emotionally involved with the characters and their lives, the Urban Professionals treated it very much as a drama about human emotion and psychology. Contrary to most accounts, whereby soap is perceived to be character-driven and male-oriented genres are generally understood to be narrative and action-driven, Ryan felt that the missions in gangster and war films enabled the filmmakers to explore characters in more depth:

Ryan: The Sopranos and the gangster films or the war films or whatever, you know if you have, everyone has a mission to do something...does it not allow you to understand them a little bit better....a bit deeper.

Most interestingly, however, this discussion about *The Sopranos* brought forth evidence of new discourses on gender, whereby the demands of patriarchal masculinity are seen as unattainable and machismo is considered a sign of weakness rather than power. Like Lacey's middle-aged respondents, who felt that Tony suffered the pressures of any ordinary man who had to balance work with family, the Urban Professional participants regarded Tony as vulnerable and often misunderstood:

Interviewer: What is its appeal?

Graham: Well, the thing about Sopranos is that it doesn't show that they're tough because it blatantly shows that they're all weak

William: Hmm?

Graham: It does, it shows all their weaknesses

William: Yeah I suppose

Like Lacey's respondent who compared the Soprano family to *The Simpsons*, Sean felt that Tony's vulnerability de-mystified the gangster lifestyle:

Sean: But I think the Sopranos it shows you that they're functional...a functional family like, that they're humans...that like the kids go to school and eh even though he's a top crime gangster boss, he still had to go to the parent-teacher meetings and he has kids having problems and he has to go home to his wife and sort out them problems and then he has his cousin and you know his brother and things like that...and em, I think...I mean, everyone sees him as this invincible guy and sometimes it's just gets too much, as it did like in I think the last series and he goes to see a therapist and stuff and you think...I dunno it just shows real...it doesn't glorify the whole lifestyle, it shows that there's work actually involved about running a criminal operation

The responses of the Youthreach Group were considerably different. Considering that their interest in the gangster genre generally revolved around what they considered to be realistic portrayals of organised crime and "the gangs", "the guns" and "the drugs", it is perhaps unsurprising that *The Sopranos'* prioritisation of family problems and emotional issues over narrative action alienated them from this particular programme's approach to the topic:

Interviewer: Why do you like gangster stuff?

David: Scarface an' all

Declan: Yeah that's deadly

Gary: That's a deadly film

Interviewer: What do you like about it?

Gary: The gang
 Declan: The gang yeah and the fights and all of that does be in it
 David: The guns
 [Laughter]
 The drugs
 [Laughter]
 Tommy: Yeah
 Interviewer: And do you think it's real?
 Declan: Yeah
 Interviewer: Realistic?
 Declan: Some of them are realistic
 David: Goodfellas is brilliant
 Tommy: Yeah
 Gary: Yeah it's a great film

Although they reported having liked *The Sopranos* when the series started, their interest waned when Tony began to develop psychological problems and started seeing a therapist:

David: It was good at the start but it's not that good now
 Interviewer: Why?
 David: Just got a bit overboard...the stuff that happens in it
 Peter: Like when he cracks up
 Declan: Yeah....he's gone all mad in the head...he's gone all like....what's that called
 Peter: He keeps having panic attacks
 Declan: Yeah....having panic attacks and all
 David: Panic attacks and all

While insights into the psychological problems of the gangster alienated one group, it fascinated another. However, it is difficult to determine whether the Urban Professional participants were critiquing patriarchal masculinity *per se* or mobilising discourses of male victimhood by way of apology or explanation for their interest in gangster films and iconography. That the Urban Professional participants, like Lacey's respondents, picked up on the masculinity-in-crisis subtext of *The Sopranos* may in fact signal little more than their prioritising of a more recent variant of hegemonic masculinity (the male as victim of feminism) over another, more traditional one. Indeed, rather than resisting or subverting dominant ideologies, oppositional readings can sometimes produce even more regressive decodings, as is the case, for example when parodic or ironic hypermasculinity is (mis)interpreted as straightforward machismo (Ging 2005). According to Attwood, this process is already

underway, evidenced by “a more recent move away from the ‘ironic’ stance of earlier new lad portrayals to a ‘post-ironic’ celebration of all things male (2005 p94).”

What is of significance, however, is that for the Urban Professionals and the GAA Group, issues of gender rather than of class appeared to mediate their interest in gangster cinema and other films featuring hard or socially-excluded masculinities. Unlike the GAA Group, however, for whom the ‘protest masculinities’ of contemporary film represented ‘jokey, blokey’ hard men that offered considerable potential for playful performances of machismo (ludic engagement), the Urban Professionals retained a more critical distance, arguing about the misconceptions surrounding lad culture rather than appropriating its rhetoric to deflect serious discussion. In spite of this and even though they were able to locate fissures in or counter-discourses against the supposed stability and hegemony of the contemporary gangster, they were still impressed by and identified with the gangster’s hallmarks of conventional masculinity. As Sean commented, “they’re always dressed sharply, they have power, they have money, they generally have the good-looking girlfriend, and they’re respected by all their peers.”

8.4 Conclusion

The construction of class in contemporary male-oriented cinema is an important factor in determining how different audiences relate to films and to their protagonists, narratives and locations. As far as portrayals of working-class men are concerned, the most salient development in recent Irish cinema has been in the replacement of work as a signifier of hegemonic masculinity with leisure and with 'subcultural' pursuits such as greyhound racing, bareback horse-riding, racing cars and amateur forays into the criminal underworld. The resultant trajectory - from upbeat portrayals of working-class men overcoming adversity to a more ambivalent preoccupation with 'anti-social' and underclass masculinities - has produced a new range of masculine types (Spicer 1991) including "losers" (Messner and Montez de Oca 2005), protest masculinities, small-time criminals and 'wannabe rebels', which, it has been demonstrated, provide considerably different pleasures and meanings to different male viewers. According to Feona Attwood, the success of new laddism lies partly "in its reconstruction of a consumerist masculinity which focuses on leisure pursuits and eschews aspiration and careers; a particularly important move given the context of late 20th-century economic recession (2005 p94)." Similarly, Messner and Montez de Oca contend that cultural capitalism "constructs gender relationally, as part of a general lifestyle (2005 p1886)," whereby representing men as single and distrustful of women and commitment means that they remain more open to the marketing strategies of the beer industry. By the same logic, constructing men as liberated from conventional employment and in opposition to 'the system' or *status quo* reconfigures conspicuous consumption as the marker of an irreverent and carefree lifestyle.

Implicit in these claims is a model of the audience as relatively passive consumers of a mass culture, whose styles and images of masculinity, even if they are borrowed from 'bona fide' subcultures, are reappropriated and manufactured from above rather than evolving from within (Hebdige 1993). According to this concept of gender hegemony, dominant models of masculinity must constantly change and readapt in order to maintain their dominance while at the same time appearing to be subversive or oppositional. The kind of disturbances to patriarchal masculinity that have been noted by Cohan and Hark, Tasker and Gauntlett are thus dismissed by Robert Hanke as evidence of patriarchy reforming "masculinity to meet the next historical turn, to

regain the pleasure of reinforcing the norm, to fit the social climate, or to articulate the new racism” (Hanke 1998 p189). However, the diversity of responses to and engagements with the various masculinities exhibited by the participants in this study indicate that the class identities and identifications of viewers play a major role in determining the meanings, pleasures and uses derived from mediated images of working-class or underclass masculinity.

In spite of this, simply because viewers adapt films’ meanings and pleasures to their own circumstances and aspirations, it does not follow that they resist the film’s dominant ideological message or that they are actively questioning and critiquing its images of and discourses on masculinity (Mayne 2002). Certainly, there is evidence that the muscular masculinities of the action genre described by Tasker are regarded as parodies and are rarely taken seriously, even among those groups (the GAA Group) who were fans of these films:

- Interviewer: What about films like Die Hard and all those?
 Martin: Ah they are just straightforward...
 Peadar: Classic action
 Patrick: You’d watch them twice a day and wouldn’t give them a second thought
 [laughter]

However, it is difficult to designate the representations of hard-core, disaffected working-class masculinity under analysis here as unequivocally hegemonic, precisely because they are socially-excluded and because the films often purport to be dealing with a serious social problem, even if they refuse to tell the audience what to think. Unlike the Urban Professionals, who readily consumed neo-gangster machismo in British or American media texts but did not identify with Irish underclass masculinities, or the GAA Group, for whom the underclass masculinities of contemporary cinema presented an appealing subcultural lifestyle (Monk 2000) that articulated with lad culture’s rhetoric of “don’t take things too seriously”, the Youthreach Group took the “protest masculinities” of contemporary Irish film seriously. Faced with genuine anxieties about their employment prospects and career satisfaction, they connected with the films’ valorisation of a working-class identity that is not dependent on work, as well as with their portrayal of familiar urban subcultures.

The question of resistance is therefore somewhat problematic. For both the GAA and the Youthreach participants, films such as *Intermission* provided subversive pleasures but the question of what they felt was being subverted or challenged varies. In the case of the GAA group, much pleasure was derived from the mock performance of a rebel masculinity, which rejects political correctness and seriousness in general. For the Youthreach group, however, resistive pleasures lay in the protagonists' rejection of state authority and the law and keen sense of identification with the local 'gang'. These pleasures could only be described as genuinely resistive or oppositional, however, if they were in opposition to the texts' "preferred reading" (Hall 1980), which is by no means easily identifiable. In the case of the Youthreach group, the absence of irony as a reading strategy and the predominantly referential rather than rhetorical nature of their engagements indicate that they were the least able to engage critically or rhetorically with the films' ideological discourses. From an effects-model perspective, this would presumably make them most vulnerable to the films' sympathetic – or at least ambivalent – portrayals of violence, crime and hard masculinity. However, while assessing the effects of mediated masculinity on individual viewers is not an objective of this study, it is also unrealistic to suppose that the proliferation and popularity of images and narratives associated with male, working-class subcultures has no impact on the wider social discourses which shape our understandings of gender, class and the articulation between them.

What emerges from these findings, therefore, is a concern about the wider impact that these films - and the various other media texts which they inspire and from which they borrow – might have on public perceptions about male working-class youth and, in turn, on precisely those groups which they represent. The commodification or aestheticisation of socially-disadvantaged men, which according to the findings of this study were most enthusiastically and least critically received by working-class male viewers, may ultimately reinforce stereotypes and preconceptions about social exclusion in the popular imaginary. Because the films refuse to adopt a moral position, to explore the causes of exclusion or to present possible solutions, they arguably essentialise marginalised masculinity as randomly violent and antisocial, rather than challenging the simultaneous (and symbiotic) fear and reverence which the news and entertainment media engender around gangsters, 'chavs' and young men

wearing hoodies. Thus, even though the films offer recognition and valorisation of marginalised urban identities by presenting a counter-discourse to the news media's demonisation of socially-disadvantaged male youth, their celebration of these ways of life as subcultural lifestyles runs the risk of essentialising and further marginalising these groups. As Will Higbee has commented in relation to French film *La Haine*, such imagery risks contributing to the "already exaggerated media representation of the disadvantaged urban periphery as the site of violence and delinquency which warrants the repressive police presence" (Higbee 2001 p202). Indeed the extreme polarity that has come to characterise media representations of young working-class men – as lawless and dangerous in the news media, yet reified as popular cultural heroes in advertising and the entertainment media – may ultimately be serving the same purpose, namely to stigmatise and essentialise underclass masculinity as a social inevitability rather than a social problem of the State.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion

Over the past two decades, images of masculinity in the mainstream media have become increasingly diverse. Competing and often conflicting images, identities and discourses jockey for position across a wide range of advertising texts, style magazines, television programmes, digital games and films. This plurality of mediated masculinities – including the often overlapping categories of gay men, bisexual men, single fathers, stay-at-home husbands, new lads, metrosexual men and new-age warriors of the men’s movement – has made it difficult to determine which models of contemporary masculinity are normative or non-normative, acceptable or taboo, mainstream or marginalised. Contemporary cinema has proven a rich and increasingly self-reflexive platform for these new manifestations of masculinity and film studies scholarship has, in turn, contributed significantly to current debates about mediated masculinities and the relationship between cultural representations and social change. This has been especially evident around those recent films which have moved from a consideration of “masculinity as fact” to a more self-conscious exploration of the “facticity of masculinity” (Fejes, 1992), such as *Die Hard*, *Falling Down*, *The Full Monty*, *Fight Club* and *American Beauty*. Even epic films such as *Gladiator* and *Troy*, which hark back to an era of allegedly unperturbed masculinity, cannot fully conceal the “*narcissistic and performative masculine angst*” (Fradley 2004 p236) that underpins them.

This study has contributed to film and media scholarship on masculinity, both in and beyond Ireland, in a number of significant ways. Firstly, it steps into a relatively under-explored field of Irish film studies, namely the representational and discursive construction of contemporary masculinities. To date, the radical narrative, stylistic and thematic changes that have occurred in recent Irish film have been discussed primarily within the framework of Ireland’s transition from tradition to modernity, from postcolonialism to first-world nationhood and from a rural to an urban society. To the extent that gender has featured in these debates, it has been framed largely within a meta-discourse of liberation from a sexually-repressed society, whereby more sexually fluid and open identities are now available in Irish cinema (Barton 2004). This thesis has actively questioned the rhetoric of progress that tends to

underpin accounts of Irish cinema's trajectory from a focus on rural patriarchs to a broader and more liberal palette of modern masculinities. Although, at the level of representation, the new masculinities are undoubtedly more sexually liberated and in tune with the codes of (post)modernity than their predecessors, how they are ideologically constructed and positioned by the films' mode of address signals an important break with the past.

As has been argued throughout this study, the shift from a predominantly critical (feminist) perspective on the part of the First-Wave filmmakers to the markedly more postmodern and postfeminist sensibilities displayed by contemporary directors has had a radical – yet under-theorised – impact on the discursive construction of gender. By focussing specifically on issues that are pertinent to men and masculinity – as opposed to on themes of youth culture, sexual liberation or the decline of the Church – it has been possible to show that the past decade has produced a significant cycle of male-oriented and male-themed films in Ireland, whose gender-political import has hitherto been concealed beneath a range of other, more nationally-specific issues. A considerable number of these films have been shown not only to exhibit a range of themes, aesthetic styles and male types that are continuous with postfeminist discourses on masculinity in other film and media cultures, but have also revealed themselves to be understood by male viewers in this way. Thus, the argument that the Irish male underclass and crime/gangster films of the past ten years are 'paradigm films' - in that they introduce and reinforce an important male type (Spicer 2001 p3) – is supported not only by detailed textual analysis but also by audience accounts of the meanings and pleasures offered by these films and their male (anti)heroes.

Secondly, therefore, this research has shifted the focus of enquiry into Irish cinematic masculinities away from a preoccupation with national identity toward a concern with the wider debates about men and masculinity in cinema, which are emerging from sociology, media sociology, media studies and film studies elsewhere. This has enabled a consideration of film and film-viewing practices beyond the 'national-allegory' model, and has revealed that the film-viewing practices of audiences and the meanings which they bring to and take from these films are also played out in local and transnational contexts. What has emerged therefore is a considerably more fluid and dynamic picture of the relationship between cinema and identity, in which

communities are imagined not only along lines of national identity (Anderson 1991) but also in terms of gender, class and cultural capital, and in both local and transnational contexts. Moving beyond the 'national-allegory' model has thus enabled images of social exclusion to be considered not only as a critique of consumer capitalism and of the Celtic Tiger era but also as continuous with a specifically gendered discourse about men in contemporary western societies. This does not eliminate a concern with class but rather frames class among a different set of concerns, namely the commodification of working-class masculinity by the culture industries.

Thirdly, as well as moving beyond national borders, this study has also challenged the conventional academic treatment of film and film viewing as an hermetically sealed space by acknowledging the highly intertextual nature of contemporary media cultures. As the boundaries between different media forms become increasingly blurred or "leaky" (O'Donohoe 1997) in the current 'mediascape' of "franchise-led and synergistic cross-media borrowing" (O'Day 2004 p202), it becomes necessary to take into account the prevalence of "gender transactions" and "gender thefts" (ibid. p203) among and between a range of media formats. Again, extending the analysis into the realm of reception intensifies the significance of this phenomenon, since – as has been demonstrated here – audiences themselves situate their understandings of film and filmic masculinities within much broader media and gender networks. While it can be assumed that, at the level of authorial intention, overt pastiche and parody of other texts operate at a highly conscious level (for example, *I Went Down's* lampooning of the American road movie or *Headrush's* reference to *Porky's*), this is more difficult to pin down in relation to the more nuanced inflections which shape the re-imagining of masculinity over time. Determining to what extent and how audiences detect and discuss these new images and discourses has thus brought a sense of proportion and context to the textual phenomena which have been identified here, and has demonstrated that filmic masculinities are consumed and understood in dynamic intertextual relation to masculinities not only from other film cultures but also across other media forms.

