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Dead Men Walking: An Analysis of Working-Class Masculinity in Post-2008 Hollywood Film

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Abstract

Working-class masculinity has lost its steam. Since 2008, a sub-genre of Hollywood films has emerged that depicts the current crisis, and imminent demise, of working-class masculinity in the United States. The 2008 financial crisis has had devastating effects on the American economy, and particularly the working-class, whose precarious economic position has only been exacerbated under neoliberalism. These effects have become the thematic focus of a fringe genre of films, which show how the destabilization of the American economy has incited greater instability in gender relations, and has had an acute impact on working-class men. This thesis proceeds by analyzing how these films articulate the current crisis of working-class masculinity in America. Using the framework outlined by R.W. Connell, I explore how working-class masculinity has become marginalized in relation to neoliberal hegemonic masculinity, and how its marginalization has become an excitatory factor for inter-masculine violence, constituting a social problem.

Summary For Lay Audience

By studying the films *Out of the Furnace* (2013), *Warrior* (2011), and *Manchester by the Sea* (2016), this thesis seeks to identify how Hollywood has represented the working-class in decline, and how blue collar men have struggled in their masculinities since the market crash of 2008. By analyzing the relationships between working-class men in these films, and how these men live out their lives, we gain insight into the conditions of working-class masculinity in American culture at this time. Such an analysis serves to deepen our understanding of the problems with working-class masculinity at hand, and in doing so helps us address these problems moving forward.

Keywords

Working-class masculinity, Hollywood films, gender relations, hegemonic masculinity, male violence, 2008 financial crisis, neoliberalism, masculinity studies, cultural studies.

Epigraph

"That immaculate manliness we feel within ourselves, so far within us, that it remains intact though all the outer character seem gone; bleeds with keenest anguish at the undraped spectacle of a valor-ruined man."

– Herman Melville

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Introduction:

The Beginning of the End

Since the financial crisis of 2008, there have been a number of Hollywood films produced that depict the struggle of working-class men in America. This struggle, what might be called a crisis of masculinity, has resulted from the economic recession that followed the financial crisis. It has become a major topic of cultural importance that has since spread throughout the American cultural imagination, becoming thematically embedded in many mass media cultural products. What is called the 2008 financial crisis was caused by the sub-prime mortgage crisis that occurred two years prior, following which a large portion of Americans lost their homes because of under-regulated and unsafe lending practices. When interest rates rose, and homes lost their value, many Americans who had been given interest-only mortgages could no longer afford their houses, and so defaulted on their loans. The surge in speculation and subsequent decline in the real estate market had resounding effects on the economy, ushering in what is known to be the worst economic recession since the great depression.[1] The time period following 2008 thus marks a point in which the various insecurities concomitant to the destabilized economy could be seen playing out in popular culture. What has been made visible by a sub-genre of Hollywood films to be released after this point is that the financial crisis has also destabilized gender relations, resulting in a crisis, or what would best be called crisis tendencies, of working-class masculinity.

Since the dawn of neoliberalism at the end of the 1970s, the working-class in America has fallen ever more progressively into economic precarity. As a result of a shift in policies towards greater deregulation of the market economy, the median income has been suppressed while the income of top earners continues to increase, as David Harvey explains: "the ratio of the median compensation of workers to the salaries of chief executive officers increased from just over thirty to one in 1970 to more than four hundred to one by 2000."[2] Having already been reduced to a state of economic

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[1] Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 265.
[2] David Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610, no. 1 (2007): 28.

vulnerability, the 2008 recession spelled death for the status of working-class men in America (this is of course an all-gender issue, and will be addressed on page 6). Because men's position of dominance over women within the gender order is legitimated by capitalism, a man must have access to economic resources if he is to fulfill his patriarchal potential. Moreover, under patriarchal logics, it is the expectation that men protect the institution of patriarchy so as to safe-guard their positions of power within society. What is then called hegemonic masculinity is the ideal by which masculinities are organized towards patriarchal perseverance. If a man should lose his access to resources, and thereby fail in his ability to wield economic command, and provide for a family, he loses that which gives him much of his power as a man. When the material benefits of patriarchy, what R.W. Connell calls the "patriarchal dividend," are lost by such a large strata of men who share in similar configurations of practice – practices which are constituted in their working environments – there is the likelihood that a crisis will occur in the lives of these men. For such men, the destabilization of their gendered positions of power tends to be paralleled by a discussion of an overall crisis of that form of masculinity.[3]

These crisis tendencies of working-class masculinity have since become a recurring theme within popular culture, and films that depict the struggles of working-class men post-2008 comprise a culturally important sub-genre. The representation of working-class masculinity in its present state is culturally significant because Hollywood tends to represent masculinity in its present idealized hegemonic form. Cultural narratives tend to serve the function of reinforcing patriarchal ideals, instructing boys and men about what is deemed the dominant masculine configuration of the time.[4] As men consume such cultural products, they internalize the patriarchal ethos by narcissistically identifying with the hegemonic male characters on screen.[5] A deviation from the logics of cultural production that seek to affirm hegemonic aspiration is therefore not only something different, but something culturally significant. It is a break from the standard operating

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[3] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 79.

[4] R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 838.

[5] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," In *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 438-48.

procedure and endeavours to show the real for what it truly is[6]. By depicting the veritable collapse of working-class masculinity, these films go beyond the standard model of hegemonic affirmation, and illuminate not only some of the actualities of working-class masculine struggle, but also demonstrate that the reasons for this struggle are inherent to hegemonic masculinity itself. These films do not seek to obfuscate the problems at hand by providing false idols for men to venerate in denial of themselves and the reasons for their own suffering, but rather expose the often inarticulable issues that men experience as a result of being caught in a system of patriarchal dominance that often enough does not benefit them as much as the hegemonic mode would have them believe.

My research proceeds with a thematic analysis of three texts that reveal the crisis tendencies of working-class masculinity at this time. I chose the films *Warrior* (2011), *Out of the Furnace* (2013), and *Manchester by the Sea* (2016) so that they would serve as exemplars of this sub-genre, primarily for their quality, veracity, and the consummate attention they give to the issues of gender relations and gendered practice among American working-class men. What these texts so poignantly address are the issues of inter-masculine violence that extend from restricted male relations, compromised configurations of practice, and diminished economic positions. *Warrior* (Gavin O'Connor, 2011) for instance, tells the story of two brothers, Tommy Riordan (Tom Hardy) and Brendan Conlon (Joel Edgerton), whose lives have been bifurcated by their relationships with their alcoholic father, Paddy Conlon (Nick Nolte). Through the reproductive cycle of gender relations which I outline later, Tommy's masculinity comes to reflect the masculinity of his father, who he loathes for having driven him and his mother away when he was a teenager. Brendan on the other hand has found a way to improve his social standing, moving beyond the confines of working-class practice and becoming a teacher. Thus, the brothers represent the polarities of working-class and middle-class masculinity. With Tommy being determined to prove his masculine self-worth after a life-long struggle of interpersonal loss and emotional devastation, and Brendan being driven by desperation to save his house from being foreclosed on, and thereby protect the family he is meant to provide for, the brothers come into direct

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[6] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

physical conflict in a mixed martial arts tournament, because the one thing the brothers share is their capacity for violence. The conflict is played out as more than just a fight between men, but a war of masculinities that are both struggling to assert their claim for the patriarchal dividend, which are the payouts of "honour, prestige, and the right to command" that men receive for upholding patriarchal rule.[7] By incisively representing an intractable partition within masculine relations, and the implosive contingencies of working-class masculine practice, the film emphasizes how the working-class masculine ethos has been delegitimated under neoliberalism, and how working-class men must reconfigure their masculinities if they are to maintain their privileged positions within the gender order.

Out of the Furnace (Scott Cooper, 2013) also follows the lives of two brothers, Russell and Rodney Baze (Christian Bale and Casey Affleck), whose lives are torn asunder by the death of their father (Bingo O'Malley), who represents both the working-class masculinity that has been passed down to them, and the declining economic state of the industrial region in which they live. When Russell loses his chance at starting a family after being sent to prison, and Rodney returns from the Iraq war as a broken and unsalvageable wreck, the brothers prove incapable of helping each other solve their problems, and are pushed further and further towards violent conflict. Rodney's character in many ways resembles Tommy's in *Warrior*, insofar as his life has been destroyed by the very configuration of working-class practice that he has been trapped within. With presumably no way out, Rodney proceeds down a path of violent (self)destruction in an attempt to communicate the pain of his loss – the loss of his status as a man. Russell's life is also inundated with crisis. Failing to maintain coherence with the hegemonic ideal, he is stripped of his chance to fulfill his patriarchal potential, and is thus impelled to redeem himself as a man by avenging the death of his brother. Through portrayals of dead-end masculine configurations that result in crisis and lead to violent inter-masculine conflict, the film not only emphasizes crises experienced by working-class men, but the inevitable demise of working-class masculinity.

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[7] Connell, *Masculinities,* 82.

In *Manchester by the Sea* (Kenneth Lonergan, 2016), the death of the status of working-class masculinity is symbolized by the loss of the father and brother figure as one and the same. Joe Chandler (Kyle Chandler) is the primary patriarchal figure in this text, who early in the film dies from a heart attack. His brother Lee (Casey Affleck), and son Patrick (Ben O'Brien/Lucas Hedges) survive Joe in what proceeds to be a test of their ability to survive together as men. The film follows the conflict-ridden existence of Lee and Patrick as they attempt to reassemble the pieces of their shattered lives after Joe's death. The struggle between the two men to communicate (or relate) with each other pervades this narrative, painting a picture of what it means to sustain a configuration of working-class masculinity at this time. With Lee having written his own life off after the death of his children, he represents the failed patriarch who is doomed to live out the rest of his days as a man who is marginalized from his community, and in relation to the neoliberal configuration of hegemonic masculinity. Lee must however persevere for the sake of his nephew Patrick, who is now an orphan and dependent on Lee for support and guidance, two things which Lee struggles to provide because of the tragedy of his past. Where Patrick represents the present need for working-class masculinity to be reconfigured, Joe's death, and Lee's resignation thus symbolize its proverbial castration – working-class masculinity cannot prosper in the current neoliberal cultural milieu. The film provides a warning for the future of working-class men in America, as much as it functions as a reflection on the inconsistencies with the present hegemonic configuration of masculinity, as well as its departure from the privileged position it held in the past.

These texts were also chosen to represent how consistently the theme of working-class masculine crisis has been addressed between the 2008 financial crisis and the time of this writing. *Warrior*, released three years after 2008, marks an early point in the wave of these films. *Out of the Furnace* follows two years after, and then *Manchester by the Sea* three years after that. If an even more recent text were to be chosen, it would have been *A Star is Born* (2018), as the exegesis that follows would have thematically aligned just as well with this text as the others, however due to the limitations on the scope of this thesis further textual analysis could not be engaged in. The body of texts that were consulted while in the selection process is outlined below. This list of texts is both meant to serve as a resource for identifying the sub-genre and the kinds of films that fit in it, as

well as a guide for those who might wish to further consider the implications of this analysis:

- *Brothers* (2009)
- *Blue Valentine* (2010)
- *Warrior* (2011)
- *Drive* (2011)
- *Bullhead* (2011)
- *The Place Beyond the Pines* (2012)
- *Killing Them Softly* (2012)
- *Out of the Furnace* (2013)
- *Locke* (2013)
- *The Drop* (2014)
- *Manchester by the Sea* (2016)
- *Hell or High Water* (2016)
- *A Star is Born* (2018)
- *Leave No Trace* (2018)

Since the selection process inherently involves leaving other texts out, it should be noted that where the themes and issues that are interrogated in this analysis do pervade the aforementioned list of films in varying frequencies, the chosen texts proved to be the most cogent of exemplars, insofar as they embody the greatest amount of potential for thematic analysis, and as sources of data held up best under the litmus test of analytical scrutiny. It is also pertinent to address the object of focus in the same manner. Working-class masculinity is not the only configuration to undergo stress and strain as a result of post 2008 recession. Films such as *The Company Men* (2010), *Margin Call* (2011), *99 Homes* (2014), *The Big Short* (2015), and *Demolition* (2015) are also examples of how the financial crisis was overtly discussed and represented by the Hollywood culture industry, and they place particular emphasis on problems faced by middle- to upper-middle class men. However, the representation of what is at stake for the masculinities in these films is nowhere near as dire as that which is being proffered by this sub-genre concerning the conditions of working-class masculinity. To put it simply, where the middle- to upper-class men in films such as these stand to be pushed down a rung, the working-class is the lowest on the socio-economic ladder, and therefore is at the greatest risk of having its masculinities pushed down and out to the margins.

It must also be acknowledged that this analysis focuses almost entirely on working-class men, and not women. The simple explanation for this is that the recognition of this cinematic trend occurred prior to the research that was conducted on the topic. It is known that Hollywood cinema has primarily been a white, middle-class, androcentric enterprise. Furthermore, as a form that is meant to reach a wide audience

through the mass media, Hollywood products are designed for the pleasure of the active male viewer.[8] Because Hollywood film largely has been, and is still, produced by men for men, it only makes sense that a crisis of masculinity would be a far more salient theme to run through the industry. This is not to excuse the industry as being so evidently patriarchal, but if anything, to condemn it. By giving insight into the conditions of complicit masculine struggle in relation to hegemonic masculine rule, these films provide an opportunity for cultural reflection on the very problems of patriarchy for both men and women, and since Hollywood has the greatest cinematic reach in the world as a mass media enterprise, such films are likely to get the most exposure. If there is to be a focus on men, it should be in a way that broadcasts such inconsistencies, so that men can be incited to reform the system from within. It is, after all, masculinity that resides at the centre of the problem, since the problem is patriarchy. Should patriarchy be dismantled, men must play a part in reconfiguring their modes of practice and towards ameliorating systemic inequalities in gender relations. This analysis thus focuses on the relationship between working-class masculinity and hegemonic masculinity because hegemonic masculinity is a problem that must be addressed if patriarchal control is to be undermined.

Race and sexuality are other representational factors that ought to be accounted for. Even though this analysis does not focus on race and sexuality as intersectional elements, they certainly do bear weight on any gender or class analysis. For the purposes of this analysis then, where working-class masculinity is the focus, what is meant is indeed white heterosexual working-class masculinity; however, there will not be a relational analysis of race and sexuality in what follows. In short, the scope of this thesis was too limited to consider these variables at proper length, although an extended reading of these texts could certainly include them as a part of the analysis. I understand that much of my argument might seem to make a special case for white, straight, working class men in parts of America. I want to be clear that while I do address what happens to these men as reflected in the cultural texts I have selected, I am not making any claims about their rights over and above any other group. This is not an argument that white working class men have been hit harder than, say, generations of African American men

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[8] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 438-48.

and women who have inherited the legacy of hundreds of years of official and unofficial slavery. I acknowledge that millions have been grievously injured by the system of late capitalism I discuss. All deserve justice, all deserve to be treated fairly and in accordance with American Constitutional law as it is written, if not practiced. No people of any race, class, gender, sexual orientation or any other subjectivity, deserve to be treated badly. This thesis in no way argues that white working class men should enjoy rights of which others have, in some cases for centuries, only dreamed. However I do argue that it is crucial to study this particular group if we want to understand the ongoing daily politics in contemporary America. That being said, the characters that I focussed on in this analysis are indeed white, and presumably heterosexual men. Much like female representation in Hollywood cinema, characters that are not a part of this homogenous group are too often cast in subordinate roles, much as they are within the internal hegemonic hierarchy.[9] Thus, though there have been films released since the financial crisis that address the struggles of subordinate masculinities – *Moonlight* (2016) being an excellent example of one, and an excellent film – they are outside the purview of this research, although a further analysis into such texts would be of great value to the study of masculinities in film.

In conducting this research, a cultural studies approach was used, which involved a close reading of the selected texts through various theoretical lenses. Chapter 1 establishes the conceptual and theoretical foundations upon which this analysis was built, and also serves as a review of the literature germane to this area of study. The chapter begins with a brief explanation of gender from the sociological perspective of social constructionism, before moving more thoroughly into an examination of the field of masculinity studies. Since this research proceeds as an analysis of masculinity, with a prominent conceptual focus on hegemonic masculinity, the theorists R.W. Connell, and James W. Messerschmidt are most heavily relied on for a theoretical framework. Chapter 1 thus proceeds to explore the fundamentals of a sociological analysis of masculinity with attention paid to how gender must be understood as a relation concept, and one that is constituted in practice.[10] The notion of crisis is then interrogated for purposes of

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[9] Connell & Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," 844.
[10] Connell & Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," 848.

conceptual clarification, and explained in line with the model of hegemonic masculinity that Connell and Messerschmidt propose. The topic of violence is then explored in theoretical detail, pulling from theorists such as Michel Foucault, Johan Galtung, and Byung-Chul Han. Lastly, neoliberalism is explored as a political-economic program that created the necessary conditions for the 2008 financial crisis. The research conducted by Dumenil and Levy is used to explain the events of the crisis and their consequences, along with the supporting literature of David Harvey, and Jim McGuigan, whose theories on neoliberalism help explain the current economic moment and its implications on the working mass.

Chapter 2 begins the textual analysis that comprises the core project of this work. Since gender relations are a primary component of how masculinity is to be understood, the chapter proceeds as an analysis of the masculine relations between the central male characters in each of these texts. Across each of these texts there is a shared theme of patriarchal descent, and the meaning of this is two-fold. For one, these texts show how working-class masculinity is socially and culturally reproduced through father-son relations. Secondly, they establish that this reproductive cycle has come to an end as a result of the unsustainability of working-class masculinity under neoliberalism. Thus, the passing on of working-class configurations is thematically tied to the fall from hegemonic grace that working-class men have experienced. Furthermore, the chapter explores the issues of brotherly relations as represented in these texts. The intractable issue of working-class disgrace under neoliberal hegemonic masculinity is further exacerbated by the inability of men being able to help and support other men – even those closest to them. The brothers in these texts prove unable to help each other restore their status as men because the working-class configuration is doomed to die. These men are then provided with an ultimatum: reconfigure, or die. The chapter moves sequentially between texts, starting with *Warrior*, as it is the first in the chronological order, and ending with *Manchester by the Sea*, as the chapters that follow continue to do.

Since masculinities are to be understood as configurations of practice, Chapter 3 then delves into the problems of working-class practice as exhibited by the central male characters in the texts. An analysis of the intersections of gender and class are brought to

bear at the beginning of this chapter, firstly as a way of identifying how the economic positions of these men define much of who they are. It is by defining the economic situation of these men that their struggles then become apparent. As these characters are shown falling deeper into economic despair, what becomes apparent is not only their inability to provide, and thereby succeed as model patriarchs, but that without this ability they can no longer understand who they are as men. This dislocation and the concomitant desperation to preserve their identities culminates in crisis for these characters, and through a misplaced alliance with a configuration of practice that has only diminished them, drives them toward acts that only contribute to their further undoing. What follows in this reading is then a critical unpacking of how these texts use representations of violence to demonstrate the problems at the heart of masculine hegemony. As the men undergo crisis, they are both habitually and structurally turned towards violence. Violence is thus exposed as an element integral to the fight for hegemonic authority, however where it is best rendered invisible under the hegemonic ideal, its true and ugly nature becomes visible when men have no other means of asserting their authority. The full destructive capacity of violence is thus played out in these films, and between the men in these texts, as a way of illuminating the problems of masculine hegemony for men. These characters engage in the violent destruction of each other and themselves as a way of both asserting their hegemonic status, and as a way of communicating the pain of their experiences as marginalized men. The final part of this chapter thus seeks to explain how violence is articulated as a method for patriarchal preservation, and furthermore establishes the extent to which these films prognosticate the imminent demise of working-class masculinity.

Chapter 1:
Theoretical Foundations

It is not titles that honour men, but men that honour titles.