Finally, the innovative interdisciplinary methodological approach adopted here has pushed out the existing boundaries of Irish film studies to incorporate the largely

unexplored area of reception studies. The findings presented here demonstrate that how consumers / viewers use these images and discourses and what sense they make of them in connection with wider discourses contributes to a more complete picture of mediated masculinities as functioning within an ideological hierarchy of power relations. The findings of this study corroborate Judith Mayne's (2002) two key assertions: firstly, that negotiated readings are the norm rather than the exception and, secondly, that they are not necessarily indicative of ideological resistance. Indeed, in the increasingly heterodox landscape of postmodern culture, whereby polysemy is a consciously formulated mode of address, there is increasingly less consensus regarding the ideological unity of either the text or its audience(s). This study shows how audience research can open up new perspectives on and insights into the masculinities of contemporary film by exploring how they are used and understood in different social contexts. It shows, as Mayne (ibid.) and Fiske and Dawson (1996) have done, that audience studies can serve to complement and enhance, rather than to challenge the alleged limitations of, textual analysis.

9.1. National Film Culture Reconsidered

Possibly the most important overall finding of this study, given its far-reaching consequences for a plethora of other related concerns, is its demonstration of the limits of the national-cinema approach, both as an ontological and an epistemological paradigm. The rich social, cultural and gender-discursive repositories upon which participants drew to make sense of and discuss the films under analysis were as often rooted in local and transnational contexts as they were in national ones. While close textual analysis was used to identify clear stylistic, narrative, generic and ideological continuities between the male-oriented British and American (sub)genres discussed in Chapter 1 and the cycle of Irish films in question, exploring practices of reception provided new insights into the transnational nature of media reception, thereby adding flesh to existing debates. For example, the cult status of older films such as *Accelerator* and *Crush Proof* among the Youthreach Group drew attention to the importance of DVD/video viewing, thus adding weight to Creeber's (2002) claims about the increased domestication of film-viewing and to Chibnall's (2002) assertion that new gendered contexts of reception are being created by the trend toward home viewing. The group's interest in the Australian film *Chopper* also demonstrated that

communities are imagined transnationally, along lines of class and subcultural identity as much as they are linked to notions of the national.

Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the Irish viewers in this study explained their pleasures and identifications in remarkably similar ways to respondents in the British and American studies of the male audience (Robbins and Cohen 1978, Valerie Walkerdine 1986, Fiske and Dawson 1996, Lacey 2002). However, although the Irish films under analysis were largely understood by the Youthreach, Urban Professional and GAA groups as continuous with similar developments in British and American film and with elements of British and American Lad Culture, this is not to say that male audiences do not vary between different countries and territories. On the contrary, this study has also revealed important local, class-based and national specificities. For example, 'indigenised' versions of the crime caper film did not appeal to the Urban Professional group because they featured a variant of urban underclass masculinity with which they did not wish to identify, despite the fact that they were avid fans of similar narratives and characters when set in British or American contexts. By contrast, the Youthreach group's interest in films about Irish gangsters was such that it even allowed them to (partly) read prosocial crime films such as *Veronica Guerin* according to the conventions of the gangster genre, i.e. from the perspective of the gangsters. It is precisely the revelation of these "little tactics of the habitat" (Foucault 1980 p149 cited in Morley 1996 p318) which raises unexpected questions and may, in turn, prompt further, more targeted and particularised research in the future.

Taken together, the findings of chapter 5 lend concrete support to Andrew Higson's claim that the film industry's structures of (co)production, distribution and exhibition are inevitably and uniquely predisposed toward cross-cultural fluidity. This study has shown that Irish viewers recognise and, in some cases, identify with the locations, characters and subcultures depicted in films such as *Crush Proof*, *Accelerator* and *Intermission*, yet at the same time understand these films as aesthetically, generically and, arguably, ideologically continuous with many of the British and American films discussed in Chapter 1. These findings thus indicate that the objectives of the Second Irish Film Board, as outlined retrospectively by Rod Stoneman (2005), have been largely successful, in the sense that a film production environment has developed in

Ireland which actively seeks to engage audiences, both within and beyond Ireland, whose film tastes and preferences have been shaped by an increasingly transnational film and media culture. By considering the diverse horizontal and vertical ways in which audiences relate to the characters, narratives and genres of contemporary Irish films, therefore, it becomes clear that Irish cinema does not present us with a neat, homogenous or representative account of the national psyche, but rather with the expression of numerous, often competing and contradictory discourses, as well as the exclusion of many others.

9.2 National Diversity, Transnational Homogeneity

The notion of a 'transnational imaginary' which has emerged from this study also contributes significantly to debates about the threat of globalisation to national film cultures. Many film and cultural theorists express concern about the universalising and homogenising effects that Hollywood cinema will have on the diversity of themes, images and styles available in indigenous filmmaking and, ultimately, on national identity. However, the increasing heterogeneity of masculine types in cinema to which several commentators have recently alluded (Spicer 2001, Beynon 2002, Gauntlett 2002) is, paradoxically, a transnational phenomenon, in the sense that images of and discourses on masculinity have become increasingly "leaky", both across the boundaries of different film cultures and between different media forms. Exploring socially-situated practices of film reception adds further nuances and complexities to the debate by showing that cinematic images of and discourses on masculinity with allegedly universal appeal are not consumed homogeneously but rather in locally-specific as well as class-specific ways. They demonstrate that indigenised crime and gangster films can be read as underpinned by elements of both "eclectic irony" and "new sincerity" (Collins 1993 p242-243), depending on the interpretive communities in question: thus, while the Youthreach and Rural Men's groups leaned strongly towards a (closed, referential) understanding of crime films, the GAA and Urban Professional groups were more cognisant of the stylistic and ideological continuities between Irish gangster films and texts such as *Lock Stock, The Krays, Pulp Fiction* and *The Sopranos*.

These interpretive commutations between the local and the transnational tend to cut across the common conceptualisation of national cinema as positioned in diametrical opposition to the (pernicious) influences of Hollywood. They show instead that neither national cinematic nor Hollywood genres, styles and images are intact or stable but rather fluid and dynamic, particularly in the context of reception. It is difficult to argue, therefore, that the influences of Anglophone cinema from elsewhere have homogenised the repertoire of male types visible in Irish film, given that a rather homogenous set of archetypes (the autocratic patriarch, the sexually-repressed and maternally-fixated son, the ineffectual father, the abusive priest) has given way to a substantially more diverse palette of male identities. However, it is also important to consider that the scale and scope of Irish film production has increased dramatically in the past ten years, and that there is a considerable unevenness inherent in comparisons between the First Wave and those made under the Second Irish Film Board. The range of mediated masculinities to which Irish audiences are now exposed, therefore, is diverse when compared with the themes and images that characterised earlier Irish cinema but arguably more uniform and unvarying when considered in the broader context of Anglophone mass media.

9.3 Challenging Irony's Counter-Hegemonic Claims

Representational homogeneity notwithstanding, it is the discursive construction of the masculinities in question which is considered to be of central importance here. As this study has shown, the themes and styles of postmodern and postfeminist culture are not only overtly encoded into the promotional strategies of the Irish crime and underclass films but they are also understood by audiences as continuous with these sensibilities. It is precisely this foregrounding of irony, parody and polysemy which makes the masculinities in question so difficult to assess in terms of their ideological impact. Arguably, this study's advancement of the irony debate from the realm of the generalised and the speculative into that of the socially-specific and the empirical represents its most important contribution to the current debates on masculinity in film and the media. It challenges the assumptions made by both feminist and postfeminist analyses about the investments which cause viewers to adopt a particular subject position in a certain discourse (De Lauretis 1987) by exploring viewers' use of filmic images as they occur within wider discursive contexts. Shifting the focus from

irony as a textual device to irony as a reading strategy has thus re-emphasised the importance of reception and theories of the active audience, yet without relinquishing an understanding of media images as ideologically powerful.

What is particularly striking about the findings is that they do not point to a conflict of interests between evidence of a diversity of readings of the texts and the argument that the texts reinforce dominant ideologies of gender. This corroborates Judith Mayne's claim that negotiated or non-preferred readings are the norm and, crucially, that they are not automatically synonymous with ideological resistance. In spite of the diversity of readings and the plurality of pleasures which the Irish films had to offer, most participants availed of a relatively limited number of dominant discourses on gender (equality) and masculinity in their conversations. Critical responses to gender determinism were absent, and there was little or no critique of the objectification of women in media culture, since it was generally agreed by participants that the polarised interests of men and women were satisfactorily catered for by a gender-segregated media. Even the Urban Professionals, whose readings were the most ideological and constructional and who identified strongly (when watching and talking about *Intermission*) with the New-Man sensibilities of the John and Oscar characters, were by their own admission interpellated by the more traditional masculine image of the gangster in British and American films. Moreover, when the discussion turned to men's style magazines, they mobilised the defensive rhetoric of new laddism to argue that the magazines and their readers were unfairly judged as "smutty" by women, and they demonstrated a substantial lack of awareness of the gender inequity which continues to underpin the gaze economy of popular (film) culture.

Most importantly, the findings suggest that the ironic machismo which characterises contemporary Lad Culture is rarely consumed in the hyper-aware manner suggested by theorists such as Gauntlett (2002) and Sconce (2002). Although the Youthreach, GAA and Urban Professional participants often demonstrated an awareness of the controversial or provocative nature of some of the texts discussed, there was little indication that they fully grasped the ideological dynamics of lad culture. In this sense, they identified the presence of irony or what Ackerman (1983) describes as "detection" but they did not move to the second level of "inference" (*ibid.*), at least in

any recognisable or coherent way. Even the Urban Professionals, who were adept at pinpointing textual borrowings and exhibited highly constructional engagements, did not call to mind the hyper-aware audience of master semioticians envisaged by Sconce (2002). Similarly, the GAA participants, whose discussions most closely eclipsed the rhetoric of laddism, displayed no conscious, self-reflexive or 'smart' engagements. These findings are supported by those of an earlier study (Ging 2005 p41-2), whose male teenage participants "appeared to have little or no conscious grasp of laddism's anti-feminist backlash politics". This notable absence of what Hutcheon (1994) refers to as irony's "evaluative edge" raises important questions about the ideological functioning of postfeminist images of and discourses on gender in contemporary film and media culture. Such findings indicate that, as borrowings from 1960s gangster films or 1970s soft pornography have become increasingly incorporated into the mainstream, their initially visible, self-conscious and parodic status has been slowly ingested to the point where the critical distance necessary for inference threatens to collapse. This research therefore poses a significant challenge to the argument that sophisticated levels of media literacy or cultural competence facilitate ideological resistance.

Moreover, this study has engendered an important re-evaluation of masculine hegemony, by moving beyond analyses of socially-excluded masculinities as rooted in social concerns about poverty and crime (Barton 2004, Pettitt 2004) to their reconsideration in the context of the frameworks used by Savran (1998), Pfeil (1995), Monk (2000) and Tarr (2004), who read them as attempts (orchestrated by the culture industries) to reinvent and reinstate straight, white, male power by (re)presenting young working-class men as disenfranchised rebels. Thus, while the former readings configure these masculinities as non-hegemonic, the latter explain them as responses to a discourse of white male power under threat and therefore as hegemonic. The findings of this study indicate that, although images of tough, underclass masculinity were understood and enjoyed in considerably different ways by participants from different socio-economic backgrounds and different localities, there was little evidence that the films posed any significant challenge to these (white, male) viewers' sense of themselves as men: for the working-class participants, the films valorised an oft maligned social grouping, thus consolidating their sense of identification with an urban subculture, whereas for the middle-class participants,

they functioned primarily as a fantasy about masculinity freed from the constraints of adult responsibility and political correctness.

The study thus presents a concrete example of Connell's (1995) explanation of the hierarchical functioning of hegemonic masculinity, whereby, at the level of the symbolic, subordinated masculinities are used to validate and legitimate hegemonic masculinity. Even though young working-class men do not benefit from the patriarchal dividend in the same way as middle-class men, their status as exemplars of masculine authorisation allows them to be complicit in this process. As the findings presented in Chapter 7 have demonstrated, the perceived benefits of having one's identity ostensibly valorised by mainstream visual culture may not, ultimately, outweigh the negative effects that such images have on public opinion about male social exclusion. If, as Savran (1998 p36-37) claims, the beleaguered white man has become "an intractable subject for all those systems designed for personal transformation, from psychoanalysis to meditation to twelve-step programs", the benefits of this phenomenon are, in effect, least likely to benefit socially-excluded men. While these small-scale qualitative findings cannot be extrapolated to the wider population, they nonetheless indicate that, for many viewers, the hard and disaffected masculinities of contemporary Irish cinema function to reinforce rather than challenge hegemonic and heteronormative codes of masculinity. They can thus be understood as implicated in what Robert Nye (2005) describes as a wider 'episode of remasculinisation' that is currently taking place in western societies.

9.4 Class, Style and the Commodification of Subversion

The findings of this study present an important challenge to the relatively gender-neutral way in which theorists such as Barton (2004) and Pettitt (2004) have interpreted Irish cinema's preoccupation with social marginalisation, namely as a critique of consumer capitalism under the Celtic Tiger. This study's re-interrogation of class through the prism of gender supports Fiske and Dawson's (1996) argument that such images and discourses, while they may serve a progressive agenda when viewed from the perspective of class, can be regressive in terms of gender. While there was some variation in the gender-based spectatorial positions adopted by

participants in this study, in that they demonstrated different cultural competencies and levels of familiarity with and sensitivity to popular discourses on masculinity, there were also numerous fundamental commonalities based on their identifications and privileges as men. This was not the case, however, with class, whereby the working-class and underclass identities on screen engendered radically different class-based spectatorial positions among viewers. These significantly different identifications demonstrate that hegemonic masculinities do not function necessarily and exclusively hegemonically for different social groups. On the contrary, there is strong evidence of what Higson (1984 p18) refers to as “the voyeurism of one class looking at another”, with all of the power differentials that such gaze economies entail.

The relatively limited range of popular discourses on masculinity and gender equality mobilised by the participants in this study indicate that the resistant or ‘protest’ masculinities of contemporary Irish cinema may function to symbolically reinvigorate conventional or patriarchal codes of masculinity without appearing to reference traditional values: they thus liberate portrayals of Irish men from negative associations with tradition and rural life, challenge the largely feminist-inflected critiques of earlier Irish cinema, counter the politically-correct, feminised, middle-class masculinity of new mannism and capitalise on an image of male suffering that is difficult to dismiss as hegemonic on account of its ostensible concern with vulnerable social groups and male disaffection. Their (post)modern, subcultural and transnational appeal thus works to disassociate them with the past and with tradition, in spite of their arguably pre-feminist attitudes and performances of gender. The findings thus support Robert Connell’s (1995) claim that subordinated masculinities are used as exemplars of masculine authorisation, even though the groups or individuals in question are excluded from hegemonic privilege.

Clearly, a crucial factor in the commodification of underclass masculinity has been the successful disentanglement of consumption from feminisation or homosexualisation (Edwards 2003 p144). Freed from associations with cosmetics and clothing aimed at the (frequently objectified) New Man, a more robust form of commodity fetishism has been able to market sportswear, jewellery and clothing brands such as Lambretta and Ben Sherman using the imagery of tough urban

subcultures. Gangsters, rappers, soccer hooligans and other highly commercialised variants of “protest masculinity” have become the new exemplars of traditional masculine authorisation and power (Connell 1995). Lad culture has thus partly succeeded in constructing an imagined gendered community that transcends class boundaries, whereby all men together are reduced to a set of basic common instincts. Such binarist and biodeterminist agendas have been facilitated by what Attwood describes as the return to what is considered to be a more ‘natural’ state of affairs, “a move which also underpins a number of other shifts towards essentialist thinking in science, therapy and popular culture (Gill, 2003: 50-1)” (Attwood 2003 p91).

The findings elicited here indicate that the culture industries’ exploitation of images of male disaffection and suffering run the risk of detracting from the seriousness of real male suffering, while serving to essentialise socially-excluded male identities in the popular imaginary. Although statistics show that patriarchy continues to benefit men, its “linked pattern of disadvantages or toxicity” (Connell 2005 p1808) have become increasingly apparent. When exploited for their ostensibly transgressive value, however, these patterns of toxicity are in danger of becoming both (materially) trivialised and (symbolically) lionised. Although the working-class participants in this study showed themselves to be adept at relating the films they watched to the realities of their lives and at using these narratives to play out fantasies of counter-hegemonic rebellion, they were also the group which was the least defensive and most celebratory in response to these images. Rather than empowering them, therefore, it has been argued here that the predominantly real (closed, referential) nature of their readings compounded their vulnerability and, ultimately, their exclusion from a middle-class dominated media which plays a significant role in shaping public opinion about (the causes and effects of) male social exclusion. This supports Charles Acland’s (1995 p25) claim that “in depicting delinquency onscreen in dynamic and dramatic ways, most teen films are artificially providing rebellion for youth who are told that what they do outside the theatre will be of little consequence”.