– Niccolò Machiavelli

Throughout this chapter I will discuss the theoretical foundations for the gendered power structure understood as patriarchy, and its guard dog: hegemonic masculinity. R.W Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity will serve as an analytical framework for understanding how men gain and hold power over others, as well as why certain masculinities become more dominant while others lose power. Furthermore, the application of this framework will provide insight into what can transpire when men do lose power as a result of their masculinity being marginalized from a position that was once complicit with hegemonic masculinity. By combining the analysis of hegemonic masculinity with a complementary theoretical outline of crisis, and crisis tendencies, this chapter also intends to situate the selected texts in the context of the cultural moment in which they were produced, as well as in relation to the history of that which proceeded them. Furthermore, in addressing the systemic forces behind the diffusion of such intimately felt and lived out crises, a concise analysis of neoliberalism will be brought to bear. By synthesizing theories of crisis and hegemonic masculinity with those of neoliberalism, this chapter will develop a socio-historical backdrop for this cultural moment. Ultimately, this framework will serve as the primary instrument for analyzing representations of gender relations and masculine practice in chapters 2 and 3, as well as establishing the cultural and historical significance of this sub-genre of film. To begin this analytical expedition; however, we must start by laying a theoretical foundation. In what follows, the ideas of gender and patriarchy will first be discussed, setting the stage for a more thorough exploration of masculinity. Then, a framework for concepts of crisis and hegemonic masculinity will be constructed, followed by a theoretical outline for neoliberalism and how it relates to working-class masculinity in post-2008 America. Lastly, a cinematic history of masculinity in crisis will be developed to help frame the texts in their current cultural moment.

Gender

As an approach to understanding the gendered dimensions of crisis in contemporary Hollywood film, it is important to begin with what is meant by gender. From the social constructionist perspective (which understands the social world to be made largely of human definitions rather than universal laws), gender differs from sex insofar as it is the amalgamation of norms and values that have been associated with the biological categories of 'male' and 'female'. One learns to act their gender, as "gender is not fixed in advance of social interaction, but is constructed in interaction."[11] Furthermore gender is historical, it is based in convention, and the roles which have been customarily assigned to each gender have, over time and across various cultures, been loaded with meanings. Sex however, is rooted in a biological distinction between those who are born with XX (female) and XY (male) chromosomes, and their corresponding physical manifestations. The chromosomal sex-determination system that has been used in the natural sciences as a way of categorizing the physical differences between women and men has commonly (and erroneously) been conflated with the systems of cultural values that assign meanings to these categories. As Connell suggests, "to believe that we can understand the social world through a biological demarcation is to misunderstand the relation between bodies and social processes."[12] This common error is a highly problematic one. For one, it has led to a belief in a natural gender order, whereby such things as divisions of labour and power relations are preordained and justified in their being products of evolution or intelligent design. As well, by couching the cultural in the biological, our ability to interrogate culture and effect social change with regards to gender relations has been restricted. Because what is perceived as normal is often mistaken for what is natural due to historical consistency with certain biological imperatives that manifest in socially convenient practices, the role culture plays in the collective formation of meanings often goes unexamined. As a result, gender relations have become more and more entrenched in the cultural imagination as biologically determined laws and not socially constructed norms.

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[11] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (California: University of California Press, 2005), 35.
[12] Ibid., 43.

It has been with great effort that the fields of sociology and gender studies have worked to denaturalize gender and problematize its implications in the realm of social relations. As Judith Butler has argued, gender ought to be understood as a verb, something that is brought into being through action, and not as something that is inherent in the body. Because we tend to act out gender, performing masculinity and femininity for each other, we not only speak gender into existence, but also reify it. What we say and do, the way we dress and speak make gender appear to be something that is "natural". Butler explains, "because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis."[13]

Gender is complex, as it is problematic. If gender is not a fixed feature within the individual, but rather something that is acted into existence as Butler suggests, then gender becomes rather difficult to talk through as a great deal of abstraction is required to undo the damage of its conceptual hypostatization. Being subject to political influence and historical change, gender becomes a much more difficult idea to frame in some grand narrative, and as a permeable and liquid concept, it begins to slip through the fingers as soon as one attempts to grasp it. These are some of the reasons that work is continuously needed on this subject until present myths about sex and gender are discredited. Much is owed to feminist scholars (e.g., Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Donna Haraway, bell hooks, Eve Sedgwick) for rendering the term open for analysis, allowing gender to be understood as a collectively-constructed element of our social lives. The more that gender can be understood as a social fact and less a biological one, the more we can work towards addressing the many injustices concomitant to the realm of gender relations, and ultimately dismantle the gendered system of dominance known as patriarchy.

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[13] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 522.

Patriarchy

Although it remains a fraught concept, especially within feminist scholarship, patriarchy, as Michael Kimmel notes, refers to a hierarchal social structure in which men hold power over women, and is recognizable in two domains.

> Public patriarchy refers to the institutional arrangements of a society, the predominance of males in all power positions within the economy and polity, both locally and nationally, as well as the "gendering" of those institutions themselves (by which the criteria for promotion, for example, appear to be gender-neutral, but actually reproduce the gender order). Domestic patriarchy refers to the emotional and familial arrangements in a society, the ways in which men's power in the public arena is reproduced at the level of private life. This includes male-female relationships as well as family life, child socialization and the like.[14]

The dichotomy Kimmel draws between the public and domestic spheres of patriarchy establishes the terrain upon which patriarchy can be discussed as a macro and a micro social phenomenon. At the structural level, patriarchy pervades institutional logics within society. The cultural products that people consume are heavily influenced by androcentric thinking, which in turn implicates the consumer in the reproduction of patriarchal norms. Laura Mulvey, in her foundational work *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, suggested that cinema is a patriarchal fantasy played out for the male viewer, who, through the process of identification, takes on the active role of looking *at* the female. The female viewer inversely becomes the object of the gaze, and thereby internalizes this passive 'self-viewing' role as it is played out on screen in her day-to-day life. Patriarchy is thus inscribed in the male as an active participant and the female as a passive recipient of the male gaze.[15] This example illustrates how patriarchal thinking at the structural level finds its way down the pipe, and how the viewer who becomes inundated with the codes of patriarchal behaviour may act them out at the interpersonal level, putting into practice the ideals that are exemplified in the media that they consume.

Patriarchy is a problem, as the wide range of feminist scholarship suggests. It is not only an unequal system by which men are afforded more rights and greater liberty at the expense of women, it is also a system of violence. The fickle and fragile notions upon

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[14] Michael Kimmel, "Global masculinities: Restoration and resistance," *A Man's World* (2001): 22.

[15] Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, 438-448.

which gender dominance is based means it is always at risk of being subverted, and because the only law supporting patriarchal dominance is one of force, the use of force at times becomes an instrument (though not the only instrument) to preserve this system. Masculinity and violence have thus become very closely associated terms in Western culture, to the extent of masculinity being viewed as a highly destructive and toxic force in society, in the lives of women, and even in the lives of men. And so, the study of masculinity has become its own field. Branching out from the domain of sociology, and as a focussed field of inquiry within gender studies, masculinity studies emerged as way of addressing the problem at the heart of patriarchy: masculinity.

Masculinity

Masculinity, as an object of knowledge, is still relatively new on the scene of feminist research. The field of masculinity studies began to emerge during the 1980s and '90s, which happened to be concurrent with a time of political turmoil following the Men's Liberation movement of the 1970's. Men's Liberation was a movement which sought to renegotiate the meanings of what it meant to be a man. Normative expectations for men to conform to traditional conceptions of masculinity were being refuted by the new left. Such conceptions and idealizations of masculinity at the time were seen by members of the movement as being damaging to the lives of both men and women. The movement shared many of the sentiments of second wave feminism, primarily concerning gender equality, and domestic violence prevention, and was in many ways aligned with the Women's Liberation movement of the time. Buchbinder notes that such movements, as well as "other civil rights movements of the 1960's such as Black Liberation and Gay Liberation," contributed to an elevation in social consciousness, insomuch as many "social, political, and other inequities and injustices were traced back to the dominance and power of white middle-class, heterosexual males who were then compelled to examine the power structures and dynamics of their societies, and their own role in those."[16]

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[16] David Buchbinder, *Studying Men and Masculinities*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 4.

Men's Liberation borrowed much of its understanding of patriarchy and its consequences from feminism, but also much of the rhetoric on masculinity was taken from burgeoning research about sex roles. Sex role theory had become popular by taking earlier ideas of sex difference from the 19th century and combining them with later sociological ideas on the social role. The sex role model, which understood gender as an amalgam of sex difference constituted through socialization, became prominent in the psychological discourse about gender at the time, and led to an expansion of male sex role literature which had not been seen before. Connell notes that, "much of the writing of the 1970's encouraged men towards the modern vision, using therapy, consciousness-raising groups, political discussion, role-sharing in marriage or self-help."[17] The issue with role theory however is that it fails to account for social change, as much as it overstates the static categories within which male and female prescriptive behaviours are fixed within. To this extent it does not account for cultural variations, nor does it make room for intersectional analysis of race, class, and differences in sexual orientation. Furthermore, in sex role theory the biological element of sex remains far too structurally intertwined with ideas about gendered patterns of behaviours. As Connell explains, "[i]n sex role theory, action (the role enactment) is linked to a structure defined by biological difference, the dichotomy between male and female – not to a structure defined by social relations. This leads to categoricalism, the reduction of gender to two homogenous categories, betrayed by the persistent blurring of sex difference with sex roles."[18] Though problematic, sex role literature proved to be a significant theoretical ground-floor upon which the field of masculinity studies could build upon.

In overhauling the previous body of sex role literature, the field has emphasized that as an object of knowledge *masculinity* can not be talked about as a singular, all-encompassing concept. Although "[m]ass culture generally assumes there is a fixed, true masculinity beneath the ebb and flow of daily life,"[19] Connell explains that gender is a relational concept that is constituted in practice; that "masculinity as an object of knowledge is always masculinity-in-relation."[20] Masculinities should be thought of as

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[17] Connell, *Masculinities*, 24.
[18] Ibid., 26.
[19] Ibid., 45.
[20] Ibid., 44.

socially organized configurations, or forms, that are made manifest in social action. Where masculinity only has meaning in relation to femininity, the varying configurations of masculinity can only be understood in relation to other masculinities. Furthermore, masculinities cannot be comprehended outside the cultural and social framework in which they are fixed. Connell confirms that masculinities are indeed "configurations of practice structured by gender relations. They are inherently historical; and their making and remaking is a political process affecting the balance of interests in society and the direction of social change."[21] Thus, masculinity cannot be studied as a static archetype that is constant throughout time, but rather a part of a perpetually shifting structural formation in which various aspects – or masculinities – are played out.[22]

Because men are the dominant power in the gender order, it has long been customary not to discuss masculinity. One reason for this is that power renders itself invisible, it refuses to be talked about or seen.[23] If attention can be brought to bear on those who hold power, then critical inquiry can be launched into the premises of such power, leading to the deterioration and reformulation of the power structure. Thus, it has been in the interest of patriarchy for masculinity to not be talked about. As mentioned, feminism has been the excitatory condition through which our awareness has been drawn to the patriarchy, as it continues to do. Operating upon similar principles, masculinity studies has sought to unpack the center of this phenomenon; to make legible the complexity of the system of gender relations and the power structure that maintains it.