Unlike many of the current debates about media, gender and identity, which focus on audience agency and creativity, this study does not ignore the wider relations of power within which mediated images circulate and are used. It regards cinematic images of masculinity and their reception by audiences as key elements in a meta-

discourse of contemporary gender relations. The lack of critical/ideological or ironic readings on the part of the working-class participants indicates that Irish film's representation of underclass masculinity is hindering rather than furthering the cause of such groups. To the extent that ironic readings were present in this study, they occurred predominantly only at the level of detection and were, almost without exception, confined to middle-class men who can indulge in gendered fantasies of subverting the *status quo* while at the same time being generally content with the *status quo* they inhabit. Given that the demonstrable gains of feminists and sexual and ethnic minorities pose the greatest threat to those in power, namely white, middle-class men, projecting fantasies of disempowerment/empowerment onto the working classes not only potentially enervates middle-class masculinity but it may also serve to unburden politicians, media commentators and other public figures from taking responsibility for the sexist, racist and homophobic anxieties that are so frequently displaced onto society's most vulnerable groups.

The key conclusion of this study, therefore, is that the criminal and socially-excluded masculinities of contemporary Irish cinema, even though they offer potentially resistive readings from the perspective of class, are primarily an example of patriarchy reformulating masculinity to meet the next historical turn (Hanke 1998 p189). Like black rap artists, the new white underclass masculinities are being employed in film, television and lifestyle advertising to promote male social exclusion as a subversive lifestyle rather than a detrimental symptom of class oppression. As bell hooks (1994) claims in her analysis of gangsta rap, rather than challenging the *status quo*, the patriarchal, sexist and misogynistic features of gangsta rap embody the prevailing values of a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy: "[r]ather than seeing it as a subversion or disruption of the norm, we need to see it as an embodiment of the norm" (hooks 1994 p117). Arguably, the prevalence of a film culture in Ireland that is keen to unshackle itself from the strictures of tradition (Ging 2002), combined with the dominance of progressive discourses on gender (McMahon 1999) as well as the widespread popularity of biodeterminist understandings of gender difference (Ging 2005), are concurrent factors which set the scene for the type of uncritical acceptance by young men of such images that is documented here. Despite the ubiquitous claims to irony made by producers and consumers within the current postmodern and postfeminist mediascape, the findings of this study point to an incomplete and

inadequate understanding of the dynamics of irony - on the part of both producers and consumers.

This, in turn, raises important questions about the role of mediated images in the social construction of gender identity. The diversity of readings and pleasures documented here challenges the simplicity of and unilateral dynamic implicit in media effects models. It also points to the limitations inherent in scapegoating the media for the persistence of outmoded masculine behaviours and identities, since such approaches overlook the nature of the wider school and family cultures within which young men grow and learn, and which engender a taste for certain narratives and images (Fiske and Dawson 1996). As Michael Kimmel (1987 p20) has commented, images of gender are “texts on normative behaviour” but they are only “one of many cultural shards we use to construct notions of masculinity”. Crucially, however, this study also illustrates that active audiences and non-preferred readings are by no means coterminous with ideological resistance, since viewers frequently exhibited negotiated readings that were simultaneously uncritical of hegemonic codes of masculinity. Clearly, small-scale empirical studies are not representative of the general population. However, they do provide concrete examples of media as social practice (Couldry 2004) and can thus add flesh or pose challenges to existing macrotheories (Fiske and Dawson 1996), as well as suggesting topics for further research - both text- and context-based – in this area. The popularity of the ‘paradigm films’ analysed here and the diverse range of discourses mobilised around them demonstrate the potential of film studies to continue to provoke pertinent questions about the social construction of masculinity.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

All information given in this questionnaire and in the focus group is strictly confidential.

1. How often do you go to the cinema?

- a) More than once a week [if so, how often?.....]
- b) Once a week
- c) Once a fortnight
- d) Once a month
- e) Less than once a month
- f) Never

1a. With whom do you usually go to the cinema?

.....

2. How often do you watch videos/DVDs

- a) More than one a week [if so, how many?.....]
- b) One a week
- c) One a fortnight
- d) One a month
- e) Less than one a month
- f) Never

2a. Where do you usually watch videos/DVDs?

.....

2b. With whom do you usually watch videos/DVDs?

.....

3. How often do you watch films on cable television / movie channels?

- a) More than one a week [if so, how many?.....]
- b) One a week
- c) One a fortnight
- d) One a month
- e) Less than one a month
- f) Never

3a. Where do you usually watch films on cable television / movie channels?

.....

3b. With whom do you usually watch films on cable television / movie channels?

.....

4. What are your favourite types of film? Number in order of preference

- a) Action.....
- b) Comedy.....
- c) Drama.....
- d) Gangster.....
- e) Horror.....
- f) Musical.....
- g) Romance.....
- h) Sci-fi.....
- i) Thriller.....
- j) Western.....
- k) Other (please specify)

5. Name the last 5 films you saw and specify whether you saw them in the cinema, on video/DVD or on television.

.....

.....

6. What are your favourite 5 films from the last 6 - 12 months?

.....

.....

7. What are your favourite 5 films ever?

.....

.....

8. From the list below, can you tick the films you have seen?

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. Accelerator..... | 50. Peaches..... |
| 2. Crush Proof..... | 51. Goldfish Memory..... |
| 3. The General..... | 52. The Actors..... |
| 4. Last Days in Dublin..... | 53. On the Edge..... |
| 5. Saltwater..... | 54. The Butcher Boy..... |
| 6. Ordinary Decent Criminal..... | 55. November Afternoon..... |
| 7. Adam and Paul..... | 56. Cowboys and Angels..... |
| 8. Man About Dog..... | 57. Disco Pigs..... |
| 9. Head Rush..... | 58. Flick..... |
| 10. Freeze Frame..... | 59. Dead Bodies..... |
| 11. The Halo Effect..... | 60. Spin the Bottle..... |
| 12. Intermission..... | 61. When Brendan Met Trudy |
| 13. Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels..... | 62. About Adam..... |
| 14. Snatch..... | 63. The Full Monty..... |
| 15. Shopping..... | 65. Brassed Off..... |
| 16. Trainspotting..... | |
| 17. Twin Town..... | |
| 18. Face..... | |
| 19. Naked..... | |
| 20. Pulp Fiction..... | |
| 21. Reservoir Dogs..... | |
| 22. Fight Club..... | |
| 23. American Beauty..... | |
| 24. Magnolia..... | |
| 25. Falling Down..... | |
| 26. Disclosure..... | |
| 27. Basic Instinct..... | |
| 28. Fatal Attraction..... | |
| 29. American Pie 1..... | |
| 30. American Pie 2..... | |
| 31. American Pie The Wedding..... | |
| 32. There's Something About Mary..... | |
| 33. Roadtrip..... | |
| 34. Shallow Hal..... | |
| 35. In the Company of Men..... | |
| 36. Die Hard..... | |
| 37. Die Hard II..... | |
| 38. Die Hard with a Vengeance..... | |
| 39. Dude, Where's My Car?..... | |
| 40. Saving Silverman..... | |
| 41. Lethal Weapon I..... | |
| 42. Lethal Weapon II..... | |
| 43. Rocky..... | |
| 44. Rocky II..... | |
| 45. Rocky III..... | |
| 46. First Blood..... | |
| 47. Rambo: First Blood Part II..... | |
| 48. Rambo III..... | |
| 49. Top Gun..... | |

8a. Which were your favourite films (e.g. choose 3 or 4) from this list? Why?

.....

8b. Which films from the list did you dislike and why?

.....

9. Name:.....

10. Are you married / co-habiting / single?.....

11. Are you:

- a) Studying.....
- b) Training.....
- c) Full-time employed.....
- d) Part-time employed.....
- e) Unemployed.....

12. If employed, what do you work at?.....

.....

13. Highest level of education achieved to date?.....

.....

14. Do you live in an urban or rural location? (Give name of village, town, city)?

.....

15. Have you spent most of your life living in an urban or rural location (Give name of village, town, city)?

.....

16. Age:.....

Appendix B - Focus Group Guiding Questions

Screening Intermission (105 mins.)

Guiding questions:

If you saw the film before, where did you see it?

Who were you with?

What do you recall about seeing it?

Did you like it? Why?

Is this the kind of film that you usually like to watch?

What type of film is it?

Did you think of it as an Irish film?

Does it remind you of any other films? Which ones? Why?

What do you think the film is about?

Is it mostly serious or funny?

Is it realistic?

Do you think it's about things that are actually going on in Ireland?

Which characters do you like / dislike? Why?

Would you see any of the characters as like yourself or people you know?

Which ones? How?

Who is the star of the film?

What do you think of Detective Lynch (Colm Meaney)?

What do you think of Lehiff (Colin Farrell)?

What about Ben?

Oscar and John?

What kind of man is the bank manager?

Are they powerful men?

Are any of the characters in the film rebels?

What are they rebelling against?

What does masculinity crisis mean?

Would everyone enjoy this film or does it appeal to particular people or groups?

Why is the film promoted using reviews from FHM and Maxim?

Appendix 2

Audience Figures and Plot Summaries for the contemporary Irish Films under Analysis (to accompany film clips on DVD)

Accelerator, 1999

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Accelerator (NI)	15/18	3	15	177,845		1999
Accelerator (ROI)	15/18	6	11	150,914	41,000	1999

Tagline(s): -

Website: <http://www.grandpictures.ie/>

Plot summary:

Car thief Johnny T is forced out of Belfast by paramilitaries. He decides to leave for Barcelona but his plans change when he finds himself in conflict with a Dublin gangster called Whacker. Johnny T not only threatens to upstage Whacker as King of the Joyriders but also covets his girlfriend Louise. The two decide to settle their differences by racing in stolen cars from Belfast to Dublin with 12 of their friends.

The Actors, 2003

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
The Actors	15PG	6	40	246,575	N/A	16 May 2003

Tagline(s): Thick as thieves...only thicker

Website: -

Plot summary:

When struggling actor O'Malley starts hanging out with criminals in Dublin's roughest bars in order to research his role as Richard III, he and fellow-actor Tom become involved in a complicated plot to steal a large sum of cash. Tom succeeds in convincing Scottish criminal Jock that he is Dublin gangster Barreller, but then must contend with Mrs. Magnani, the head of the criminal operation for which Jock works.

Adam and Paul, 2004

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Adam and Paul	15PG	6	15	489,693	N/A	27 th August 2004

Tagline(s): And you thought you were having a bad day

Website: <http://www.adamandpaul.com/>

Plot summary:

Adam and Paul, whose individual identities are never revealed in the film, have been friends since childhood. They have become heroin addicts and now spend their days surviving and trying to get a fix around the city streets and council estates of Dublin. The film portrays a day in their life, which turns out to have a tragic ending.

Crush Proof 1999

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Crush Proof	18	2	4	10,449	230,000	7 th May 1999

Tagline(s): Nowhere to run. Nothing to lose

Website:

Plot summary:

Neal is released from prison and goes to visit his baby son, who he has not yet met. He is refused access to the child by his ex-girlfriend. On discovering that his horse is dead and his parents have separated and are not interested in him, he seeks out his old friends in the 'pony club' subculture of Dublin's Northside. It is not long before Neal runs into the snitch who set him up and is in trouble with the law again.

Dead Bodies 2003

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Dead Bodies	15PG	3	29	108,074	N/A	25 th April 2003

Tagline(s): Every situation is a grave situation

Website: -

Plot summary:

Tommy's hedonistic and carefree lifestyle is interrupted by the return of his ex-girlfriend Jean. A fight that turns physical has unexpected consequences, and Tommy realises that he is out of his depth.

Flick, 2000

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Flick	18	4	4	16,094	27,000	8 th Septmeber 2000

Tagline(s): In every club and in every bar there's a dealer dying to make it big.

Website: -

Plot summary:

Jack Flinter is a small-time drug-dealer from a middle-class background who hangs out in Dublin's pubs and nightclubs. Jack's girlfriend Alice is disillusioned with his lifestyle. Jack meets a German tourist called Isabelle and embarks on a fling with her, which forces him to make a decision about the direction his life is taking.

Freeze Frame, 2004

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Freeze Frame	18		7	20,000	N/A	

Tagline(s): Off-camera is off-guard

Website:

Plot summary:

A murder suspect who suffers from extreme paranoia films himself constantly so that he will have an alibi if ever accused of another crime. However, one of the tapes that can prove his innocence in a new murder case goes missing and he goes on the run to fabricate evidence of his whereabouts during the crime.

The General, 1998

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
The General	15	12	2	1, 372, 396 punts	646,000	August 1998

Tagline(s): He was a world-class criminal and a working-class hero.
The extraordinary true story of the rise and fall of the gangster, Martin Cahill.

Website: <http://www.sonypictures.com/classics/general>

Plot summary:

The General tells the story of notorious Irish criminal Martin Cahill, who has become an urban legend in Ireland since his death in 1994. The film tells the story of Cahill's criminal heists and of his ongoing antagonism with the Irish police force and the IRA. It also provides insights into his *ménage-a-trois* relationship with his wife and her sister, both of whom he fathered children with.

The Halo Effect, 2004

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
The Halo Effect	15PG		8	15,240	N/A	

Tagline(s):

Website:

Plot summary:

Fatso is the owner of a run-down fast-food restaurant and is struggling to pay his bills and debts. He is a compulsive gambler and is constantly harassed by loan sharks and debt collectors. Just when Fatso thinks he can solve his problems, he is faced with a dilemma that could destroy him for good.

Headrush, 2002

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Head Rush	15	3	10	41,676	N/A	24 th June 2002

Tagline(s): Would you go to Amsterdam for Charlie?
No sex, no drugs, no rock 'n' roll - what's a boy to do?

Website: <http://www.headrushthemovie.com/>

Plot summary:

No-hopers Charlie and T-Bag spend most of their time getting stoned and dreaming up get-rich-quick schemes. When Charlie is refused unemployment benefit and his girlfriend, Vicky, finishes with him, he realises that his life has hit rock bottom. Charlie and T-Bag decide to do a one-off drugs run from Amsterdam for a crime lord called The Uncle. A madcap adventure ensues through the underworlds of Dublin and Amsterdam, and Charlie and T-Bag are fortunate to escape not only unscathed but also having learned some important lessons about business.

I Went Down, 1997

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
I Went Down	15			600,000 punts	427,000	

Tagline(s): One doesn't count, the other can't. Dis-organised crime
A film about sex, friendship and one incredibly talkative hostage

Website: -

Plot summary:

Git is released from prison and rescues an old friend from loan sharks. In trouble with the mob boss, Tom French, he is sent to Cork with another debtor, Bunny Kelly, to find a man called Frank Grogan. An Irish road movie ensues, in which the unlikely duo encounter a series of obstacles, often to comic effect.

Intermission, 2003

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Intermission	15PG	24	30	2,558,931* (2.8 million)	N/A	29th August 2003

*Intermission is the highest ever grossing Irish directed and produced film. Intermission is Xtravision's most rented video/dvd in a six week period ever. It premiered at no 1 on its rental release (Source: Moira Horgan, Head of Marketing, Bord Scannán na hÉireann / the Irish Film Board).

Tagline(s): Life is what happens in between.

Website: <http://www.thefilmfactory.co.uk/intermission/intermission.html>

Plot summary:

Intermission is a story of interweaving subplots, set in contemporary Dublin. Petty criminal Lehiff plans one last job before settling down. His nemesis, Detective Jerry Lynch, is also determined to leave his mark before quitting the fight against crime. After splitting up with his girlfriend Deirdre, who starts seeing local bank manager Sam, John hooks up with Lehiff to win Deirdre back. Their attempted bank robbery fails when Sam's (ex-)wife attacks him during the heist, with chaotic results.

Last Days in Dublin, 2002

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Last Days in Dublin		2	1	10,296	17,000	4th Oct. 2002

Was not released on video/DVD, went straight from theatre to RTE.

Plot summary:

Monster is a young, unemployed Dubliner who dreams of travelling the world. But as soon as he resolves to leave Ireland, his plans are thwarted by an endless array of oddball and criminal characters from Dublin's underworld. He teams up with Freddie, a homeless explorer, and tries to find an alternative escape. But he seems doomed for failure.

Man About Dog, 2004

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Man About Dog	15PG	12	41	2,096,869*	609,000	1 st October 2004

*Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland

Plot summary:

Mo Chara, Scud Murphy and perpetual stoner Cerebral Paulsy are three young, unemployed men from Belfast, who owe £50,000 to a local bookmaker and have one week to repay him. In order to win back the cash, they decide to buy and race a greyhound. On discovering that the dog can't run, they sell him to a group of local Travellers but discover afterwards that he is a champion hare-courser. They steal the dog back and drive to Ireland's biggest hare-coursing event, where they run into both the bookmaker and the Travellers.

Ordinary Decent Criminal, 1999

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Ordinary Decent Criminal	15	5	41	291,828	543, 000	7 th January 1999

Tagline(s): A smash and grab masterpiece

Website: -

Plot summary:

Based on the character of Martin Cahill ('the General'), Michael Lynch is a suave criminal who robs from the rich but lives with the poor. As Michael becomes more and more successful, he becomes embroiled in conflicts with the police and the IRA, both of which determine to break him.

Saltwater, 1999

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Saltwater	15	4	26	125,886	495, 000	29 th September 1999

Tagline(s): -

Website: -

Plot summary:

George, a chip shop owner in a seaside resort falls heavily into debt to local loan shark 'Simple Simon'. George's son, Frank, attempts to avenge his father's emasculation by humiliating Gleeson. Meanwhile, George's younger son starts keeping 'bad company' and is disturbed by his accidental witnessing of a rape. In a parallel subplot, their friend Ray, a university lecturer who is experiencing a crisis in his career and relationship, has an affair with one his students.

Spin the Bottle, 2003

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Spin the Bottle	15PG	5	40	525,515	116,000	28 th November

Tagline(s): -

Website: -

Plot summary:

Rats, released from prison yet again, returns to his mother's house. When the money that has been saved to send his Aunt to Lourdes to cure her terminal obesity is stolen, Rats embarks on campaign to replace the stolen money. After a series of failed get-rich-quick schemes, he decides to reform his old band Spermdotcom and gatecrashes a national TV talent show.

Veronica Guerin, 2003

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
Veronica Guerin	15	15	61	4, 020, 924*	N/A	11 th July

*Top-grossing film at the Irish box office in 2003

Tagline(s): Why would anyone want to kill Veronica Guerin?

Website: -

Plot summary:

Veronica Guerin is the story of the eponymous Irish journalist who was gunned down on Dublin's Naas Road in June 1996. Starting with her assassination, the film flashes back to tell the story of her 18-month investigation into Dublin's drug trade. Guerin starts out interviewing young drug addicts but soon has information on the key dealers. Her relentless attempts to get close to crime lord John Gilligan result in threats to her family and to her own life. Despite the warnings of her mother, husband and informant John Traynor, she persists in her pursuit of justice, with fatal consequences.

Vicious Circle, 1999

Made for Television (BBC Northern Ireland)

Tagline(s): -

Website: -

Plot summary:

Vicious Circle is based on the real life story of Dublin criminal, Martin Cahill. Following O'Connor's Jewellery factory heist, he is regarded as Dublin's most audacious and notorious criminal. However, the 'General' is wanted both by the Irish police force and a by a local IRA unit. As Detective Declan Finney determines to bring Cahill down, his days as Boss of the Dublin Underworld are limited.

When the Sky Falls, 2000

Film	Cert.	No. of weeks in release	No. of screens in opening week	Gross to date (in Euros)	RTE viewing figures	Date of release
When the Sky Falls	18	6	52	319,492	N/A	16 th June 2000

Tagline(s): When the truth is hidden when the witness is silenced when the sky falls
In 1996, a reporter uncovered the truth. Now it's going to bury her.

Website: -

Plot summary:

When the Sky Falls is based on the real life story of investigative journalist Veronica Guerin, called Sinead Hamilton in this film. Despite the pleas of her husband and family to give up her pursuit of justice, Hamilton persists. A small-time gangster working for crime lord Dave Hackett convinces her he is acting as her snitch, with fatal consequences.

Sources: *INPRODUCTION*, RTE Audience Research Department, Irish Film and Television Network, Internet Movie Database, Video Home Entertainment Ireland, Screen Digest, European Audiovisual Observatory Yearbook, Ruth Barton (2004), the Irish Film Board and Buena Vista Intl.

Bibliography

- Ackerman, B. 1983. Form and Function in Children's Understanding of Ironic Utterances IN: *Journal of Exp Child Psychology* 35, pp487-508.
- Alexander, J. 1997. Half a Million Men Can't Be Wrong IN: *You*, 12th October.
- Anderson, B. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. London and NY: Verso.
- Andrews, R. 2000. Review of Accelerator *Film West*, Issue 40.
- Ang, I. 1985. *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London; New York: Meuthen.
- Ang, I. 1989. Wanted: Audiences: On the Politics of Empirical Audience Studies IN: Seiter, E., Borchers, H., Kreutzner, G. and Warth, E.M. (eds.), *Remote Control*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp150-167.
- Aronson, A. and Kimmel, M. 2001. The Saviors and The Saved: Masculine Redemption in Contemporary Films IN: Lehman, P. (ed.) *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Attwood, F. 2005. 'Tits and ass and porn and fighting': male heterosexuality in magazines for men IN: *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. 8 (1), pp83-100.
- Austin, T. 1999. 'Gendered (dis)Pleasures: *Basic Instinct* and Female Viewers IN: *Journal of Popular British Cinema* 2, pp4-22.
- Austin, T. 2002. *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences: Selling and Watching Popular Film in the 1990s*. Manchester University Press.
- Austin-Smith. B. 1990. Into the Heart of Irony IN: *Canadian Dimension* 27(7), pp51-2.
- Barker, M. with Austin, T. (eds.) 2000. *From Antz To Titanic : Reinventing Film Analysis*. Pluto Press.
- Barkley, R.A., Ullman, D.G., Otto, L. and Brecht, J.M. 1977. The effects of sex typing and sex appropriateness of model behaviour on children's imitation IN: *Child Development* 48, pp721-725.
- Barton, R. 2004. *Irish National Cinema*. London: Routledge.
- Beynon, J. 2002. *Masculinities and Culture*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Blumler, J.G. and Katz, E. (eds.) 1974c. *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Bly, R. 1988. *A Little Book on the Human Shadow*. HarperCollins.
- Bly, R. 1992. *Iron John: A Book about Men*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Bourdieu, P. 1986 *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London; New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Bourdieu, P. 1986. The Forms of Capital IN: Richardson, J. (ed.) Ed. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood Press, pp241-258.
- Bourdieu, P. 1993. *Sociology in Question*. (R. Nice Trans.). London; Thousand Oaks; New Dehli: Sage Publications.
- Breeze, J., Turner, R. and Patterson, P. 2003. Anti-Community Behaviour Ballymun Citizens' Jury Report, Dublin: Vision21 [Online]. Available from: http://www.brl.ie/pdf/Ballymun_ACB_Citizens_Jury_Report.pdf, accessed on 20th November 2005.
- Brookey, R. A. Westerfelhaus, R. 2002. Hiding Homoeroticism in Plain View: The Fight Club DVD as Digital Closet IN: *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19 (1), pp21-43.
- Brown, M.E. 1994. *Soap Opera and Women's Talk. The Pleasure of Resistance*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Brown, M.E. 1996. Desperately Seeking Strategies: Reading in the Postmodern IN: Grodin, D. and Lindlof, T.R. (eds.) *Constructing the Self in a Mediated World*. London; New Dehli: Sage Publications, pp55-67.
- Buggy, M. 2003 Review of *Intermission in Film Ireland*, Sept./Oct., p. 34.
- Burchill, J. 1999. Way back when men were men IN: *The Guardian*, 4th January.
- Byrne, H. 1997. 'Going to the Pictures': The Female Audience and the Pleasures of Cinema IN: O'Connor, B. and Kelly, M. (eds.) *Media Audiences in Ireland: Power and Cultural Identity*. Dublin, University College Dublin Press.
- Cain, M. and Finch, J. 1981. Towards a rehabilitation of data IN: Abrams, P., Deem, R., Finch, J. and Rock, P. (eds.) *Practice and Progress: British Sociology 1950-1980*. London: Allen and Unwin.

- Calcutt, A. 2000. *Brit Cult: An A-Z of British Pop Culture*. London: Prion.
- Campbell, B. 1993. *Goliath: Britain's Dangerous Places*. London: Methuen Publishing.
- Cantillon, S., Corrigan, C., Kirby, P. and O'Flynn, J. (eds.) 2001. *Rich and Poor: Perspectives on Tackling Inequality in Ireland*, Oak Tree Press in association with the Combat Poverty Agency.
- Central Statistics Office 2005. *EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) 2004*. Dublin: Central Statistics Office. [Online]. Available from: http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/labour_market/current/eusilc.pdf, accessed 3rd January 2006.
- Cheles-Miller, P. 1975. Reactions to Marital Roles in Commercials IN: *Journal of Advertising Research* 15 (4), pp45-49.
- Chibnall, S. 2001. Underworld England: Guy Ritchie and the British Gangster Film IN: *Filmhäftet* # 118 (6).
- Chibnall, S. and Murphy, R. (eds). 1999. *British Crime Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Church Gibson, P. 2004. Queer Looks, Male Gazes, Taut Torsos and Designer Labels: Contemporary Cinema, Consumption and Masculinity IN: Powrie, P., Davis, A. and Babington, B. (eds.) *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*. London and New York: Wallflower Press, pp176-186.
- Clare, A. 2000. *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Clarke, D. 2002. Review of *Last Days in Dublin* IN: *The Irish Times (The Ticket)*, 3rd October, p. 8.
- Clarke, D. 2004. Vein Spotting IN: *The Irish Times (The Ticket)*, 20th August, p. 6.
- Cleary, A., Corbett, M., Galvin, M. and Wall, J. 2004. *Young Men on the Margins*. Dublin: The Katherine Howard Foundation.
- Cobb N., Stevens-Long, J., and Goldstein, S. 1982. The Influence of Televised Models on Toy Preference in Children IN: *Sex Roles*, 8(10), pp1075-1080.
- Cohan, S. and Hark, I.R. (eds.) 1993. *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Collins, J. 1992. Postmodernism and Television IN: Allen, R. (ed.) *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, pp327-353.

- Collins, J. 1993. Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and the new sincerity IN: Collins, J., Radner, H. and Preacher Collins, A. (eds.) *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*. London: Routledge, pp242-63.
- Connell, R.W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Connell, R.W. 2005. Change among the Gatekeepers: Men, Masculinities, and Gender Equality in the Global Arena IN: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30 (3), pp1801-1825.
- Connolly, M. and Ryan, O. 2000. *The Glass Eye: Artists and Television*. Dublin: Project Arts Centre.
- Cook, P. 1982. Masculinity in Crisis? IN: *Screen* 23, Sept/Oct.
- Cook, P. (ed.) 1987. *The Cinema Book*. London: BFI.
- Cordua, G.D., McGraw, K.O. and Drabman, R.S. 1979. Doctor or nurse: Children's perception of sex-typed occupations IN *Child Development* 50, pp590-593.
- Couldry, N. 2004. Theorising Media as Social Practice IN: *Social Semiotics* 14 (2). London: Routledge, pp115-132.
- Coulter, C. 1993. *The Hidden Tradition: Feminism, Women and Nationalism in Ireland*. Cork: Cork University Press.
- Coward, R. 1999. *Sacred Cows: Is Feminism Relevant to the New Millennium?* London: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Craig, S. (ed.) 1992. *Men, Masculinity, and the Media*. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, London, New Dehli.
- Creeber, G. 2002. 'TV Ruined the Movies': Television, Tarantino, and the Intimate World of the Sopranos IN: Lavery, D. (ed.) *This Thing of Ours: Investigating the Sopranos*. London: Wallflower Press.
- Creed, B. 1993. Dark Desires: Male Masochism in the Horror Film IN: Cohan, S. and Hark, I.R. (eds.) *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*. London; New York: Routledge, pp118-133.
- Curtin, A. and Linehan, D. 2002. Where the boys are - teenagers, masculinity and a sense of place IN: *Irish Geography* 35(1), pp63-74.
- Dart, T. 2004. Film in the Firms' Grip IN: *The Irish Independent (Weekend)*, 15th May, pp12-16.

- Decode - Youth Lifestyle Research Programme*. 2000. Dublin: Market Research Bureau of Ireland.
- De Lauretis, T. 1987. The Technology of Gender IN: De Lauretis, T. (ed.) *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Denski, S. and Sholle, D. 1992. Metal Men and Glamour Boys: Gender Performance in Heavy Metal IN: Craig, S. (ed.). *Men, Masculinity and the Media*. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, London, New Dehli.
- Department of Education and Science. 2000. *Exploring Masculinities: A Programme in Personal and Social Development for Transition and Senior Cycle Boys and Young Men*. Dublin: Department of Education and Science.
- Devlin, M. *Representations of Irish Youth*. Doctoral Thesis (2000, unpublished). Maynooth: National University of Ireland.
- Deyner, S. 1998. *It's Dangerous to be a Man! The Health of Men in the North West*. Keynote address at Men's Health Conference. Bundoran.
- Donald, R.R. 1992. Masculinity and Machismo in Hollywood's War Films IN: Craig, S. (ed.). *Men, Masculinity, and the Media*. Newbury Park; London; Dehli: Sage Publications.
- Drabman, R., Robertson, S., Patterson, S.J., Jarvie, G.J., Hammer, D. and Cordua, G. 1981. Children's Perception of Media-Portrayed Sex Roles IN: *Sex Roles* 7, pp379-389.
- Duncombe, S. (ed.) 2002. *Cultural Resistance Reader*. London and New York: Verso.
- Dyer, R. 1993. The Role of Stereotypes IN: *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*. London: Routledge, pp11-18.
- Dwyer, M. 2003. That's a Wrap IN: *The Irish Times (The Ticket)*, 21st August, p. 2.
- Edwards, T. 1997. *Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society*. London: Cassell.
- Ellis, J. 1982. *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1940. *The Nuer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Faludi, S. 1991. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. London: Vintage.
- Faludi, Susan. 1999. *Stiffed: the Betrayal of Modern Man*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Farrell, K. 2003. Naked Nation: The Full Monty, Working-Class Masculinity, and the British Image IN: *Men and Masculinities* 6 (2). Sage Publications, pp119-135.

Fejes, F.J. 1992. Masculinity as Fact: A Review of Empirical Mass Communication Research on Masculinity IN: Craig, S. (ed.). *Men, Masculinity, and the Media*. Newbury Park; London; Dehli: Sage Publications.

Ferguson, H. 2003. Ireland national report on research on men's practices. Workpackage 1 (work in progress). EU FPV Thematic Network: the Social Problem and Societal Problematisation of Men and Masculinities, CROME: Critical Research on Men in Europe, EU National Reports [Online]. Available from: [http://www.cromenet.org/crome/crome.nsf/resources/F63718CBF67DD401C22569D2002F87B9/\\$file/Ireland.doc](http://www.cromenet.org/crome/crome.nsf/resources/F63718CBF67DD401C22569D2002F87B9/$file/Ireland.doc), accessed 28th October 2003.

Finch, J. 1984. 'It's Great to Have Someone to Talk to': the Ethics and Politics of Interviewing Women IN: Bell, C. and Roberts, H. (eds.) *Social Researching: Politics, Problems, Practice*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Fish, S. 1980. *Is There a Text in this Class? : The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Harvard University Press.

Fishman, N. 1998. Ratings and Reality: The Persistence of Reality Crime Genre IN: Fishman, M. and Cavender, G. (eds.) *Entertaining Crime: Television Reality Programs*. New York, NY: Aldine DeGruyter.

Fishman, M. and Cavender, G. (eds.) 1998. *Entertaining Crime: Television Reality Programs*. New York, NY: Aldine DeGruyter.

Fiske, J. (1987). *Television Culture*. London: Meuthen.

Fiske, J. and Dawson, R. 1996. Audiencing Violence: Watching Homeless Men Watch Die Hard IN: Hay, J., Grossberg, L. Wartella, E. (eds.) *The Audience and Its Landscape*, Colorado; Oxford: Westview Press, pp297-316.

Fiske, J. and Hartley, J. 1978. *Reading Television*. London: Methuen.

Fiske, J. 1991. The Cultural Economy of Fandom IN: Lewis, L.A. (ed.) *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. London and New York: Routledge, pp30-50.

Flocker, M. 2003. *The Metrosexual Guide to Style: A Handbook for the Modern Man*. Da Capo Press.

Fradley, M. 2004. Maximus Melodramaticus: Masculinity, Masochism and White Male Paranoia in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema IN: Tasker, Y. (Ed.) *Action and Adventure Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge.

Frazer, E. 1987. Teenage Girls Reading Jackie IN: *Media, Culture and Society* 9, pp407-425.

Frey, L.R. et al. 1991. *Investigating Communication: An Introduction to Research Methods*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall.

Frueh, T. and McGhee, P.E. 1975. Traditional Sex-Role Development and Amount of Time Spent Watching Television IN: *Developmental Psychology* II, p109.