Crises of Masculinity

The emergence of this field of study has been punctuated by various reactionary countermeasures that followed in the wake of men's movements in the 1970s and '80s. Because of what appeared to be the diminishing of male authority resulting from the surge in second wave feminist sentiments at this time, a counter-movement emerged in which many men began to radically resist feminist influence and attempted to reassert their dominant social position. Michael Messner observes that, because of this new crisis,

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[21] Connell, *Masculinities,* 44.
[22] Ibid., 67.
[23] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 214.

"men's liberation had disappeared. The conservative and moderate wings of men's liberation became an anti-feminist men's rights movement, facilitated by the language of sex roles."[24] The new premise of the movement was to incite a return to traditional masculinity, what Robert Bly conceived of as masculine archetypes that are rooted in our psyche but have been repressed. To Bly, and the mythopoetic movement he inspired in America in the early '90s, the problem men were facing at the time was located in a loss of contact between men and the deep masculine. To help men find their way back to their source of inner power, Bly's book *Iron John* encouraged that men should bond together over the rejection of the feminine, emphasizing that only through celebration of the hyper-masculine could men recover the inner most essential features of the one true masculinity which they had lost touch with.[25]

Given that men's liberation had sought to undermine patriarchal dominance in America, it would not be uncommon, nor entirely incorrect, for such reactionary measures as those employed in the '90s to be considered indicative of a deeper crisis in masculinity. Buchbinder establishes that

> One way of understanding the notion of crisis is as a reaction of anxiety or even panic to cultural change. This usually alarming and undesired emotional response on the part of the individuals is then projected outward as a generalized social response that redefines change as catastrophe. The "crisis" then ceases to be simply a reaction to perceived change. Instead, it is understood as a real threat.[26]

A crisis manifests from the fear of such a threat, in this case to group identity and the power that resides in that identity structure – to the point where that threat becomes real in its consequences. In other words, the pervasive discussion of, and belief in, a crisis is enough to materialize its effects, to the extent that it really does not matter whether the crisis is real. Sally Robinson explains how the rhetoric of crisis can engender crisis itself, whereby "[a] crisis is 'real' when its rhetorical strategies can be discerned and its effects charted; the reality of a particular crisis depends less on hard evidence of actual social trauma … than on the power of language."[27] It is to this extent that a perceived crisis does

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[24] Michael Messner, "The Limits of "The Male Sex Role": An Analysis of the Men's Liberation and Men's Rights Movements' Discourse," *Gender and Society* 12, no. 3 (1998): 255.
[25] Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men,* 1st ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).
[26] Buchbinder, *Studying Men and Masculinities*, 6.
[27] Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 10.

not necessarily need to form at the level of the individual or be a group experience, but rather might be instantiated, or at least reified through media. As with Robert Bly's *Iron John*, it is hard to say at what point in time such a threat might begin to be felt, and at what point it becomes an acknowledged crisis resulting from the mass dissemination of rhetoric that legitimates men's feelings of ressentiment. Though this relationship is not entirely clear, what is important to address is the role that the media play not just in responding to crisis, but in making a crisis an event that is more easily related to and identified with – because, as Robinson explains: "the language of crisis imposes a certain narrative logic on an event, or, more nebulously, a social trend or cultural formation."[28]

Another problem with the use of 'crisis' as firm concept in relation to masculinity is that a crisis becomes unwieldy and diffused when attempting to situate it historically. As an aberration, a deviation from the norm, a crisis is meant to suggest a moment of turmoil that erupts from a state of stability. There would need to be a prior moment when masculinity was indeed stable for the concept to hold any value. Yet, as John MacInnes contends, there does not appear to be a moment in history since the Enlightenment (when modern conceptions of gender difference were forged) when masculinity has *not* been in crisis:

> It has become a cliché to argue that masculinity is in crisis. But although men's privilege is under unprecedented material and ideological challenge, the briefest historical survey will show that masculinity has always been in one crisis or another … This is because the whole idea that men's natures can be understood in terms of their "masculinity" arose out of a crisis for all men: the fundamental incompatibility between the core principle of modernity that all human beings are essentially equal (regardless of their sex) and the core tenet of patriarchy that men are naturally superior to women and thus destined to rule over them.[29]

Much like Connell has professed, that gender relations are always in flux, masculinity is also perpetually unstable. In addition to this, patriarchy incessantly perceives itself to be under threat even though this threat might not be real. All of these issues hint at more than just the fragility of masculinity, but also at how neurotically concerned men are with the maintenance of patriarchy. What ought to be addressed is that there was and continues to

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[28] Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*, 11.
[29] John MacInnes, *The End of Masculinity: The Confusion of Sexual Genesis and Sexual Difference in Modern Society* (Philadelphia;Buckingham [England];: Open University Press, 1998), 9.

be a perceived, or *felt*, crisis on behalf of many men who fear a certain disinheritance of power. Demasculinization is all too commonly seen as a threat to individual, or even to a group identity, when what is most often at threat are men's positions of power within the patriarchy.

Masculinities respond to events that effect gender relations and, because of this, responses will vary depending on which masculinities are implicated and in which ways. Connell borrows the term "crisis tendencies" from Habermas to explain how masculinities are implicated in the disruptions and transformations of the gender order. Since the "theoretical term 'crisis' presupposes a coherent system of some kind … masculinity is not a system. It is rather a configuration of practice within a system of gender relations." Connell concludes however, that "[w]e can … logically speak of the crisis of a gender order as a whole and of tendencies towards crisis."[30] As noted, such tendencies culminate in response to perceived threats to patriarchal power. Where some men might see the potential in feminism for the reconfiguration of an oppressive gender order to the benefit of all, others might see it as a threat to their own positions of power, which encompasses their identities.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Within the gender order, the "relations of power…show the most visible evidence of crisis tendencies."[31] Much of this has to do with patriarchy's constant need to maintain masculine dominance. When gender relations shift due to larger forces of social and historical change, then patriarchy is put under pressure to change as well. It is the raison d'être of patriarchy to preserve its power, and if it cannot, then it must adapt to gain footholds elsewhere. Connell and Messerschmidt have operationalized the concept "hegemonic masculinity" to explain how patriarchy is preserved through male practices of domination. However, by drawing on Gramsci's notion of hegemony, Connell and Messerschmitt's concept is meant to imply more than just a system of male dominance over women, but also a way of investing patriarchal logics in the minds of those it dominates. As they explain, "the hierarchy of masculinities is a pattern of hegemony, not

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[30] Connell, *Masculinities*, 84.
[31] Ibid., 85.

a pattern of simple domination based on force. Cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and the marginalization or delegitimation of alternatives are widely documented features of socially dominant masculinities."[32] The plurality and hierarchy of masculinities are central to this concept, as the gender order is not maintained simply by men's domination over women, but also by men's domination over other men. Demetriou, as Connell and Messerschmidt have recognized, has further established a distinction between what he calls "external" and "internal" hegemony; where "'External hegemony' refers to the institutionalization of men's dominance over women; 'internal hegemony' refers to the social ascendancy of one group of men over all other men."[33] The system of dominance between men is one that is much less talked about, but remains integral to the maintenance of the patriarchy as a whole, as it is internal hegemony amongst men that assures external hegemony over women.

Hegemonic masculinity is an organizing ideal, and as an ideal it co-opts the most compatible practices from the ever-changing array of configurations into an assemblage. This assemblage serves as a model for the best way to conduct one's self while simultaneously seeking to uphold the patriarchy. Hegemonic masculinity is the apotheosis of what men are encouraged to achieve, and as a model it embodies all the ideals of that which makes a man powerful in that particular time and cultural space. In doing so, it must be established in relation to subordinated and marginalized masculinities, which include, but are not limited to, men whose masculinities intersect with other marginalized identities, such as race, class or sexual orientation. Black masculinity, or "poor white" masculinity, or gay masculinity are all relational terms insofar as they are removed in varying degrees from the hegemonic masculine standard.[34] Hegemonic masculinity operates, in a sense, by pushing other masculinities down so that it can maintain a lofty status, as it is only hegemonic so long as there are masculinities that are marginalized and subordinated in relation to it. As a result, men with subordinate or marginalized masculinities see themselves in relation to that which is hegemonic. These power relations pressure such men to reconfigure their masculinities so that their practices align

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[32] Connell & Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," 846.
[33] Ibid., 844.
[34] Connell, *Masculinities*, 78-80.

with the hegemonic ideal – so that they too can acquire the concomitant social positioning. There is a constant struggle for ascension, and the preeminence of hegemonic masculinity depends on this hydraulic model, as it is through competition within the system of masculine dominance that hegemonic masculinity is perpetually reshaped so that external hegemony can be maintained. Demetriou refers to this process as the "dialectical pragmatism" of internal hegemony,[35] because it is conflict between masculinities that helps determine which configurations of practice are most ideal for the preservation of the patriarchy in any given time.

As Connell establishes, "the number of men rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small." [36] The reality is that the ideal hegemonic form is unattainable for the majority of men because they lack access to resources that are required to hold such status. Because of this, most men do not explicitly act the role of the hegemonic patriarch, but are rather complicit with hegemonic masculinity because they are nonetheless rewarded for contributing to the preservation of the patriarchy. This payout, what Connell refers to as the "patriarchal dividend," is most simply the "advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" – it is that which affords men their taken-for-granted positions of privilege in the gender order.[37] Complicit men may not be entirely hegemonic, but they are nonetheless a constitutive component of the hegemonic system which helps maintain patriarchal dominance. When the constitutive practices of complicit masculinities fall out of coherence with the prescribed practices of the hegemonic ideal – in effect hampering the reproductive needs of patriarchy – they risk being marginalized. This pressure then can be a cause for crisis among men who share in these unadjusted configurations, and on a wider scale these intermittent personal crises come to emblematize what are the crisis tendencies of a particular masculinity. Such tendencies are rooted in the very foundations of hegemonic masculinity, and more specifically internal hegemony, as the processes of dialectical pragmatism threaten certain masculinities with obsolescence. Hegemonic masculinity thus creates the necessary conditions for crisis tendencies. Why this is important is

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[35] Demetrakis Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique," *Theory and Society* 30, no. 3 (2001): 337-361.
[36] Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.
[37] Ibid., 79.

because crisis tendencies carry with them an array of other social problems that extend from masculine practice, namely – for the purposes of this analysis – those involving violence.