Fuchs, C. 1993. The Buddy Politic IN: Cohan, S. and Hark, I.R. (eds.) *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*. London; New York: Routledge, 194-210.

Gaffney, M. 2004. Inside the Heads of a Generation Without Constraints IN: *The Irish Times*, 28th February, p3.

Gamman, L. and Marshment, M. 1988. *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*. London: Women's Press.

Gash, H. and Conway, P. 1997. Images of Heroes and Heroines: How Stable? IN: *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 18, pp349-372.

Gauntlett, D. 2002. *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.

Geraghty, C. 1991. *Women and Soap Opera: A Study of Prime-Time Soaps*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gibbons, L. 1996. *Transformations in Irish Culture*. Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press in association with Field Day.

Gilbey, R. 2004. Dangerous Dandies IN: *The Independent*, 3rd May.

Gilbey, R. 2004. Tough Guys Don't Dream IN: *Sight and Sound* 5, May, pp40-41.

Gilder, G.F. 1973. *Sexual Suicide*. Quadrangle.

Ging, D. 2002. Screening the Green IN: Kirby, P., Gibbons, L. and Cronin, M. (eds.) *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*. London: Pluto.

Ging, D. 2004. The Lads from New Ireland: Marginalised, Disaffected and Criminal Masculinities in Contemporary Irish Cinema IN: *Film and Film Culture* 3. Waterford Institute of Technology.

- Ging, D. 2005. A 'Manual on Masculinity'?: The Consumption and Use of Mediated Images of Masculinity among Teenage Boys in Ireland IN: Cleary, A. (ed.) *Irish Journal of Sociology (Masculinities)* 14 (2). pp29-52.
- Giroux, H. and Szeman, I. 2001. Ikea Boy Fights Back: Fight Club, Consumerism, and the Political Limits of Nineties Cinema IN: Lewis, J. (ed.) *The End of Cinema as We Know It: American Film in the 90s*. New York University Press.
- Gitlin, T. 1989. Postmodernism: Roots and Politics IN: Angus, I.H (ed.) *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Gordon, T. 1992. Citizens and Others: Gender, Democracy and Education IN: *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 2 (1).
- Gray, J. 1993. *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationships*. London: Thorsons.
- Greven, D. 2002. Dude, Where's My Gender? Contemporary Teen Comedies and New Forms of American Masculinity IN: *Cineaste* 27 (3), pp14-21.
- Griffiths, M. 2002. Blue worlds and pink worlds – A portrait of intimate polarity IN: Buckingham, D. (ed.) *Small Screens*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, pp159-184.
- Hall, S. 1980. Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse IN: Hall, S., Hobson, D., Lowe, A. and Willis, P. (eds.) *Culture, Media Language*. London: Hutchinson, pp128–138.
- Hall, S. 1981. Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular' IN: Samuel, R. (ed.) *People's History and Socialist Theory*. London: Kegan Paul-Routledge, pp 231-239.
- Hall, S. 1989. Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation IN: *Framework* 36, pp68–81.
- Hall, S. 1991, 1997. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.
- Hammersley, M. 1992. On Feminist Methodology IN: *Sociology* 26 (2), pp187-206.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. 1994. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hanke, R. 1990. Hegemonic Masculinity in *thirtysomething* IN: *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7(3), pp231-248.

Hanke, R. 1992. Redesigning Men: Hegemonic Masculinity in Transition IN: Craig, S. (ed.). *Men, Masculinity and the Media*. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, London, New Dehli.

Hanke, R. 1998. Theorizing Masculinity With/In the Media IN: *Communication Theory* 8(2), pp183-203.

Haraway, D. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.

Haywood, C. and Mac an Ghail, M. 1997c. Masculinity and Social Change: Rethinking Sexual Politics IN: *Social Alternatives* 16 (3), pp11-13.

Haywood, C. and Mac an Ghail, M. 2003. *Men and Masculinities: Theory, Research and Social Practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Hearn, J. 1987. Changing Men's Studies IN: *Achilles Heel* 8 [Online]. Available from: http://www.achillesheel.freeuk.com/article08_11.html, accessed 8th April 2002.

Hearn, J. 1987. *The Gender of Oppression*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf.

Hearn, J. 1992. *Men in the Public Eye: the Construction and Deconstruction of Public Men and Public Patriarchies*. London; New York: Routledge.

Hearn, J. 1998. *The Violences of Men: How Men Talk about and How Agencies Respond to Men's Violence to Women*. London: Sage.

Hearn, J. and Melechi, A. 1992. The Transatlantic Gaze: Masculinities, Youth, and the American Imaginary' in Craig, S. (ed.). *Men, Masculinity and the Media*. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, London, New Dehli.

Hearn, J. and Morgan, D. (eds.) 1990. *Men, Masculinities and Social Theory*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Hearn, J. (2005) Autobiography, nation, postcolonialism and gender relations: reflecting on men in England, Finland and Ireland IN: *Irish Journal of Sociology* 14 (2), pp 66-93.

Hebdige, D. 1993. The Meaning of Mod IN: Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (eds.). *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*. London: Routledge, 1993, pp 87-94. First published in 1975 as Working Papers in Cultural Studies, No. 7/8, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham.

Higbee, W. 2001. Screening the 'other' Paris: cinematic representations of the French urban periphery in *La Haine* and *Ma 6-T va crack-er* IN: *Modern and Contemporary France* 9 (2).

- Higson, A 1984. Space, PLace and Spectacle. Screen 25, pp2-21.
- Higson, A. 2000. The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema IN: Hjort, M. and McKenzie, S. (eds.) *Cinema and Nation*. London: Routledge.
- Hill, D. 2000. Blokes on the Ropes IN: *The Guardian*, 8th November, p. 4.
- Hill, J. 2004. A Working-Class Hero is Something to be? Changing Representations of Class and Masculinity in British Cinema IN: Powrie, P., Davis, A. and Babington, B. (eds.) *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*. London and New York: Wallflower Press.
- Hill, J. and Church Gibson, P. (eds.). 2000. *Film Studies: Critical Approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hills, M. 2001. *Fan Cultures*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hjort, A. 1986. *When Women Watch TV. How Danish Women Perceive the American Series Dallas and the Danish Series Daughters of the War*. Copenhagen: Danish Broadcasting Corporation, Media Research Department.
- Hobson, D. 1982. *Crossroads - The Drama of a Soap*. London: Methuen.
- Hobson, D. 1989. Soap Opera at Work IN: Seiter, E., Borchers, H., Kreutzner, G. and Warth, E.M. (eds.), *Remote Control*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp150-167.
- Hobsbawm, E. 1959/1965. *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Hoff-Sommers, C. 1999. The War Against Boys IN: *The Sunday Times (News Review)*, 18th June.
- Hoff-Sommers, C. 2001. *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men*. Touchstone Books.
- Höijer, B. 1990. Reliability, Validity and Generalizability. Three Questions for Qualitative Reception Research IN: *Nordicom Review* (1), pp15-20.
- Höijer, B. 1990. Reliability, Validity and Generalizability: Three Questions for Qualitative Reception Research IN: *Nordicom Review* (1), pp15-19.
- hooks, b. 1994. *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*. New York: Routledge.
- Horrocks, R. 1994. *Masculinity in Crisis: Myths, Fantasies, and Realities*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

- Horrocks, R. 1995. *Male Myths and Icons: Masculinity in Popular Culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Humphreys, J. 2005. Hypocrisy of McDowell's anti-social behaviour plan IN: *The Irish Times*, 15th March.
- Hunt, L. 1998. *British Low Culture: From Safari Suits to Sexploitation*. London: Routledge.
- Hutcheon, L. 1994. *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*. London: Routledge.
- Jackson, P., Stevenson, N. and Brooks, K. (eds.) 2001. *Making Sense of Men's Lifestyle Magazines*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Jameson, F. 1991. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Jeffords, S. 1994. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Jeffords, S. 2002. Can Masculinity Be Terminated? IN: Turner, G. (ed.). *The Film Cultures Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, pp344 - 354.
- Jenkins, H. 1992 "Welcome to Bisexuality, Captain Kirk": Slash and the Fan-Writing Community IN: Jenkins, H. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, pp185-222.
- Jenkins, H. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. and Cassell, J. 1998. *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*, MIT Press, Cambridge: Mass.
- Kane, M. 1999. *Modern Men: Mapping Masculinity in English and German Literature, 1880-1930*. London: Cassell.
- Kaplan, E.A. 1987. *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism and Consumer Culture*. London: Meuthen.
- Katz, A., Buchanan, A. and McCoy, A. 2000. *Leading Lads: A Nationwide Study on Boy's Views in Britain*. Young Voice.
- Katz, E. and Liebes, T. 1986b. Decoding Dallas: Notes From a Cross-Cultural Study' IN: Gumpert, G. and Cathcart, R. (eds.) *Inter/media: Interpersonal Communication in a Media World*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp97-109.

- Kaufman, M. (ed.) 1987. *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kazdin, A.E. 1982. *Making Sense of the News*. Viborg, Denmark: Aarhus University Press.
- Kelley, R.D.G. 1994. *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. New York: Free Press.
- Kimmel, M. (ed.) 1987d. *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Kimmel, M. 1995. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. Free Press.
- Kimmel, M. and Messner, M. (eds.) 1992. *Men's Lives*. New York/Toronto: Macmillan/Maxwell.
- Kimmel, M.S. (ed.) 1995. *The Politics of Manhood: Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (and the Mythopoetic Leaders Answer)*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kimmel, M.S. 1994. Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity IN: Brod, H. and Kaufman, M. (eds.) *Theorising Masculinities*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Kimmel, M.S. 1996. Try Supporting Feminism IN: Lloyd, T and Wood, T (eds.) *What Next for Men?* London: Working With Men.
- Kimmel, M. 2004. *Globalisation and its (Male)Contents*. Lecture presented as part of Boys, Men and Masculinities series, Trinity College Dublin, 1st April.
- Kirby, P. 2002. *Celtic Tiger in Distress: Growth with Inequality in Ireland*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kirby, A. 1989. A Sense of Place? IN *Critical Studies in Mass Communications* 6(3).
- Kirkham, P. and Thumim, J. (eds.) 1993. *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Kitzinger, J. 1999. A Sociology of Media Power: Key Issues in Audience Reception Research IN: Philo, G. (ed.) *Message Received*. Harlow: Longman.
- Komisar, L. 1976. Violence and the Masculine Mystique IN: Savran, D.S. and Brannon, R. (eds.) *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role*. Boston: Addison-Wesley.

- Kuhn, A. 2002. *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd.
- Lacey, J. 2002. One for the Boys? The Sopranos and its Male British Audience IN: Lavery, D. (ed.) *This Thing of Ours: Investigating the Sopranos*. London: Wallflower Press.
- Lasch, C. 1979. *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. New York: Warner Books.
- Lasch, C. 1990. The Culture of Narcissism Revisited IN: *The World & I*, Issue 5.
- Lee, J. 1997. Democracy and Public Service Broadcasting IN: Kiberd, D. (ed.) *Media in Ireland: the Search for Diversity*. Dublin: Open Air.
- Lehman, P. (ed.) 2001. *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Lehman, P. 1993. Don't Blame this on a Girl: Female Rape-Revenge Films IN: Cohan, S. and Hark, I.R. (eds.) *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*. London; New York: Routledge, pp103-117.
- Leigh, D. 2000. Get Smarter IN: *Sight and Sound*, July, pp22-25.
- Liebes, T. and Katz, E. 1990. *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas*. Polity Press.
- Livingstone, S. 1990. *Making Sense of Television: The Psychology of Audience Interpretation*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Livingstone, S. 1991. Audience Reception: the Role of the Viewer in Retelling Romantic Drama IN: Curran, J. and Gurevitch, M. (eds.) *Mass Media and Society*. London; New York: E. Arnold.
- Lohan, M. 2000. Extending Feminist Methodologies: Researching Masculinities and Technologies IN: Byrne, A. and Lentin, R. (eds.) *(Re)searching Women: Feminist Research Methodologies in the Social Sciences in Ireland*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.
- Lull, J. 1995. *Media, Communication, Culture. A Global Approach*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Mac an Ghail, M. (ed) 1996. *Understanding Masculinities: Social Relations and Cultural Arenas*. Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.

- Mac an Ghail, M. 1994. *The Making of Men: Masculinities, Sexualities and Schooling*. Open University Press.
- Mac an Ghail, M. and Haywood, C. 1997. The End of Anti-Oppressive Education? A Differentialist Critique IN: *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 7 (1), pp21-34.
- MacKinnon, K. 1997. *Uneasy Pleasures: the Male as Erotic Object*. London: Cygnus Arts.
- McGhee, P. 1975. Television as a source of learning sex-role stereotypes IN: Cohen, S. and Comiskey, T.J. (eds.) *Child Development: Contemporary Perspectives*. Ithaca, IL: Peacock.
- McGhee, P. and Frueh, T. 1980. Television viewing and the learning of sex-role stereotypes IN: *Sex Roles* 6 (2), pp179-269.
- Meyer, B. 1980. The development of girls' sex-role attitudes IN: *Child Development* 51, pp508-514.
- Morgan, M. 1982. Television and adolescents' sex-role stereotypes: A longitudinal study IN: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 43 (5), pp947-955.
- Mariani, P. 1996. Law-and-Order Science IN: Berger, M., Wallis, B. and Watson, S. (eds.) *Constructing Masculinity*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Marsden, D. and Duff, E. 1975. *Workless: Some Unemployed Men and Their Families*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Martin, L.H., Gutman, H. and Hutton, P.H. (eds.) 1988. *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Maykut, P. and Morehouse, R. 1994. *Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophic and Practical Guide*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Mayne, J. 2002. Paradoxes of Spectatorship IN: Turner, G. (ed.) *The Film Cultures Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.
- McCabe, M. 1993. The Irish Male in Cinema IN: *The Irish Reporter (Special Issue: The Irish Male)* 14.
- McCarthy, G. 2004. Vice of a New Generation: Ireland's answer to *Trainspotting* is also Shimmy Marcus' answer to Hollywood IN: *The Sunday Times (Culture)*, February, pp6-7.

- McCullagh, C. 1996. *Crime in Ireland: A Sociological Introduction*. Cork: Cork University Press.
- McKee, L. and Bell, C. 1986. *The Experience of Unemployment*. London: MacMillan.
- McKeogh, C. (ed.) 2000. *Participant Observation: A Team Study of Young People and Television*. Irish Sociological Research Monograph. Dublin.
- McLoone, M. 2000. *Irish Film: the Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema*. London: British Film Institute.
- McLoone, M. and MacMahon, J. 1984. *Television and Irish Society: 21 Years of Irish Television*. Dublin: RTE/IFI.
- McMahon, A. 1999. *Taking Care of Men: Sexual Politics in the Public Mind*. Cambridge University Press.
- McShane, I. 2003. A Media-Literate and Savvy Generation IN: *The Irish Times*, 20th September, p6.
- Melly, G. 1972. *Revolt into Style*. London: Penguin.
- Mercer, K. and Julien, I. 1988. Race, Sexual Politics and Black Masculinity: A Dossier IN: Chapman, R. and Rutherford, J. (eds.) *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*. Lawrence & Wishart.
- Messner, M.A. 1997 *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements*. University of Southern California: Sage Publications.
- Messner, M.A. and Montez de Oca, J. 2005. The Male Consumer as Loser: Beer and Liquor Ads in Mega Sports Media Events IN: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30 (3), pp1879-1909.
- Miles M.B. and Huberman A.M. 1984. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Miller, D. and Philo, G. 1996 Against Orthodoxy: The Media Do Influence Us IN: *Sight and Sound* 6 (12) December, pp18-20.
- Miller, D. and Philo, G. 2001. The Active Audience and Wrong Turns in Media Studies: Rescuing Media Power IN: *Soundscapes: Journal on Media Culture* 4 [Online]. Available from: http://www.icce.rug.nl/~soundscapes/VOLUME04/Active_audience.html, accessed 1st September 2003.

- Miller, D. and Philo, G. 2001. *Market Killing: What the Free Market Does and What Social Sciences Can Do About It*. London: Longman.
- Miller, M. and Reeves, B. 1976. Dramatic TV content and children's sex-role stereotypes IN: *Journal of Broadcasting* 20(1), pp35-50.
- Monk, C. 1999. From Underworld to Underclass: Crime and British Cinema in the 1990s IN: Chibnall, S. and Murphy, R. (eds.) *British Crime Cinema*. London; NY: Routledge, pp.172-188.
- Monk, C. 2000. Men in the 90s IN: Murphy, R. (ed.) *British Cinema of the 90s*. London: BFI Publishing.
- Morgan, D. 1982. *Discovering Men*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Morley, D. 1980. *The Nationwide Audience: Structuring and Decoding*. BFI Television Monograph No. 11. London: BFI.
- Morley, D. 1985. Cultural Transformations: The Politics of Resistance IN: *Mass Communication Review Yearbook* 5, pp237-250.
- Morley, D. 1989. Changing Paradigms in Audience Studies IN: Seiter et al. *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power*. London: Routledge.
- Morley, D. 1992. *Television Audiences and Cultural Studies*. London, Routledge.
- Morley, D. 1996. The Geography of Television IN: Hay, J., Grossberg, L. and Wartella, E. (eds.) *The Audience and Its Landscape*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Morley, D. 1997. Theoretical Orthodoxies: Textualism, Constructivism and the 'New Ethnography' in Cultural Studies IN: Ferguson, M. and Golding, P. (eds.) *Cultural Studies in Question*. London: Sage.
- Morris, M. 1990. Banality in Cultural Studies IN: Mellencamp, P. (ed) *Logics of Television*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp14-43.
- Muggleton, D. 2000. *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning Of Style*. Berg Publishers Ltd.
- Mulvey, L. 1975. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema IN: *Screen*, 16 (3), pp6-18.
- Murphy, J. 2003. 'The Quare Ones': Finding a Male Homosexual Space Within Irish Cinema IN: *Film and Film Culture* 2. Waterford Institute of Technology.
- Nandy, A. 1984. *The Intimate Enemy*. New Dehli: Oxford University Press.

- Nardi, P. 1992. Seamless souls - an introduction to men's friendships IN: *Men's Friendships*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Nash, C. 1993. Re-mapping and Re-naming: new cartographies of identity, gender and landscape in Ireland IN: *Feminist Review* 44, pp39-57.
- Neale, S. 1982. Chariots of Fire, Images of Men IN: *Screen* 23, Sept/Oct.
- Neale, S. 1983. Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema IN: *Screen* 24 (6), pp2-16, reprinted in Cohan, S. and Hark, I.R. (eds.) 1993. *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*. London; New York: Routledge, pp9-20.
- Neale, S. (ed.) 2002. *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*. London: BFI.
- Newberger, E.H. 2000. *The Men They Will Become: The Nature and Nurture of Male Character*. Perseus Book Group.
- Newkirk, T. 2002. *Misreading Masculinity: Boys, Literacy, and Popular Culture*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Nixon, S. 1997. Exhibiting Masculinity IN: Hall, S. (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.
- Nochimson, M.P. 2002/2003. Waddaya Lookin' At? Re-reading the Gangster Genre Through *The Sopranos'* IN: *Film Quarterly* 56 (2), pp2-13.
- North Leitrim Men's Group. 2001. *Research Project: A Study of the Situation of the Single Rural Man*. Manorhamilton: North Leitrim Men's Group.
- Nussbaum, B. 2001. Real Masters of the Universe IN: *Business Week*, 1st October [Online]. Available from: http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/01_40/b3751740.htm), accessed 12.12.05.
- Nye, Robert A. 2005. Locating Masculinity: Some Recent Work on Men IN: *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30 (3), pp. 1937-1962.
- O'Brien, H. 2000. Review of Accelerator IN: Harvey's Movie Reviews [Online]. Available from: <http://homepage.eircom.net/~obrienh/acc.htm>, accessed 14th October 2004.
- O'Brien, H. 2003. Review of Last Days in Dublin IN: Harvey's Movie Reviews [Online]. Available from: <http://homepage.eircom.net/~obrienh/ldid.htm>, accessed 18th May 2004.

- O'Connor B. 1997. 'Gender, Class and Television Viewing: audience response to the *Ballroom of Romance*' IN: O'Connor, B. and Kelly, M. (eds.) *Media Audiences in Ireland: Power and Cultural Identity*. Dublin, University College Dublin Press.
- O'Day, M. 2004. Gender, Spectacle and Action Babe Cinema IN: Tasker, Y. (ed.) *Action and Adventure Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge.
- O'Donohoe, S. 1997. Leaky Boundaries: Intertextuality and Young Adult Experiences of Advertising IN: Nava, M., Blake, A., McRury, I. And Richards, B. (eds.) *Buy This Book: Studies in Advertising and Consumption*. London: Routledge.
- O'Hearn, D. 1998. *Inside the Celtic Tiger: The Irish Economy and the Asian Model*. London: Pluto Press.
- O'Mahony, P. 1997. *Mountjoy Prisoners: A Sociological and Criminological Profile*. Dublin: Department of Justice.
- O'Toole, F. 2005. A cynical political gesture IN: *The Irish Times*, 14th June.
- Penman, I. 2000. Over-loaded IN: *Frank Magazine* (in association with the Observer), June.
- Perloff, R. 1977. Some antecedents of children's sex-role stereotypes IN: *Psychological Reports* 40, pp463-466.
- Pettitt, L. 1999. A Construction Site Queered: 'Gay' Images in New Irish Cinema IN: *Cineaste* 24 (2/3), pp61-63.
- Pettitt, L. 2000. *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Pettitt, L. 2004. "We're not fucking Eye-talians": The Gangster Genre and Irish Cinema IN: Barton, R. and O'Brien, H. (eds.) *Keeping It Real: Irish Film and Television*. London: Wallflower Press.
- Pfeil, F. 1995. *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference*. New York: Verso.
- Philo, G. 1990. *Seeing and Believing: the Influence of Television*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Pollack, W. 1999. *Boys to Men: Entertainment Media, Messages About Masculinity*. Oakland: Children Now.

- Potter, J. and Mulkay, M. 1985. Scientists' interview talk: interviews as a technique for revealing participants' interpretive practices IN: Brenner, M., Brown, J. and Canter, D. (eds.) *The Research Interview: Uses and Approaches*. London: Academic Press.
- Powrie, P., Davis, A. and Babington, B. (eds.) 2004. *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*. London and New York: Wallflower Press.
- Prendergast, S. and Prout, A. 1980. 'What Will I Do...?' Teenage Girls and the Construction of Motherhood IN: *Sociological Review* 28, pp517-535.
- Propp, V. 1968. *Morphology of the Folktale* (L. Scott, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Quinn, B. 2000. Recycled Rants IN: *Film West* 42, pp26-30.
- Radway, J. 1984. Ethnography Among Elites: Comparing Discourses of Power IN: *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 13 (2), pp3-11.
- Radway, J.A. 1987. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. London: Verso Press.
- Robbins, D. and Cohen, P. 1978. *Knuckle Sandwich: Growing up in the Working Class City*. Penguin.
- Rodowick, 1982. The Difficulty of Difference IN: *Wide Angle* 5, pp4-15.
- Roper, M. and Tosh, J. (eds.) *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*. London: Routledge.
- Rorty, R. (1989) *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rosengren, K.E. 1996. Combinations, Comparisons, and Confrontations: Toward a Comprehensive Theory of Audience Research IN: Hay, J., Grossberg, L. Wartella, E. (eds.) *The Audience and Its Landscape*, Colorado; Oxford: Westview Press, pp23-51.
- Rose, S. 2004. Review of Intermission IN: *The Guardian Unlimited*, 2nd July [Online]. Available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/fridayreview/story/0,12102,1251620,00.html>, accessed October 2005.
- Ross, J. 1999. *The Nineties*. London: Ebury.
- Rotundo, A.E. 1993. *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. New York: Basic.

- Russo, V. 1981. *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*. Harper Collins Publishers.
- Ryall, T. 1978. *Teachers' Study Guide No. 2: The Gangster Film*. London: BFI Education.
- Saco, D. 1992. Masculinity as Signs: Poststructuralist Feminist Approaches to the Study of Gender IN: Craig, S. (ed.) *Men, Masculinity and the Media*. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, London, New Dehli.
- Sarantakos, S. 1993. *Social Research*. Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Savran, D. 1998. *Taking It Like a Man*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Schlesinger, P., Boyle, R., Dobash, R.E., Haynes, R., McNair, B. and Dobash, R. 1998. *Men Viewing Violence*. London: Broadcasting Standards Commission [Online]. Available from: <http://www-fms.stir.ac.uk/research/mvv/>, accessed 14th July 2005.
- Schlesinger, P., Dobash, R.E., Dobash, R.P. and Weaver, C.K. 1992. *Women Viewing Violence*. London: BFI.
- Schwalbe, 1996. *Unlocking the Iron Cage: The Men's Movement, Gender Politics, and American Culture*. New York: Oxford.
- Sconce, J. 2002. Irony, Nihilism and the New American 'Smart' Film IN: *Screen* 43 (4), pp 349-69.
- Seale, C. 1998/2001. Qualitative Interviewing IN: Seale, C. (ed.) *Researching Culture and Society*. London: Sage Publications.
- Shary, T. 2005. Bad Boys and Hollywood Hype: Gendered Conflict in Juvenile Delinquency Films IN: Pomerance, M. and Gateward, F. (eds.) *Where are the Boys: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Shelley, J. 1993. Down These Mean Streets Many Men Have Gone IN: *The Times Saturday Review*, 20th February, p5.
- Shelley, J. 1993. Guest Appearance: The Boys are Back in Town IN: *The Guardian*, 7th January, p7.
- Silverman, K. 1992. *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Simpson, M. 2002. Meet the Metrosexual IN: Salon.com, 22nd July [Online]. Available from: <http://www.salon.com/ent/feature/2002/07/22/metrosexual/>, accessed on 17th September 2003.

- Smith, J. 2004. *Gangster Films*. London: Virgin Books Ltd.
- Smith, P. (ed.) 1996. *Boys: Masculinities in Contemporary Culture*. Colorado: Westview Press.
- Somerville-Woodward, R. 2002. *Ballymun: A History Volumes I and II 1600-1997*. Dublin: Ballymun Regeneration Ltd.
- Southwell, T. 1998. *Getting Away With It: The Inside Story of Loaded*. London: Ebury.
- Spicer, A. 2001. *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Culture*. I.B. Tauris.
- Stacey, J. 1994. *Star-Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Staiger, J. 1992. *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Staiger, J. 2000. *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*. New York University Press.
- Steinman, C. 1992. Gaze Out of Bounds IN: Craig, S. (ed.) *Men, Masculinity and the Media*. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, London, New Dehli.
- Stoneman, R. 2005. The Sins of Commission II IN: *Screen* 46 (2), pp247-264.
- Strate, L. 1992. Beer Commercials: A Manual on Masculinity IN: Craig, S. (ed.) *Men, Masculinity and the Media*. Newbury Park, London, New Dehli: Sage Publications, pp78-92.
- Surette, 1998. *Media, Crime and Criminal Justice: Images and Realities*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Tarr, C. 2004. Masculinity and Exclusion in post-1995 Beur and banlieu films IN: Powrie, P., Davis, A. and Babington, B. (eds.) *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*. London and New York: Wallflower Press, pp110-120.
- Tasker, Y. 1993. Dumb Movies for Dumb People: Masculinity, the Body, and the Voice in Contemporary Action Cinema IN: Cohan, S. and Hark, I.R. (eds.) *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Taubin, A. 1999. So Good It Hurts IN: *Sight and Sound*, November, pp16-18.

- Thomas, C. 1996. *Male Matters: Masculinity, Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line*. Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press.
- Titley, G. 2003. *Youth Work with Boys and Young Men as a Means to Preventing Violence in Everyday Life*. Report of the General Rapporteur, Helsinki, May 2003.
- Tobin, J. 2000. *Good Guys Don't Wear Hats: Children's Talk about the Media*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- Troyer, J. and Marchiselli, C. 2005. Slack, Slacker, Slackest: Homosocial Bonding Practices in Contemporary Dude Cinema IN: Pomerance, M. and Gateward, F. (eds.) *Where are the Boys: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Turner, G. 2002. Audiences and Consumption IN: Turner, G. (ed.) *The Film Cultures Reader*. Routledge: London and New York.
- Walkerdine, V. 1986. Video Replay: Families, Films and Fantasy IN: Burgin, V., Donald, J. and Kaplan, C. (eds.) *Formations of Fantasy*. Meuthen: London and New York.
- Walter, N. 1998. *The New Feminism*. London: Little, Brown and Co.
- Warshow, R. 1970. The Gangster as Tragic Hero IN: Warshow, R. *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre, and Other Aspects of Popular Culture*. Holiday House.
- Waters, J. 2001. Horrors of Feminised Education IN: *The Irish Times*, 27th August.
- Wernick, A. 1991. *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology, and Symbolic Expression*. London; Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Whelan, C.T., Hannan, D.F. and Creighton, S. 1991. *Unemployment, Poverty and Psychological Distress*. General Research Series, Paper No. 150, Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute.
- Whelehan, I. 2000. *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism*. London: The Women's Press.
- White, H. 1973. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Willemen, P. 1981. Anthony Mann: Looking at the Male IN: *Framework* 15-17, pp16-20.

Willis, P.E. 1981. *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Gower.

Willott, S. and Griffin, C. 1996. Men, Masculinity and the Challenge of Long-term Unemployment IN: Mac an Ghail, M. (ed.) *Understanding Masculinities*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Zuckerman, D., Singer, D. and Singer, J. 1980. Children's television viewing, racial and sex-role attitudes IN: *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 10, pp281-294.

Filmography

- 2 Days in the Valley* 1996. John Herzfeld. USA: Rysher Entertainment / Redemption Productions (Colour, 104 mins)
- 21 Grams* 2003. Alejandro González Iñárritu. USA: This Is That Productions / Y Productions (Colour, 124 mins.)
- A Soldier's Song* 1995. Kevin Liddy. Ireland: A Soldier's Song Productions Ltd. / Indi Films (Colour, 30 mins.)
- About a Boy* 2002. Chris Weitz, Paul Weitz. UK, USA, France, Germany: Kalima Productions GmbH & Co. KG / Studio Canal / Tribeca Productions / Working Title Films (Colour, 101 mins.)
- About Adam* 1999. Gerard Stembridge. Ireland, UK, USA: Venus Productions / Miramax / Irish Film Board (Colour, 97 mins.)
- Accelerator* 1999. Vinny Murphy. Ireland: Imagine Films / Two For The Show (Grand Pictures) (Colour, 87 mins.)
- Actors, The* 2003. Conor McPherson. Ireland: Company of Wolves (91 mins.)
- Adam and Paul* 2004. Lenny Abrahamson. Ireland: Speers Films / Element Films (Colour, 83 mins.)
- Adaptation* 2002. Spike Jonze. USA: Beverly Detroit / Clinico Estetica Ltd. / Good Machine / Intermedia / Magnet Productions / Propaganda Films (Colour, 114 mins.)
- Ailsa* 1994. Paddy Breathnach. Ireland: Temple Films / WDR (Colour, 78 mins.)
- Alien3* 1992. David Fincher. USA: 20th Century Fox / Brandywine Productions Ltd. (Colour, 114 mins.)
- American Beauty* 1999. Sam Mendes. USA: DreamWorks SKG / Jinks/Cohen Company. (Colour, 122 mins.)
- American History X* 1998. Tony Kaye. USA: New Line Cinema / The Turman-Morrissey Company (B+W / Colour, 119 mins.)
- American Pie* 1999. Paul Weitz. USA: Newmarket Capital Group LLC / Summit Entertainment / Universal Pictures (Colour, 95 mins.)
- American Pie 2* 2001. James B. Rogers. USA: Live Planet / Universal Pictures / Zide-Perry Productions (Colour, 108 mins.)

- American Psycho* 2000. Mary Harron. USA, Canada: Edward R. Pressman Film Corporation / Lions Gate Films Inc. / Muse productions / P.P.S. Films / Quadra Entertainment / Universal Pictures (Colour, 101 mins.)
- Amistad* 1997. Steven Spielberg. USA: DreamWorks SKG / Home Box Office (HBO) (Colour, 152 mins.)
- Analyze This!* 1999. Harold Ramis. USA: Baltimore Pictures / Face Productions / NPV Entertainment / Spring Creek Productions / Tribeca Productions / Village Roadshow Pictures (Colour, 103 mins.)
- Basic Instinct* 1992. Paul Verhoeven. USA, France: Carloco Pictures Inc. / Le Studio Canal+ / TriStar Pictures (Colour, 127 mins.)
- Being John Malkovich* 1999. Spike Jonze. USA: Gramercy Pictures / Propaganda Films / Single Cell Pictures (Colour, 112 mins.)
- Beyond the Sea* 2004. Kevin Spacey. USA, Germany, UK: Archer Street (Beyond the Sea) Ltd. / Trigger Street Productions / Endgame Entertainment / Lions Gate Films Inc. / QI Quality International GmbH & Co. KG (Colour, 118 mins.)
- Big Fish* 2003. Tim Burton. USA: Columbia Pictures Corporation / Jinks/Cohen Company / The Zanuck Company (Colour, 125 mins.)
- Boiler Room* 2000. Ben Younger. USA: New Line Cinema / Team Todd (Colour, 118 mins.)
- Boogie Nights* 1997. Paul Thomas Anderson. USA: Ghouardi Film Company / Lawrence Gordon Productions / New Line Cinema (Colour, 156 mins.)
- Bottle Rocket* 1996. Wes Anderson. USA: Columbia Pictures Corporation / Gracie Films (Colour, 92 mins.)
- Boyz n the Hood* 1991. John Singleton. USA: Columbia Pictures Corporation (Colour, 107 mins.)
- Brassed Off* 1996. Steve Abbott. UK, USA: Channel Four Films / Miramax Films / Prominent Features Inc. (Colour, 107 mins.)
- Braveheart* 1994. Mel Gibson. Ireland: Twentieth Century Fox / Icon Entertainment / Paramount Pictures (Colour, 171 mins.)
- Brighton Rock* 1947. John Boulting. UK: Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC) / Charter Film Productions Ltd. (B+W, 92 mins.)
- Broken Harvest* 1994. Maurice O'Callaghan, Nick McCarthy, John A. Phelan . Ireland: Destiny Films (Colour, 98 mins.)