Violence and Masculinity

Violence between men might not seem as important a topic of analysis as say, domestic or sexual violence against women, as it is women within the discussion of hegemonic masculinity who are most at threat; however, addressing issues of violence between men is an important part of dealing with the phenomenon of gendered violence as a whole. Connell has remarked that the link between "social conflict and violence has opened up new perspectives in violence prevention,"[38] which suggests that research into the gendered dimensions of violence can help in developing strategies to prevent it. Addressing the violence of internal hegemony is a necessary part of this pursuit. Violence has a way of articulating masculine prowess, and it can be instrumental in instructing what it means to be a man.[39] Even when not used for the specific purposes of asserting one's dominance, the use of force can function as a policing mechanism by which men regulate other men's behaviour, serving to reinforce, as Michael Kimmel puts it, a "toxic brew of entitlement and despair."[40] Violence becomes more than just a practice that is used for the purposes of social regulation, it becomes a behavioural pattern that is culturally reproduced, so that those who incur violence often learn to enact it themselves as a way of communicating the experience of being a man. The emotional limitations that have been culturally ascribed to men often result in externalized violence and aggression being the only acceptable emotional responses to stressful scenarios (this is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3). As the saying goes, if the only tool a person has is a hammer, then every object starts to look like a nail. Violence is learned by men at the hands of other men, and so the cycle goes, but it also carries inwards into a man's psychology, and outwards into social relations with women, in all ways leaving a trail of devastation. [41] The above are some of the reasons why the problem of masculinized violence must be

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[38] Connell, *Masculinities*, 258.
[39] Ibid., 83.
[40] Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper, 2008), 172.
[41] DeKeseredy, Walter S. and Martin D. Schwartz, "Masculinities and Interpersonal Violence," in *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005), 353-366.

studied and addressed for the far-reaching consequences of violent male behaviour to be remedied.

In discussing the problem of violent male behaviour, it is important to make clear that masculinity tends towards violence in much the same way that it tends towards crisis. Since "[v]iolence is a part of a system of domination, but is at the same time a measure of its imperfection,"[42] it is important to emphasize that hegemony operates in a far more complex manner than simply through the use of force. However, even though hegemonic masculinity does not solely operate through the use of force, violence still plays a significant role in the struggle for male dominance – especially when masculinities are inundated with crisis tendencies. Connell and Messerschmidt are hesitant to acknowledge violence as a salient factor of hegemonic masculinity for the aforementioned reasons, but they do remark that,

> Because the concept of hegemonic masculinity is based on practice that permits men's collective dominance over women to continue, it is not surprising that in some contexts, hegemonic masculinity actually does refer to men's engaging in toxic practices—including physical violence—that stabilize gender dominance in a particular setting. However, violence and other noxious practices are not always the defining characteristics, since hegemony has numerous configurations.[43]

It is because of the plurality of configurations that they are cautious of reducing masculinity to a set of role behaviours. Indeed, hegemonic masculinity does not need to be violent in order to further instantiate dominance, violence however does often erupt as a response to a perceived threat or real loss of power, and so it is a factor that must be accounted for when discussing the crisis tendencies of disinherited masculinities, such as working-class masculinity at the present time.

Although Connell is correct in arguing that "masculinity cannot be interpreted as a fixed propensity to violence,"[44] the patriarchy as a gendered structure of male dominance must also be understood as a structure of violence. Foucault has established that the direct use of force is a less effective mechanism of social control than the disciplining of the mind, and one reason for this is because direct violence is visible.[45] Hegemony works on

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[42] Connell, *Masculinities*, 84.
[43] Connell & Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," 846.
[44] Connell, *Masculinities*, 258.
[45] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 214.

the pervasive acceptance of domination that is based in a violence that cannot be detected. As Connell suggests, "part of the struggle for hegemony in the gender order is the use of culture for such disciplinary purposes: setting standards, claiming popular assent, and discrediting those who fall short."[46] Even so, within a structure of violence there are bound to erupt myriad instances of physical violence, because even though the one does not rely on the other for its legitimacy, it engenders its spontaneous occurrence nonetheless. On the topic of systematic violence, Byung-Chul Han explains that "the situation in which an act of violence occurs often arises from the system and systemic structure in which it is embedded. Thus, manifest, expressive forms of violence can be traced back to these implicit structures, which establish and stabilize a system of domination but which withdraw from visibility."[47] Even though hegemonic masculinity does not operate solely through the overt use of violence, to understand the dynamics of inter-masculine violence one must consider the system by which practices of domination are arranged and formalized. Furthermore, the conceptual framework for hegemonic masculinity gives us insight into something that is often missed in the discussion of gendered power relations, that: "focussing on [dominant masculine] power ignores the fact that notions of masculinity can also have a damaging effect on men and male identity."[48]

The reality is that hegemonic masculinity is an ideal that does not support all configurations.[49] Men are expected to conform as best they can to the hegemonic ideal if they are to receive the patriarchal dividend. However, the irony of this is that as an ideal, hegemonic masculinity does not benefit the majority of men, because the majority of men do not have the resources needed to achieve hegemonic status. As previously established, the best most men can hope for is to be complicit. Nonetheless, men still venerate the ideal as if it *is* something they can embody, and the mass media play a significant role in maintaining this false consciousness. The ideals of hegemonic masculinity that have been, and still are being, constructed in the mass media tend to be based in the performances of

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[46] Connell, *Masculinities*, 205.

[47] Byung-Chul Han, *Topology of Violence*, trans. Amanda DeMarco, Vol. 9 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2018), 77.

[48] Donna Peberdy, *Masculinity and Film Performance: Male Angst in Contemporary American Cinema* (New York;Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire;: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 30.

[49] Connell, *Masculinities*, 77-78.

heroic masculine exemplars that are beyond the real scope of life. Connell expresses that "hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men. Yet these models do, in various ways, express widespread ideals, fantasies and desires."[50] Men in turn narcissistically identify with these idols, and even though they cannot possibly obtain their likeness, they still desire to be just like them. Connell and Messerschmidt, in exploring how hegemonic ideas proliferate throughout culture and inform men, use a multi-tier model that ranges from global, to regional, to local masculinities. They explain how "[g]lobal institutions pressure regional and local gender orders; while regional gender orders provide cultural materials adopted or reworked in global arenas and provide models of masculinity that may be important in local gender dynamics."[51] The regional level of hegemonic masculinity is central to this analysis, as it is often through media that men in their local setting come into contact with what it means to be hegemonic. As Connell and Messerschmidt propose,

> Hegemonic masculinity at the regional level is symbolically represented through the interplay of specific local masculine practices that have regional significance, such as those constructed by feature film actors, professional athletes, and politicians. The exact content of these practices varies over time and across societies. Yet regional hegemonic masculinity shapes a society-wide sense of masculine reality and, therefore, operates in the cultural domain as on-hand material to be actualized, altered, or challenged through practice in a range of different local circumstances. A regional hegemonic masculinity, then, provides a cultural framework that may be materialized in daily practices and interactions.[52]

The culturally endorsed – yet highly unachievable – hegemonic aspiration, paired with the incessant (often violent) competition that is structurally endemic to the logics of internal hegemony suggest that masculine hegemony is truly not in the best interest of most men. As Michael Kaufman has suggested, the armour of power that men wear is also a major source of their pain.[53] Being a man involves incurring violence of various forms, including the physical but by no means limited to it. As mentioned, forms of violence propagate further violence, but central to this is the idea of "structural violence," which is a far more diffuse kind of harmfulness that reverberates out from institutions

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[50] Connell & Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," 838.
[51] Ibid., 849.
[52] Ibid., 849-850.
[53] Michael Kaufman, *Cracking the Armour: Power, Pain and the Lives of Men* (Toronto: Viking, 1993), 8-9.

(e.g., the violence of poverty against those who are economically marginalized) having consequential impacts across various social groups; what Galtung explains as the "avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs."[54] Beyond how regional masculinities inform notions of hegemony, and thereby inspire competition among local masculinities, economic violence is a structural force that can bear heavy consequences on the lives of men. Not only do masculinities intersect with categories of class, but masculine hegemony is in many ways based in the authority afforded by economic achievement under capitalism.

The Creative Destruction of Masculinities

As previously stated, because they are subject to forces of greater social and economic change, gender relations are constantly in flux. The issue with rapid social change, as Durkheim has put forward, is that it has the propensity to destabilize social systems.[55] Crises of masculinity tend to erupt when masculine hegemony is threatened, and though there are a multitude of factors that contribute to the destabilization of gender relations on a frequent basis, one of the most salient forces of social change is the economy. Hegemonic masculinity specifically, as Connell notes, is tied to economic, as well as cultural prowess.[56] It is no mystery that economic success leads to greater social and political positioning under capitalism, and men's historical dominance in economic relations has indeed been a measure that has assisted in the maintenance, and even the very formation of the patriarchy.[57] Messerschmidt notes that "[p]atriarchy, while always changing, has persisted through over two hundred years of capitalist development," and that even as progress has been made in terms of women becoming more and more active in the workforce, "[p]atriarchal sex segregation in the labor market is as prevalent today as it has ever been, and men continue to appropriate the labour of women in the home."[58] Patriarchy depends, at least in part, on economic dominance, thus dramatic economic shifts tend to destabilize gender relations. Just as Habermas coined the term "crisis

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[54] Johan Galtung, "Kulturelle Gewalt," trans. Kathleen Ho, In *Structural Violence as a Human Rights Violation*, (2007), 3.

[55] Emile Durkheim, *Suicide, a Study in Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 367-92.

[56] Connell, *Masculinities*, 82-83.

[57] Sylvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 1st ed. (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

[58] James Messerschmidt, *Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Crime: Toward a Socialist Feminist Criminology* (Totowa, N.J: Rowman & Littlefield, 1986), 2.

tendencies" to explain the regularity of the occurrence of economic crises within capitalism,[59] so too do crises of masculinity tend to occur in response to crises within the economy.

Capitalism tends toward crises as masculinity does within the gender order, but economic instability (particularly within the United States) has been more severe under neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is defined by David Harvey as a "theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade."[60] Historically, neoliberalism can be traced back to shifts in economic policy that were conceptualized in the 1970s and instituted in the '80s under the Reagan and Thatcher administrations towards mass deregulation of the economy. A push back was launched by the political-economic elite at the time, whose position of control was being threatened by a proliferation of leftist sensibilities, and whose profit margins were being encroached upon by the growing demands of labour unions.[61] The new right had renewed an idea of freedom, by which markets could operate independently from constraints imposed by the state.[62] What was packaged and sold was an idea of a "free market"[63] economy that was supposed to be more socially responsible; one that kept the meddling hands of despotic politicians out of economic relations. However, much like the gift horse that was ushered through the gates of Troy, the motive at the center of this new political program was far more self-serving and has had devastating consequences on economic stability as a result.

As a project towards the recapitulation of dominant economic positioning by the ruling class, neoliberalism has proved quite successful. For one instance, as Harvey notes, "the ratio of the median compensation of workers to the salaries of chief executive officers increased from just over thirty to one in 1970 to more than four hundred to one

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[59] Jürgen Habermas, "What does a Crisis Mean Today? Legitimation Problems in Late Capitalism," *Social Research* 51, no. 1/2 (1984): 41.
[60] David Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610, no. 1 (2007): 22
[61] Ibid., 28.
[62] Ibid., 23.
[63] Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 9.

by 2000."[64] For the majority of middle- and working-class Americans however, this new political economic ethos has been a blight rather than a boon. Former U.S. secretary of labour Robert Reich explains in an article in *The New York Times* that such a disparity of wealth leads to instability in the economy, because "when so much income goes to the top, the middle class doesn't have enough purchasing power to keep the economy going without sinking ever more deeply into debt — which, as we've seen, ends badly. An economy so dependent on the spending of a few is also prone to great booms and busts."[65]

What Reich is reflecting on are the preconditions of the most recent economic crisis, commonly known as the 2008 financial crisis, which followed two years after the subprime mortgage crisis. A historically significant event, this crisis resulted in what has been considered the worst economic recession since the great depression.[66] Indeed, there is a great deal of similarity between the fiscal policies that paved the way to both cataclysmic events. As Reich explains:

> During periods when the very rich took home a larger proportion — as between 1918 and 1933, and in the Great Regression from 1981 to the present day — growth slowed, median wages stagnated and we suffered giant downturns. It's no mere coincidence that over the last century the top earners' share of the nation's total income peaked in 1928 and 2007 — the two years just preceding the biggest downturns.[67]

Dumenil and Levy have established that although the 2008 crisis is often seen as resulting from the subprime bubble bursting, "the housing crisis and the corresponding collapse of the pyramid of financial institutions acted like a seismic wave that destabilized an otherwise fragile financial-global structure. It was the trigger, not the cause of the crisis … The chain of events since the beginning of the crisis in August 2007 must be understood as the culmination of the latest phase of neoliberalism."[68] They establish that because

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[64] Harvey, *Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction*, 28.
[65] Robert Reich, "The Limping Middle Class," *New York Times*, 2011.
[66] Philip Mirowksi, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (London: Verso, 2013), 2.
[67] Reich, "The Limping Middle Class."
[68] Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 40.

free trade, the free movement of capital around the globe (investment abroad), and
the globalization of financial and monetary mechanism are the pillars of neoliberal
globalization … [the] causes of the crisis can … be described in terms of "excess."
Too much financialization meant a fragile financial structure, and too much
globalization, an uncontrollable world economy. The gradual accumulation of debt
on part of U.S households could not be continued without limit. At some point, a
halt had to be placed on the dependence of foreign financing.[69]

Ultimately, the 2008 financial crisis must be understood in relation to neoliberalism, as

much as the crisis tendencies of masculinity that followed in the wake of the financial

crisis must be understood in relation to it. A full explanation of the crisis and its causes

is beyond the scope of this thesis, but what is most salient is that the occurrence of the

crisis is strongly linked to this shift in neoliberal economic policy. It is thus the

percolating consequences of what Dumenil and Levy summarize as the overall crisis

of neoliberalism that are germane to this analysis.

Working-Class Masculinities in Crisis

The most recent economic crisis has had dramatic implications for the lives of

many working and middle-class Americans. Although banks were bailed out by the

government to prevent their otherwise imminent collapse, millions of Americans lost

their homes to foreclosure.[70] The proceeding recession also made for a rapid increase

in unemployment, as the "capacity utilization rate … began to decline, with a strong

acceleration, from the second quarter of 2008 upward."[71] The weight of the collapsing

economy had fallen on the middle class,[72] pushing them down, and the working-class

beneath them. Blue collar workers, especially those in the industrial sector – which has

been waning more and more in America due to globalizing trends of neoliberalism and

the race to the bottom tactic, operationalized by transnational corporations –

experienced some of the hardest economic setbacks. As a measure, "steel output …

declined by 30 percent from May through to January of 2008,"[73] alone, suggesting that

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[69] Dumenil & Levy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism,* 36.
[70] Crump, Jeff, Kathe Newman, Eric S. Belsky, Phil Ashton, David H. Kaplan, Daniel J. Hammel, and Ekvin Wyly,
"Cities Destroyed (again) for Cash: Forum on the U.S. Foreclosure Crisis," *Urban Geography* 29, no. 8 (2008): 745.
[71] Dumenil & Levy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, 247.
[72] Reich, "The Limping Middle Class."
[73] Dumenil & Levy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, 258.

many of those who had been working in this slowly vanishing sector experienced the sudden neoliberal *coup de grâce*.

Such a crisis puts a great deal of pressure on the lives, and the very subjectivities of working-class men. Traditional concepts of masculine fortitude, particularly amongst the working-class, are wrapped up in notions of propriety. The opportunity to sustain a lifestyle – that is, to be *stable* – and provide for a family are central to the performance of traditionally dominant masculinities. Power, after all, must present itself as impervious if it is to demand recognition as such. Connell argues that "Neo-liberalism is inconsistent with traditional patriarchy"[74] because the systemic instability engendered by neoliberalism undermines those masculinities that have been configured in relation to modern ideals of continuity and stability under organized capitalism.[75] Jim McGuigan also contends that "In fact, generational tension is a distinct feature of the neoliberal imaginary, including the rejection of 'dinosaur' attitudes concerning all sorts of matters cherished by an older generation."[76] In short, certain configurations of masculinity – in this case working-class masculinity – that were once complicit with the hegemonic configuration no longer find the same favour under neoliberalism.

As social structures change, hegemonic masculinity must also be reconfigured in relation to those changing structures so that patriarchal dominance can be maintained. It is the "dialectical pragmatism"[77] of hegemonic masculinity that leads to some masculinities – or at least aspects of masculinities – being co-opted for qualities that are presently optimal, while others fall into obsolescence. Connell establishes that "Neo-liberalism … degrades the economic and social position of some men, but not all. Many men are relatively advantaged by the shift of social resources from the state to the market, and by the de-regulation of markets. And there is a particular group who are the intended beneficiaries of the whole neo-liberal policy package – entrepreneurs."[78] Connell identifies financially successful entrepreneurs as the new figureheads of hegemonic

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[74] Connell, *Masculinities*, 255.
[75] Jim McGuigan, "The Neoliberal Self," *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 6, no. 1 (2014): 227
[76] Ibid., 234.
[77] Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique," 345.
[78] Connell, *Masculinities*, 255.

masculinity, primarily because of how the character traits that are associated with entrepreneurship align with the ideological demands of neoliberalism.

It is important to note, as McGuigan asserts, that although "neoliberalism is first and foremost a doctrine of political economy, it is also, rather more diffusely, a principle of civilisation that shapes the socio-cultural makeup of people through socialisation in the broadest sense."[79] As the dominant ideology of our current political and socio-economic era, neoliberalism has influenced the arrangement of social relations, and has permeated the value structure of American society. The ideal neoliberal subject is, in short, one who yields to "the recasting of identity in terms of flexibility, adaptability and instant transformation."[80] Thus, the neoliberal subject must adopt traits that are incoherent with more traditional ideals that have long been prevalent amongst working-class masculinity. Connell explains that "the rise of new groups of managers and owners to unprecedented global power is associated with new patterns of business masculinity and, by implication, new patterns of hegemony in gender relations. For instance, this type of entrepreneurialism, increasingly detached from local gender orders, does not valorize the family or the husband/father position for men … so prominent in older hegemonic masculinities."[81] Although working-class masculinity has not traditionally reached the levels of economic and cultural prowess to hold considerable hegemonic status, it can certainly be regarded as a *formerly* complicit configuration. Such masculinities that remain complicit with hegemonic masculinity, as Connell conceptualizes, in turn act as staple functionaries in the overall maintenance of the patriarchy.[82] However, when gender relations have been disrupted, such as they have been under neoliberalism, and the dividends stop being paid out to those traditionally complicit masculinities, it stands to reason that their bonds to the power structure would weaken. But, it is their very tie to the power structure that gives men their privilege within the gender order, thus men only remain powerful – which is to say that men only remain men – so long as their configuration of masculinity remains complicit with the hegemonic ideal of the time.

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[79] McGuigan, "The Neoliberal Self," 235.
[80] Anthony Elliot and John Urry, *Mobile Lives* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 7.
[81] Connell, *Masculinities*, 256.
[82] Ibid., 79.

Otherwise, marginalization equates to a non-being by hegemonic standards. It equates to death.