- Butcher Boy, The* 1997. Neil Jordan. Ireland: Butcher Boy Film Productions / Geggen Films / Warner Brothers (Colour, 107 mins.)
- Cheech and Chong: Up in Smoke* 1978. Lou Adler. USA: Paramount Pictures / MCA Universal Home Video (Colour, 86 mins.)
- Chopper* 2000. Andrew Dominik. Australia: Australian Film Finance Corporation / Mushroom Pictures / Pariah Entertainment Group (Colour, 94 mins.)
- Circus* 2000. Rob Walker. UK: Circus Pictures / Film Development Corporation (Colour, 95 mins.)
- Citizen Ruth* 1996. Alexander Payne. USA: Independent Pictures / Miramax Films (Colour, 102 mins.)
- City of God* 2002. Fernando Meirelles, Kátia Lund. Brazil, France, USA: O2 Filmes / Video Filmes / Globo Filmes / Lumiere Productions / Studio Canal / Wild Bunch (Colour, 130 mins.)
- Closer* 2004. Mike Nichols. USA: Icarus Productions / John Calley Productions / Avenue Pictures Productions / Inside Track Films (Colour, 104 mins.)
- Cold Mountain* 2003. Anthony Minghella. USA: Miramax Films / Mirage Enterprises / Bona Fide Productions (Colour, 152 mins.)
- Comme un aimant/The Magnet* 2000. Akhenaton Kamel Saleh. France: Centre National de la Cinématographie / Eskwad / La Société 361 / Le Studio Canal+ / Why Not Productions (Colour, 90 mins.)
- Commitments, The* 1991. Alan Parker. Ireland, UK, USA: Beacon Communications Inc. / First Film Company / Dirty Hands Productions (Colour, 118 mins.)
- Country* 2000. Kevin Liddy. Ireland: Indi Films / Samson Films (Colour, 91 mins.)
- Courier, The* 1988. Frank Deasy, Joe Lee. UK, Ireland: Eustace Films / Palace Pictures (Colour, 81 / 85 mins.)
- Cowboys and Angels* 2003. David Gleeson. Ireland, Germany, UK: Wide Eye Films / Peter Stockhaus Filmproduktion (Colour, 89 mins.)
- Cruel Sea, The* 1953. Charles Frend. UK: Ealing Studios (Colour, 126 mins.)
- Crush Proof* 1999. Paul Tickell. Ireland: Liquid Films (Colour, 91 mins.)
- Dead Bodies* 2003. Robert Quinn. Ireland: Distinguished Features (Colour, 85 mins.)

- Debt Collector, The* 1999. Anthony Nielson. UK: Channel Four Films / Dragon Pictures (Colour, 109 mins.)
- Die Hard* 1988. John McTiernan. USA: 20th Century Fox / Gordon Company / Silver Pictures (Colour, 131 mins.)
- Die Hard with a Vengeance* 1995. John McTiernan. USA: 20th Century Fox / Cinergi Pictures Entertainment Inc. (Colour, 131 mins.)
- Disclosure* 1994. Barry Levinson. USA: Baltimore Pictures / Constant c Productions / Warner Brothers (Colour, 128 mins.)
- Disco Pigs* 2001. Kirsten Sheridan. Ireland: Temple Films / Irish Film Board / Abbey Films (colour, 94 mins.)
- Donnie Brasco* 1997. Mike Newell. USA: Baltimore Pictures / Mandalay Entertainment / Mark Johnson Productions / TriStar Pictures (Colour, 127 mins.)
- Donnie Darko* 2001. Richard Kelly. USA: Pandora Cinema / Flower Films II / Adam Fields Productions / Gaylord Films (Colour, 113 mins)
- Dude, Where's My Car?* 2000. Danny Leiner. USA: Alcon Entertainment (Colour, 83 mins.)
- Election* 1999. Alexander Payne. USA: Bona Fide Productions / MTV Films / Paramount Pictures (Colour, 103 mins.)
- Exposure* 1978. Kieran Hickey. Ireland: B.A.C. Films / The Arts Council / RTE (Colour, 48 mins.)
- Face* 1997. Antonia Bird. UK: British Broadcasting Corporation / British Screen Productions / Daigoro Face Productions Ltd. / Distant Horizons (Colour, 110 mins.)
- Face/Off* 1997. John Woo. USA: Douglas/Reuther Productions / Paramount Pictures / Touchstone Pictures / WCG Entertainment Productions (Colour, 138 mins.)
- Falling Down* 1993. Joel Schumacher. France, USA: Alcor Films / Le Studio Canal+ / Regency Enterprises / Warner Bros (Colour, 113 mins.)
- Family* 1994 (TV) Michael Winterbottom. Ireland, UK: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) / Radio Telefis Éireann (Colour, 118 mins.).
- Down the Corner* 1977. Joe Comerford. Ireland: Ballyfermot Community Arts Workshop (Colour, 60 mins.)
- Fast and the Furious, The* 2001. Rob Cohen. Germany, USA: Mediastream GmbH & Co. Productions KG / Original Film / Universal Pictures (Colour, 106 mins.)

- Fast Food* 1998. Stewart Sugg. UK: Twin Pictures (Colour, 99 mins.)
- Fatal Attraction* 1987. Adrian Lyne. USA: Paramount Pictures (Colour, 119 mins.)
- Field, The* 1990. Jim Sheridan. Ireland: Granada Film Productions / Sovereign Pictures / Hell's Kitchen (Colour, 110 mins.)
- Fifth Province, The* 1997. Frank Stapleton. Ireland: Ocean Film Productions / A Strawberry Vale / Geissendorfer Films (Colour, 92 mins.)
- Fight Club* 1999. David Fincher. USA, Germany: Art Linson Productions / Fox 2000 Pictures / Regency Enterprises / Taurus Film (Colour, 139 mins.)
- Finding Neverland* 2004. Marc Forster. UK, USA: Film Colony (Colour, 106 mins.)
- Fist of Fury/Jing wu men* 1972. Wei Lo. Hong Kong: Golden Harvest Company Ltd. (Colour, 110 mins.)
- Flick* 2000. Fintan Connolly. Ireland: Fubar (Colour, 82 mins.)
- Football Factory, The* 2004. Nick Love. UK: (Colour, 91 mins.)
- Freddy Got Fingered* 2001. Tom Green. USA: Regency Entertainment / Epsilon Entertainment / New Regency Pictures / MBST/Lloyd Productions (Colour, 87 mins.)
- Freeze Frame* 2004. John Simpson. Ireland: Green Park Films / Universal Pictures (UK) (Colour, 99 mins.)
- Full Monty, The* 1997. Peter Cattaneo. UK: Channel Four Films / Redwave Films (Colour, 91 mins.)
- Game, The* 1997. David Fincher. USA: A&B Producoes Lda. / PolyGram Filmed Entertainment / Propaganda Films (Colour, 128 mins.)
- Gangster No. 1* 2000. Paul McGuigan. UK, Germany, Ireland: BSkyB / British Screen Productions / Film Four (Colour, 103 mins.)
- Garden State* 2004. Zach Braff. USA: Large's Srk Productions / Jersey Films / Camelot Pictures / Double Feature Films (Colour, 102 mins.)
- General, The* 1998. John Boorman. Ireland: Merlin Films (Colour, 120 mins.)
- Get Carter* 1971. Mike Hodges. UK: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (Colour, 112 mins.)
- Ghost World* 2001. Terry Zwigoff. USA, Germany, UK: Advanced Medien / Capitol Films / Granada Film Productions / Jersey Shore / Mr. Mudd / United Artists (Colour, 111 mins.)

- Gladiator* 2000. Ridley Scott. USA, UK: DreamWorks SKG / Universal Pictures / Scott Free Productions (Colour, 155 mins.)
- Go* 1999. Doug Liman. USA: Banner Entertainment / Saratoga Entertainment / TriStar Pictures (Colour, 103 mins.)
- Godfather, The* 1972. Francis Ford Coppola. USA: Paramount Pictures (Colour, 175 mins.)
- Godfather Part II, The* 1974. Francis Ford Coppola. USA: Paramount Pictures / The Coppola Company (Colour, 200 mins.)
- Godfather Part III, The* 1990. Francis Ford Coppola. USA: Paramount Pictures / Zoetrope Studios (Colour, 162 mins.)
- Goldfish Memory* 2003. Liz Gill. Ireland: Goldfish Films (Colour, 84 mins.)
- Goodbye Charlie Bright* 2001. Nick Love. UK: Bonaparte Films Ltd. (Colour, 87 mins.)
- Goodfellas,* 1990. Martin Scorsese. USA: Warner Bros. (Colour, 145 mins.)
- Green Street (aka Hooligans)* 2005. Lexi Alexander. USA, UK: Baker Street / Odd Lot Entertainment (Colour, 109 mins.)
- Guiltrip* 1995. Gerard Stembridge. Ireland: Temple Films / Fandango / Smile Productions (Colour, 87/88 mins.)
- Halo Effect, The* 2004. Lance Daly. Ireland: Fastnet Films (Colour, 97 mins.)
- Happiness* 1995. Todd Solondz. USA: Good Machine / Killer Films (Colour, 134 mins.)
- Hard Men* 1996. J.K. Amalou. UK, France: Entertainment (UK) / Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation (Colour, 86 mins.)
- Headrush* 2002. Shimmy Marcus. Ireland: Zanzibar Films (Colour, 85 mins.)
- Heat* 1995. Michael Mann. USA: Warner Bros. / Regency Enterprises / Forward Pass / Monarchy Enterprises B.V. (Colour, 171 mins.)
- Hell Drivers* 1957. Cy Endfield. UK: Aqua Film Productions Ltd. (B+W, 108 mins.)
- Henry Fool* 1998. Hal Hartley. USA: The Shooting Gallery / True Fiction Pictures (Colour, 137 mins.)
- High Boot Benny* 1993. Joe Comerford. Ireland: Sandy Films / RTE (Colour, 82 mins.)
- I Went Down* 1997. Paddy Breathnach. Ireland: Treasure Films / Irish Film Board / Euskal Media (Colour, 107 mins.)

- Ice Storm, The* 1997. Ang Lee. USA: Canal+ Droits Audiovisuels / Fox Searchlight Pictures / Good Machine (Colour, 112 mins)
- I'll Sleep When I'm Dead* 2003. Mike Hodges. UK, USA: Mosaic Film Group / Revere Pictures / Will & Company (Colour, 103 mins.)
- In the Company of Men* 1997. Neil LaBute. USA, Canada: Alliance Atlantis Communications / Fair and Square Productions (Colour, 97 mins.)
- In the Name of the Father* 1993. Jim Sheridan. Ireland, UK: Hell's Kitchen Films / Universal Pictures (Colour, 133 mins.)
- Inside I'm Dancing* 2004. Damien O'Donnell. Ireland: Octagon Films / Working Title (Colour, 104 mins.)
- Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* 1981. Steven Spielberg. USA: LucasFilm Ltd. / Paramount Pictures (Colour, 115 mins.)
- Intermission* 2003. John Crowley. Ireland: Company of Wolves / Parallel Films (Colour, 105 mins.)
- King Arthur* 2004. Antoine Fuqua. USA, Ireland: Touchstone Pictures / Jerry Bruckheimer Films / World 2000 Entertainment (Colour, 126 mins.)
- Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* 2000. Stewart Sugg. UK: M&M Productions / Pagoda Film / Sky Pictures / Television Production Company (TPC) (Colour)
- Korea* 1994. Cathal Black. Ireland: Cathal Black Films / Black Star Films / RTE (Colour, 80 mins.)
- Krays, The* 1990. Peter Medak. UK: Fugitive Features / Parkfield Entertainment (Colour, 119 mins.)
- La Haine* 1995. Matthieu Kassovitz. France: Cofinergie 6 / Egg Pictures / Kasso Inc. Productions / La Sept Cinéma / Le Studio Canal+ / Les Productions Lazennec / PolyGram Filmed Entertainment / Studio Image (Colour, 96 mins.)
- Last Boy Scout, The* 1991. Tony Scott. USA: Geffen Pictures / Silver Pictures / Warner Brothers (Colour, 105 mins.)
- Last Bus Home, The* 1997. Johnny Gogan. Ireland: Grand Pictures / Bandit Films (Colour, 93 mins.)
- Last Days in Dublin* 2002. Lance Daly. Ireland: Fastnet Films (B+W, 74 mins.)
- Last of the High Kings, The* 1996. David Keating. Ireland: Parallel Films (Colour, 95 mins.)
- Layer Cake* 2004. Matthew Vaughn. UK: Columbia Pictures Corporation / Marv Films (Colour, 105 mins.)

- Le Ciel, les oiseaux...et ta mère/Boys on the Beach* 1999. Djamel Bensalah. France: Canal+ / Extravaganza Films / France 2 Cinéma / Orly Films / Sofica Gimages / Sofica Sofinerie 4 / Sédif Productions (Colour, 90 mins.)
- Lethal Weapon* 1987. Richard Donner. USA: Silver Pictures / Warner Bros. (Colour, 110 mins.)
- Lethal Weapon 2* 1989. Richard Donner. USA: Silver Pictures / Warner Bros. (Colour, 114 mins.)
- Lethal Weapon 3* 1992. Richard Donner. USA: Silver Pictures / Warner Bros. (Colour, 118 mins.)
- Lethal Weapon 4* 1998. Richard Donner. USA: Donner/Shuler-Donner Productions / Silver Pictures / Warner Bros. (Colour, 127 mins.)
- Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou, The* 2004. Wes Anderson. USA: Touchstone Pictures / American Empirical Pictures / Scott Rudin Productions / Life Aquatic Productions Inc. (Colour, 119 mins.)
- Lock Up* 1989. John Flynn. USA: Carloco Pictures Inc. / Gordon Company / White Eagle (Colour, 115 mins.)
- Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* 1998. Guy Ritchie. UK, USA: Handmade Films Ltd. / PolyGram Filmed Entertainment / SKA Films / Steve Tisch Company / Summit Entertainmen (Colour, 126 mins.)
- Long Good Friday, The* 1980. John MacKenzie. UK: Black Lion Films Limited. / British Lion Film Corporation / Calendar Productions / Handmade Films Ltd. (Colour, 114 mins.)
- Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* 2001. Peter Jackson. New Zealand, USA: New Line Cinema / WingNut Films / The Saul Zaentz Company (Colour, 178 mins.)
- Loser* 2000. Amy Heckerling. USA: Branti Film Productions / Cockamamie (Colour, 98 mins.)
- Love Actually* 2003. Richard Curtis. UK, USA: Universal Pictures / Working Title Films / DNA Films (Colour, 135 mins.)
- Love, Honour and Obey* 2000. Dominic Anciano, Ray Burdis. UK: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) / Fugitive Features / L H and O Limited (Colour, 103 mins.)
- Ma 6-T va crack-er* 1997. Jean-François Richet. France: Actes Proletariens / Why Not Productions (Colour, 105 mins.)
- Maeve* 1982. Pat Murphy, John Davies. Ireland: British Film Institute Production Board / RTE (Colour, 110 mins.)