The decline of the working-class that has resulted from the crisis of neoliberalism can furthermore be understood as a punitive arrangement. Neoliberalism emphasizes competitiveness and inculcates in the individual a will to succeed that is discursively contextualized within a set of market logics. The individual is heavily responsiblized under neoliberalism, and as a result personal failure is experienced more acutely. Much of the anxiety of neoliberalism is due to the burden of financial responsibility the individual has to bear, paired with even greater precarity in the job market, along with reductions in social welfare programs that have historically been helpful in preventing individuals from hitting 'rock bottom' when their finances fall through. McGuigan attests that under neoliberalism "the individual is penalised harshly not only for personal failure but also for sheer bad luck in a highly competitive and relentlessly harsh social environment."[83] Working-class men then, in a sense, suffer twice. Though neoliberalism might use gender neutral rhetoric, as Connell suggests, the punishment for one's failure to succeed under the conditions of neoliberal economics not only results in the destruction of one's social status but also his identity as a man.[84] Working-class masculinity, which has to a large degree been forged through generations of wage-labour practices, and situated within an broad but familiar industrial cultural milieu in the U.S., has rapidly been eroded under neoliberalism. In addition to this, moving into different sectors of the economy would likely require a major reconfiguration of one's masculinity due to the growth of a "certain feminization of work,"[85] as McGuigan has put it. The difficulty of such a transition and the stakes involved in the process are likely to exacerbate the crisis tendencies at hand, leaving working-class men feeling both trapped and powerless. Conditions of powerlessness often lead to men making a display of power through illegitimate means. When the resources needed to legitimize hegemonic status are not available to certain men, a contingent response may be to attempt to claim that power – in spite of their disinheritance of economic prowess – through acts of violence. Configurations of practice

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[83] McGuigan, "The Neoliberal Self," 234.
[84] Connell, *Masculinities*, 254.
[85] McGuigan, "The Neoliberal Self," 234.

that resort to violence as a means to demonstrate masculine hegemony are what Connell conceptualizes (while borrowing from Alfred Adler) as "protest masculinities", which will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

History of Masculine Crisis in Film

The sub-genre of film that I have identified and will proceed to analyze in the following chapters has, through verisimilitude, captured an emergent protest response to the collapse of working-class masculine status resulting from the crisis of neoliberalism. Larger political economic forces shape (and reshape) gender relations. Crisis tendencies that arise within the economy often implicate the gender order, and furthermore the crisis tendencies of gender become taken up by and represented in film media. It is argued by Will Wright that film genres and styles change in line with changes in the economy. In *Six Guns and Society*, Wright examines how stylistic developments in American Western films, for example, reflect dominant shifts in capitalism:

> The classic Western plot corresponds to the individualistic conception of society underlying a market economy. ... [T]he vengeance plot is a variation that begins to reflect changes in the market economy. … [T]he professional plot reveals a new conception of society corresponding to the values and attitudes inherent in a planned, corporate economy.[86]

Similarly, the crisis of neoliberalism must be understood as an event, or rather a protracted string of events (punctuated by the 2008 financial crisis), which have altered representations of masculinity in contemporary film. These changes in representation can be analyzed to open up new entry points into a discussion about the current state of masculinities and violence in America. Such a new dialogue however requires reflection on the history of crisis tendencies of masculinity in film since the rise of neoliberalism.

Film media has a history of being invested in the representation of hegemonic masculinity, primarily as a way of creating hegemonic exemplars for boys and men alike to look up to. To a certain extent, such forms of media can be understood as moralizing instruments, insofar as they have been used towards the normative maintenance of the patriarchy through the proliferation of hegemonic masculine ideals. It is no surprise then

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[86] Will Wright, *Six Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 15.

that this history has been closely interlinked with the ebb and flow of crisis tendencies within the economy and the gender order. As discussed above, crisis tendencies emerge when social and historical forces have an impact on, and presumably destabilize, gender relations. It is the purview then of hegemonic masculinity to reformulate and reassert the dominance of masculinity within the gender order. One of the ways hegemonic masculinity manages to use "culture for disciplinary purpose … by claiming popular assent"[87] is through film media. Fintan Walsh informs us that "studies have revealed how throughout the twentieth century, national crises and trauma (translated as emasculating) have been quickly followed by periods of remasculinization,"[88] and it is in these periods of crisis that we have seen attempts by the Hollywood culture industry to exemplify hegemonic ideals of masculinity toward the renewal of patriarchal stability.

The perceived crises of masculinity – what are actually intermittent crisis tendencies – have repeatedly been represented in Hollywood film. As mentioned, it is endemic to the very profile of hegemonic masculinity to assert and maintain the dominion of the patriarchy, as well as the system of inter-masculine power relations whereby men struggle to assert dominance over other men. The most notable crisis of masculinity to be taken up by the Hollywood culture industry came about in the 1980s, and happened to be concurrent with the rise of neoliberalism. This celluloid rendering of crisis functioned as a response to the humiliation and symbolic neutering of the male body during and after the Vietnam War.[89] What was ultimately a culturally emasculating event – the failure of American military intervention – led to a notable increase of Hollywood movies featuring hyper-masculine male action heroes. The '80s re-affirmation of masculinity was accomplished in many films through representations of the impervious strong-man and soldier. Action stars such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, Chuck Norris, and Jean-Claude Van Damme became icons of the new American man (even though two of the four are not American-born), with bodies that exuded supreme physical strength, matched with a license to kill. Yvonne Tasker contends that "the visibility of the built

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[87] Connell, *Masculinities*, 205.
[88] Fintan Walsh, *Male Trouble: Masculinity and the Performance of Crisis* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 9.
[89] Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 118.

male body, in both film and advertising images [in the '80s], represents part of the wider shift in the male image."[90] This image became commonly employed by Hollywood, specifically through the warrior role in films like *Predator* (1987), *Rambo 2* (1985), and *Blood Sport* (1988), where these new ideal types of American masculinity were sent into the jungle to overcome all odds and bring back American glory – a glory that had been lost due to what was ultimately a political blunder. The soldier in these films is, as Brian Barker suggests, "merely an extension of the tendencies of the more general condition of masculinity."[91] The stability of the patriarchy was maintained in the U.S. zeitgeist, at least in part, through such attempts in film to re-embolden hegemonic masculine narratives. However, such narratives have only contributed to the obfuscation of the critical flaws inherent to masculine hegemony – those which are a source of personal pain and social destruction for men and women.

These attempts to fortify the ideals of hegemonic masculinity can also be tied to the political economic arrangements of the era. As Susan Jeffords points out, the built male body of the '80s was "closely affiliated with the foreign policy imaginary of the Reagan era."[92] Drawing on Jeffords, Brian Barker also comments that "a recuperation of 'masculine' ideals of strength, activity and self-confidence accompanied, and were embodied in the election of Ronald Raegan to the presidency in 1981."[93] Since the cultural products of a period are deeply influenced by greater political and economic forces, it is no coincidence that the film producers and distributors Golan and Globus, who contributed to the production of many of these films, had close ties with the Reagan administration.[94] The Hollywood film industry's reactionary response to the culminating 'crisis' of masculinity in American culture can thus be understood in a broader context: one that intersects with the neoliberal political economic imaginations of the time.

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[90] Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre, and the Action Cinema* (London;New York;: Routledge, 1993), 73.
[91] Brian Barker, *Contemporary Masculinities in Fiction, Film and Television* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 39.
[92] Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, 141.
[93] Barker, *Contemporary Masculinities in Fiction, Film and Television*, 42.
[94] Anthony Marcus, *Where have all the Homeless Gone?: The Making and Unmaking of a Crisis*, Vol. 1 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), ix.

These efforts to draw out a stronger image of masculinity in the pursuit of maintaining the preeminence of the patriarchy continued to gain momentum throughout the '80s. As Barker explains, "the imagery of the armoured male body in the form of Schwarzenegger's *Terminator* and in *RoboCop* (1987) reveals a disturbing cultural anxiety about masculinity in the mid-to-late 1980s. The male 'hard body' or armoured body is an anxious body, whose boundaries are constantly reaffirmed in musculature and violent action sequences."[95] Film media was routinely providing salves for a perpetually wounded hegemonic male ego; however, there is no way to ameliorate perpetual self-flagellation by hypostatizing hegemonic configurations of masculinity through representation. As noted, it is in the wake of second wave feminism that we see a reactionary response from what becomes the men's rights movement that began burgeoning in the '80s and continued through the '90s.

The mythopoetic men's movement which was inaugurated by Robert Bly and his pseudo-psychological book *Iron John*, called for a rejection of feminist ideals and an apotheosis of all that is masculine amongst men. It is no coincidence that this mythopoetic movement happens to occur at the same time as the formation of various other reactionary men's movements and groups, such as The Fathers' Rights Movement, which sought legal reform on behalf of divorced fathers,[96] and The Promise Keepers, forerunners of a Christian Men's Movement that called for a return to traditional patriarchal norms that coincided with their particular form of Christianity.[97] In this cultural moment the disillusionment of what was perceived to be a decreasingly androcentric society, along with the increased pressure on identity maintenance in a burgeoning neoliberal world, men were attempting to rely on each other for support in their attempts to find and maintain core masculine ideals.

The filmic response to this protracted crisis can be found at the tail end of the '90s in films like *Fight Club* (1999) and *American Beauty* (1999), which advanced a new type of masculinity in rejection of contemporary societal norms. In the case of *Fight Club*, the

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[95] Barker, *Contemporary Masculinities in Fiction, Film and Television,* 38.
[96] Suzanne Hatty, *Masculinities, Violence and Culture* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications, 2000), 3.
[97] John Bartkowski, "Breaking Walls, Raising Fences: Masculinity, Intimacy, and Accountability among the Promise Keepers," *Sociology of Religion* 61, no. 1 (2000): 41.

protagonists – played by the whip-cord thin, yet chiselled, Brad Pitt and Edward Norton – reject the idea of such male bonding groups as "remaining men together," which play off the ideas espoused by Bly, in search of a more holistically destructive answer to the problems that postmodernity and neoliberalism have levied on male subjectivities. The pursuit is signified by a withdrawal from society and the formation of anarchic groups bent on the annihilation of the self in protest against everything they are expected to be as men. The film's main characters refuse the men's movements of the early '90s, only to extol a revised type of masculinity that continues to deny the feminine and venerate the violence endemic to masculinity in its hegemonic form. In *American Beauty*, we see a similar flight from the anomie of white collar (what is portrayed as overly feminized) work of corporate America. This flight leads the protagonist back to his roots of self-possession, the building of a strong body, and the pursuit of male dominance over women. These films, though they appear to be representationally counter-hegemonic, in earnest do nothing more but reify hegemonic masculinity in light of the political and socio-economic oriented crises experienced by Gen X men. It is important to note, however, that as such crises emerge and re-emerge in film, truly counter-hegemonic narratives do tend to crop up as well. Suzanne Hatty acknowledges, "hegemonic (white, middle class) masculinity has been challenged and subverted in film. This has happened more frequently since the fall of the studio system in Hollywood."[98] Instances of cinematic resistance occur at various places and points in time and, as Thomas Schatz notes, "such subversions take place in cycles – and in different corners of an increasingly fragmented movie industry in different eras."[99] Such as the one at hand.