- Magnolia* 1999. Paul Thomas Anderson. USA: Ghouardi Film Company / New Line Cinema / The Magnolia Project (Colour, 188 mins.)
- Man About Dog* 2004. Paddy Breathnach. Ireland, UK: Potboiler Productions / Treasure Entertainment Ltd. (Colour)
- Married to the Mob* 1988. Jonathan Demme. USA: Mysterious Arts / Orion Pictures Corporation (Colour, 103 mins.)
- Match, The* 1999. Mick Davis. UK: Allan Scott Productions / Irish DreamTime / Propaganda Films / Rafford Films (Colour, 95 mins.)
- Matrix, The* 1999. Andy Wachowski, Larry Wachowski. USA: Groucho II Film Partnership / Silver Pictures / Village Roadshow Pictures (Colour, 136 mins.)
- Mean Machine* 2001. Barry Skolnik. UK, USA: Brad Grey Pictures / Paramount Pictures / Ruddy Morgan Productions / SKA Films (Colour, 99 mins.)
- Meet the Fockers* 2004. Jay Roach. USA: Universal Pictures / DreamWorks SKG / Tribeca Productions / Everyman Pictures (Colour, 115 mins.)
- Michael Collins* 1996. Neil Jordan. Ireland: Warner Bros Pictures Inc. (Colour, 132 mins.)
- Midnight Express* 1978. Alan Parker. UK, USA: Casablanca Filmworks (Colour, 121 mins.)
- Mighty Celt, The* 2005. Pearse Elliott. Ireland, UK: Green Park Films / Treasure Entertainment Ltd. (Colour, 82 mins.)
- Million Dollar Baby* 2004. Clint Eastwood. USA: Warner Bros. / Lakeshore Entertainment / Malpas Productions / Albert S. Ruddy Productions / Epsilon Motion Pictures (Colour, 132 mins.)
- Miracle* 2004. Gavin O'Connor. USA: Pop Pop Productions / Mayhem Pictures / Walt Disney Pictures (Colour, 135 mins.)
- Mission, The* 1986. Roland Joffé. UK: Enigma Productions / Goldcrest Films Ltd. / Kingsmere Productions Ltd. (Colour, 126 mins.)
- Mojo* 1997. Jez Butterworth. UK: British Broadcasting Corporation / Mojo Films / Portobello Pictures (Colour, 90 mins.)
- Mona Lisa* 1986. Neil Jordan. UK: Handmade Films Ltd. (Colour, 104 mins.)
- My Name is Joe* 1998. Ken Loach. UK: Alta Films SA / Channel Four Films / Degeto Film / Diaphana Films (Colour, 105 mins.)

- Naked* 1993. Mike Leigh. UK: Thin Man Films / British Screen Productions / Chanel Four Films (Colour, 131 mins.)
- Nil by Mouth* 1997. Gary Oldman. UK, France: SE8 Group / Europa Corp. (Colour, 128 mins.)
- November Afternoon* 1996. John Carney, Tom Hall. Ireland: High Hat Productions / Early Town Films (Colour, 80 mins.)
- Oceans Twelve* 2004. Steven Soderbergh. USA, Australia: Warner Bros. / Village Roadshow Pictures / Jerry Weintraub Productions / Section Eight Limited / WV Films III LLC (Colour, 125 mins.)
- On the Edge* 2001. John Carney. Ireland: Hell's Kitchen (Colour, 87 mins.)
- One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* 1975. Milos Forman. USA: Fantasy Films / N.V. Zvaluw (Colour, 133 mins.)
- Ordinary Decent Criminal* 1999. Thaddeus O'Sullivan. Ireland: Little Bird / Trigger Street Productions / Icon Entertainment International (Colour, 93 mins.)
- Our Boys* 1981. Cathal Black. Ireland: Cathal Black Films / RTE (B+W, 40 mins.)
- Out of Africa* 1985. Sydney Pollack. USA: Mirage Entertainment / Universal Pictures (Colour, 150 mins.)
- Peaches* 2000. Nick Grosso. Ireland: Stone Ridge Entertainment (Colour, 82 mins.)
- Performance* 1970. Donald Cammel, Nicolas Roeg. UK: Goodtimes Enterprises (B+W/Colour, 105 mins.)
- Pigs* 1984. Cathal Black. Ireland: Samson Films / Irish Film Board / Cathal Black Films (Colour, 79 mins.)
- Poitin* 1978. Bob Quinn. Ireland: Cinegaeil / An Comhairle Ealaíon / RTE (Colour, 60 mins.)
- Porkys* 1982. Bob Clark. Canada, USA: Astral Bellevue Pathé / Melvin Simon Productions (Colour, 94 mins.)
- Predator* 1987. John McTiernan. USA: 20th Century Fox / Amercent Films / American Entertainment Partners L.P. (Colour, 107 mins.)
- Public Enemy, The* 1931. William A. Wellman. USA: Warner Bros. (Colour, 83 mins.)
- Pulp Fiction* 1994. Quentin Tarantino. USA: A Band Apart / Jersey Films / Miramax Films (Colour, 154 mins.)

- Raining Stones* 1993. Ken Loach. UK: Channel Four Films / Parallax Pictures (Colour, 90 mins.)
- Rambo: First Blood* 1982. Ted Kotcheff. USA: Anabasis N.V. / Carloco Pictures Inc. (Colour, 97 mins.)
- Rambo: First Blood Part II* 1985. George P. Kosmatos. USA: Anabasis N.V. / Carloco Pictures Inc. (Colour, 94 mins.)
- Rambo III* 1988. Peter MacDonald. USA: Carloco Pictures Inc. (Colour, 101 mins.)
- Rancid Aluminium* 2000. Edward Thomas. UK: Ballpark Productions Ltd. / Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd. / Fiction Factory Ltd. (Colour, 91 mins.)
- Ray* 2004. Taylor Hackford. USA: Anvil Films / Balwin Entertainment Group / Bristol Bay Productions (Colour, 152 mins.)
- Reefer and the Model* 1987. Joe Comerford. Ireland: Berber Films / RTE / Channel 4 (Colour, 93 mins.)
- Remember the Titans* 2000. Boaz Yakin. USA: Jerry Bruckheimer Films / Run It Up Productions Inc. / Technical Black / Walt Disney Pictures (Colour, 113 mins.)
- Requiem for a Dream* 2000. Darren Aronofsky. USA: Artisan Entertainment / Bandeira Entertainment / Industry Entertainment / Protozoa Pictures / Requiem for a Dream LLC / Sibling Productions / Thousand Words / Truth and Soul Pictures (Colour, 102 mins.)
- Reservoir Dogs* 1992. Quentin Tarantino. USA: Live Entertainment / Dog Eat Dog Productions Inc. (Colour, 99 mins.)
- Road Trip* 2000. Todd Phillips. USA: DreamWorks SKG / The Montecito Picture Company (Colour, 93 mins.)
- Rock, The* 1996. Michael Bay. USA: Don Simpson/Jerry Bruckheimer Films / Hollywood Pictures (Colour, 136 mins.)
- Rocky* 1976. John G. Avildsen. USA: Chartoff-Winkler Productions / United Artists (Colour, 119 mins.)
- Rocky II* 1979. Sylvester Stallone. USA: United Artists / Chartoff-Winkler Productions (Colour, 119 mins.)
- Rocky III* 1982. Sylvester Stallone. USA: Chartoff-Winkler Productions / United Artists (Colour, 99 mins.)
- Rocky IV* 1985. Sylvester Stallone. USA: Chartoff-Winkler Productions / Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer MGM / United Artists (Colour, 91 mins.)

- Rocky V* 1990. John G. Avildsen. USA: MGM Home Entertainment / Chartoff-Winkler Productions / Star Partners II Ltd. / United Artists (Colour, 104 mins.)
- Rogue Trader* 1999. James Dearden. UK: Granada Film Productions / Newmarket Capital Group LLC (Colour, 101 mins.)
- Romeo and Juliette* 1996. Baz Luhrman. USA: 20th Century Fox / Bazmark Films (Colour, 120 mins.)
- Royal Tenenbaums, The* 2001. Wes Anderson. USA: American Empirical Pictures / Mordecai Films / Touchstone Pictures (Colour, 109 mins.)
- Rushmore* 1998. Wes Anderson. USA: American Empirical Pictures / Touchstone Pictures (Colour, 93 mins.)
- Safe* 1995. Todd Haynes. UK, USA: American Playhouse / (Colour, 119 mins.)
- Saltwater* 1999. Conor McPherson. Ireland: Treasure Films (Colour, 90 mins.)
- Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* 1960. Karel Reisz. UK: Woodfall Film Productions (Colour, 89 mins.)
- Saving Silverman* 2001. Dennis Dugan. USA, Australia: Columbia Pictures Corporation / NPV Entertainment / Original Film / Village Roadshow Pictures (Colour, 90 mins.)
- Say It Isn't So* 2001. James B. Rogers. USA: 20th Century Fox / Conundrum Entertainment (Colour, 95 mins.)
- Scarface* 1983. Brian De Palma. USA: Universal Pictures (170 mins.)
- Se7en* 1995. David Fincher. USA: New Line Cinema (Colour, 127 mins.)
- Sexy Beast* 2000. Jonathan Glazer. UK, Spain: Film Four / Kanzaman SA / Recorded Picture Company (RPC) (Colour, 89 mins.)
- Shallow Hal* 2001. Bobby Farrelly, Peter Farrelly. USA: 20th Century Fox / Conundrum Entertainment / Shallow Hal Filmproduktion GmbH & Co. KG (113 mins.)
- Shawshank Redemption, The* 1994. Frank Darabont. USA: Castle Rock Entertainment / Columbia Pictures Corporation (Colour, 142 mins.)
- Shiner* 2000. John Irvin. UK: Geoff Reeve Films / Vision View Entertainment / Wisecroft Ltd. (Colour, 99 mins.)

- Shopping* 1994. Paul W.S. Anderson. UK: Channel Four Films / Impact / Kuzui Enterprises / PolyGram Filmed Entertainment / WMG Film (Colour, 105 mins.)
- Slacker* 1991. Richard Linklater. USA: Detour Filmproduction (Colour, 97 mins.)
- Slackers* 2002. Dewey Nicks. Canada, USA: Alliance Atlantis Communications / Destination Films / Original Film (Colour, 86 mins.)
- Small Faces* 1996. Gillies MacKinnion. UK: Billy MacKinnion / British Broadcasting Corporation / Skyline Films / The Glasgow Film Fund (Colour, 108 mins.)
- Smalltime* 1996. Shane Meadows. UK: Big Arm Productions / British Film Institute (BFI) (Colour, 60 mins.)
- Snapper, The* 1993. Stephen Frears. UK, Ireland: British Broadcasting Corporation (Colour, 87 mins.)
- Snatch* 2000. Guy Ritchie. UK, USA: Columbia Pictures Corporation / SKA Films (Colour, 104 mins.)
- Sniper* 1993. Luis Llosa. USA, Peru: Baltimore Pictures / Iguana Producciones (Colour, 98 mins.)
- Some Mother's Son* 1996. Terry George. Ireland: Hell's Kitchen (Colour, 112 mins.)
- Song for a Raggy Boy* 2003. Aisling Walsh. Ireland: Subotica Entertainment Ltd. / Moviefan / Lolafilms SA / Zoma Films (Colour, 100 mins.)
- Sopranos, The* 1999-2006 (TV). David Chase. USA: Home Box Office (HBO) (Colour, 58 mins.)
- Spiderman 2* 2004. Sam Raimi. USA: Marvel Enterprises / Laura Ziskin Productions / Columbia Pictures Corporation / Sony Pictures Entertainment (Colour, 127 mins.)
- Spin the Bottle* 2003. Ian Fitzgibbon. Ireland: Grand Pictures (Colour, 90 mins.)
- Storytelling* 2001. Todd Solondz. USA: Good Machine / Killer Films / New Line Cinema (Colour, 87 mins.)
- Stuck on You* 2003. Bobby Farrelly, Peter Farrelly. USA: 20th Century Fox / Conundrum Entertainment (Colour, 118 mins.)
- Sweet Hereafter, The* 1997. Egon Egoyan. Canada: Alliance Communications Corporation / Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit (CPTC) / Ego Film Arts / Gort of Canada / The Harold Greenberg Fund / The Movie Network (TMN) / Téléfilm Canada (Colour, 112 mins.)

- Swiss Family Robinson* 1960. Ken Annakin. USA: Walt Disney Pictures (Colour, 126 mins.)
- Tango and Cash* 1989. Andrei Konchalovski, Albert Magnolia. USA: Guber-Peters Company / Warner Bros. (Colour, 98 mins.)
- Texas Chain Saw Massacre, The* 1974. Tobe Hooper. USA: Vortex (Colour, 83 mins.)
- There's Something About Mary* 1998. Bobby Farrelly, Peter Farrelly. USA: 20th Century Fox (Colour, 119 mins.)
- Thirteen Days* 2000. Roger Donaldson. USA: Beacon Communications LLC / New Line Cinema / Tig Productions (Colour, 145 mins.)
- This Is My Father* 1998. Paul Quinn. Ireland, Canada: Hummingbird Productions / Filmline International Inc / Merlin Films (Colour, 119 mins.)
- Tomcats* 2001. Gregory Poirier. USA: Revolution Cinemas / Eagle Cove Entertainment (Colour, 95 mins.)
- Top Gun* 1986. Tony Scott. USA: Paramount Pictures (Colour, 110 mins.)
- Traffic* 2000. Steven Soderbergh. USA: Bedford Falls Productions / Compulsion Inc. / Initial Entertainment Group (IEG) / Splendid Medien AG / USA Films (Colour, 147 mins.)
- Trainspotting* 1996. Danny Boyle. Channel Four Films / Figment Films / PolyGram Filmed Entertainment / The Noel Gay Motion Picture Company (Colour, 94 mins.)
- Traveller* 1981. Joe Comerford. Ireland: Joe Comerford Productions / British Film Institute Production Board (Colour, 80 mins.)
- Trip Trap* 1996 (TV). Danny Hiller. UK: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (Colour, 89 mins.)
- Trust* 1990. Hal Hartley. UK, USA: Channel Four Films / Republic Pictures Corporation (II) / True Fiction Pictures / Zenith Entertainment Ltd. (Colour, 107 mins.)
- TwentyFourSeven* 1997. Shane Meadows. UK: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) / Scala Films (B+W, 96 mins.)
- Twin Town* 1997. Kevin Allen. UK: Agenda / Aimimage Productions / Figment Films / PolyGram Filmed Entertainment (Colour, 99 mins.)
- Unbelievable Truth, The* 1989. Hal Hartley. USA: Action Features (Colour, 90 mins.)
- Under Siege* 1992. Andrew Davis. France, USA: Alcor Films / Le Studio Canal+ / Regency Enterprises / Warner Bros. (Colour, 103 mins.)

- Up 'n' Under* 1998. John Godber. UK: Ballpark productions Ltd. / Embarkation Media Group / Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd. / Llundain Lliw/4L Productions / Touchdown Films (Colour, 99 mins.)
- Usual Suspects, The* 1995. Bryan Singer. USA: PolyGram Filmed Entertainment / Spelling Films International / Blue Parrot / Bad Hat Harry Productions / Rosco Film GmbH (Colour, 106 mins.)
- Van, The* 1996. Stephen Frears. UK, Ireland: Beacon Communications LLC / British Broadcasting Corporation BBC / Deadly Films / Fox Searchlight Pictures (Colour, 100 mins.)
- Veronica Guerin* 2003. Joel Schumacher. USA, Ireland, UK: Jerry Bruckheimer Films / Merrion Film Productions / Persevere Productions Ltd. / Touchstone Pictures (Colour, 98 mins.)
- Very Bad Things* 1999. Peter Berg. USA: Ballpark Productions Ltd. / Initial Entertainment Group (IEG) / Interscope Communications (Colour, 100 mins.)
- Vicious Circle* 1999. David Blaire. Ireland, UK: BBC Northern Ireland Drama Department / Irish Screen (Colour, 105 mins.)
- Welcome to the Dollhouse* 1995. Todd Solondz. USA: Suburban Pictures (Colour, 88 mins.)
- When Brendan Met Trudy* 2000. Kieron J. Walsh. Ireland: Collins Avenue / Deadly Films 2 (Colour, 94 mins.)
- How Harry Became A Tree* 2001. Goran Paskaljevic. Italy, France, UK, Ireland: Cattleya / Paradox Pictures / Film and General Productions / MACT Productions / Eurimages / Irish Film Board / Le Studio Canal+ (Colour, 100 mins.)
- When the Sky Falls* 2000. John MacKenzie. Ireland, UK: Irish Film Board / Icon Entertainment International / Irish Screen / Redeemable Features / Sky Pictures (Colour, 107 mins.)
- White Chicks* 2004. Keenen Ivory Wayans. USA: Gone North Productions Inc. / Revolution Studios / Wayan Bros. Entertainment (Colour, 109 mins.)
- Wild About Harry* 1999. Declan Lowney. N. Ireland: Scala Productions (Colour, 100 mins.)
- Wimbledon* 2004. Richard Loncraine. UK, France: Inside Track Films / Studio Canal / Working Title Films (Colour, 98 mins.)
- Withdrawal* 1982. Joe Comerford. Ireland: RTE (Colour, 26 mins.)

*Your Friends and
Neighbours*

1997. Neil LaBute. USA: Fleece / PolyGram Filmed Entertainment /
Propaganda Films (Colour, 100 mins.)

You're Dead

1999. Andy Hurst. UK: Atlantic Streamline / Streamline Film
production GmbH (Colour, 98 mins.)