It is the objective of this research then to analyze, and make legible the crisis tendencies of working-class masculinity as they have been presented in a sub-genre of Hollywood films since 2008. The significance of this project attends to what Richard Erikson conceived:

> [that] in providing formats for thinking, speaking, organizing and controlling, mass media technologies do not stand apart from social reality and social relations, but are integral to them. Mass media technologies not only make dramatic cultural

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[98] Hatty, *Masculinities, Violence, and Culture*, 177.
[99] Thomas Schatz, ed. *Hollywood: Formal-aesthetic dimensions: authorship, genre and stardom,* Vol. 2 (Oxford, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 217.

representations of reality, they participate in the construction of reality and of particular configurations for social relations.[100]

Such films can render visible the pitfalls of masculine hegemony, pitfalls which historically have all too often been obfuscated by the mass media. By poignantly addressing some of the real problems of gender relations amongst working-class men, and by illuminating the many inconsistencies of working-class practice under the neoliberalism, these films expose how hegemonic masculinity can also be a problem for men, and not just women. It is thus through such subversive forms of media that hegemonic masculinity might be reformulated for the betterment of Western society.

Transitions

The goal of the following chapters is to situate this sub-genre of films within their socio-cultural and historical contexts. By doing so I hope to shed light on how a *perceived* crisis of masculinity within American culture – that being a *felt* crisis, or crisis-intermittent, that is legitimately based in factors of political-economic destabilization – has influenced the cultural imagination of the time. Additionally, it is also by illuminating the thematic contents of these films that I intend to provide insight into the texture of lived experience among working-class American men whose deeply troubled lives are the focus of these films. This is not to be an argument for documentary realism, but rather a way of assessing the way such crisis tendencies have been understood, and responded to, in popular culture. Film, after all, as a medium for social commentary, has the advantage of realism.[101] This, of course, is not to say that film is purely denotative and therefore a politically neutral medium, but rather that it has the reflexive capacity to inform a culture about itself through qualities of verisimilitude. We can learn a lot about what is occurring in a society by examining its cultural products. The films that I will be analyzing here provide an entry point into understanding the conditions of working-class masculinity in America in the time following the 2008 financial crisis. These films shed light on the conditions of working-class masculinity since this time by examining the lived experience of working-class men, who having experienced the pressures of rapid systemic change

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[100] Richard Erickson, "Mass Media, Crime, Law, and Justice: An Institutional Approach," *The British Journal of Criminology* 31, no. 3 (1991): 222.

[101] James Monaco and David Lindroth, *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, and Beyond: Art, Technology, Language, History, Theory*, 4th ed. (New York;Oxford;: Oxford University Press, 2009), 292.

under neoliberalism, have been interpolated by crisis. The crisis tendencies that these films represent show not only the dire circumstances of working-class masculinity under neoliberalism, but how episodes of violence that are concomitant to the crisis tendencies of masculinity are detrimental to social stability. In the end, it is hegemonic masculinity that is found holding the smoking gun, and what these films ultimately do is put the processes of internal hegemony on trial, for all those to see the true reasons for the debauched status of working-class masculinity in America.

Chapter 2: Gender Relations

Fathers and Brothers

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.
What is called resignation is confirmed desperation.

– Henry David Thoreau

In order to develop a critical analysis into the representation of masculinity in these films, it is most pertinent to begin with an examination of how gender relations inform the characters' masculinities. Gender is, after all, a relational term. Masculinity only has meaning so long as it stands in contrast to femininity, and moreover, masculinity is not a closed unit, meaning that one man's masculinity can only be understood in relation to other masculinities.[102] How a character's masculinity is perceived is established in correspondence to, or in distinction from, the masculinities of other male characters who appear throughout the films. The relations between men in these films are crucial for informing the masculinities of the male characters on screen, as well as the viewers' appreciation of them.

It should be no surprise that paternal relations are of foundational importance to each of these texts, as it is the relationship between the father and son that is central to the reproduction of patriarchal norms. Since primary socialization is known to occur between the parents and their children, it follows that men are foremost socialized in their masculinity by their fathers.[103] Although processes of socialization are by no means deterministic, there is a great deal of tension in these texts between the individual autonomy of the male protagonists and their culturally reproduced life-courses. Who these characters are is, in varying degrees, at odds with where they came from, and is incongruent with many of the expectations that have been passed on to them. Fatherhood is thus framed within these texts as an inimical force that breaks men down and leaves them stranded. Although the tragedy of broken father-son relationships is nothing new in

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[102] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 68.
[103] Talcott Parsons, "The American Family: Its Relations to Personality and to the Social Structure" *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (1955): 16.

film per se, the motif of the struggling patriarch that follows speaks to the inability of working-class men to compete in the reproductive arena. Connell explains that, in gender processes, "the everyday conduct of life is organized in relation to a reproductive arena, defined by the bodily structures and processes of human reproduction."[104] Biological reproduction is a necessary foundation for cultural reproduction. A man's ability to procreate and start a family is essential if he is to culturally reproduce his configuration of masculinity through his male progeny. The inability for working-class men to compete in the reproductive arena thus foreshadows the imminent demise of working-class masculinity.

Fraternal relations are also a crucial element to this analysis, as brotherhood offers further reinforcement of patriarchal norms, which are so often the raison d'être of paternal relations. True, compassionate concern for a sibling's well-being – the kind of caring often associated with the mother – is commonly both present and stifled between brothers due to the emotional limitations imposed by their masculinities. Brotherly relations are complex, and play a significant role in the formation of masculinities and the concomitant nuances of masculine practice. In these texts, fraternal relations demonstrate working-class men's dependency upon other men for support and stability in their masculinities, particularly within their moments of crisis. The issue with this inter-dependency, as these films poignantly address, is that men are largely incapable of saving other men from the collapsing habitat of their masculinity, particularly if it happens to be one that they inhabit as well. Social relations among men are often constrained by the limitations imposed by their own masculinities, as much as it is the other way around. What men can and will say is culturally framed by the masculinity each man inhabits. Men come to understand through social relations what is acceptable practice between and amongst other men in local settings – although regional ideals also play a role in normalizing traits of masculine behaviour. The relationships between the brothers in these films illustrate both a need and inability to provide support for those whose lives are punctuated by debilitating moments crisis. The result is an atomizing one, in which these working-class

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[104] Connell, *Masculinities*, 71.

men feel more isolated and trapped – doomed like Sisyphus to push the burden of their own marginalization uphill for all time.

Of Men Amongst, and Men Apart

The absence or loss of the father figure is a theme that runs throughout these three texts. The male protagonists are furthermore constructed around the motif of fractured paternal relations – they are both built upon, and broken down by, this cracked foundation. This motif is fundamental to how the male protagonists develop and devolve in these films, and is therefore central to how their masculinities are encoded. *Warrior* is an exemplary text for demonstrating the significance of a broken relationship between the father and son in the development and passing on of masculinity. The film begins in medias res, with Tommy reuniting with his father Paddy. The opening song is the aptly titled *Start a War* by The National, that foreshadows the manifest physical conflict which drives the story arc. The lyrics of song also stage much of the latent content of the narrative, that being the conflict between men and their masculinities. The lyrics read: "We expected something, something better than before/ We expected something more/ Do you really think you can just put it in a safe/ Behind a painting, lock it up and leave? …Walk away now and you're gonna start a war/ Whatever went away, I'll get it over now/ I'll get money, I'll get funny again … Walk away now and you're gonna start a war."(0:52) The tone of the song is sombre, and the lyrics, quite literally at the outset of the film, speak to a past tragedy, the inability to cope with the emotional consequences of that tragedy, false hope in a future divorced from the pain of the past, and the turmoil that will inevitably follow from unresolved traumas the men have experienced. In the scene that follows, as Tommy is welcomed into his father's house – the house he grew up in – the story of their past gets expositionally pieced together through Tommy's invective towards Paddy, who solemnly takes the metaphorical blows of Tommy's words on the chin, much as he continues to do throughout the film.

Paddy was a violent alcoholic who abused Tommy's mother, and as Tommy suggests, did not give much of a damn about his family which he allowed to fall apart. Paddy, now a reformed alcoholic, offers Tommy coffee instead of liquor. Tommy,

who is himself already drunk at the point of Paddy's arrival, pressures his father to drink with him. His wanting to "have a belt with the old man" (02:51), signifies both a desire to return to the past where things left off, while at the same time an attempt to obfuscate the pain that endures in the present. Another reading of this scene, given Tommy's behaviour and words, would suggest that it is in his interest to get in a fight – at the very least a verbal fight – with his father, who in turn disappoints Tommy with his passivity and newly found relationship with God. Tommy's anger remains unsated, and the scene ends with Tommy passing out in his father's chair with a paper-bagged bottle still clutched in his hand, as if he is re-enacting a scene that presumably played out all too often in Tommy's childhood: drunk and passed out after a night of sharing nothing but mean words.

What is most unclear throughout the film is exactly *why* Tommy chooses to return to his place of origin, as his behaviour does not indicate anything more than pure contempt for his father. It seems most likely that Tommy would not entirely understand it himself. His life is perhaps best described as being eternally shipwrecked. His formative years and early adolescence having been ruined through the incessant presence of his father's toxic influence, Tommy turns and runs away with his mother, as far away as they possibly can – a physical drive from Paddy's looming emotional impact on their lives. In the financial destitution that tends to follow a woman when she courageously escapes the grip of dependency imposed by the patriarchy, Tommy must tend to his ailing mother who does not have the resources to treat her illness (07:28). After his mother's death Tommy joins the Marines presumably in search of a sense of place and belonging now having lost his entire family. Tommy's choice in this matter can be understood as one made out of desperation due to his supreme loss and subsequent anomic state. It just so happens to be a choice that leads him back down the road toward his father, and even more so, toward becoming his father.

Having lost his entire unit to friendly fire in the Iraq war, what is shown of Tommy is something more metaphorical than a tragic life surmounted by PTSD and survivors' guilt, what is depicted is a character who is dead while he is still alive. When Tommy returns to his father, it is perhaps that he does so because at the surface level he

has nowhere else to go. At a slightly deeper level however, it can be understood that through his experience of loss and tragedy while living the working-class life that has been passed down to him by his father, he has become a broken, violent and derelict man – every bit as much as his father. The metaphorical irony of the cycle of cultural reproduction is most striking here, since Tommy was driven far away by his hate for his father, yet he still winds up in the same condition of that jilted model of masculinity that he loathes. At an even deeper level though, what this also suggests – specifically within the context of the narrative – is that the tragedy of Tommy's life can only be resolved if he can understand the origin of his affliction. To move forward both as a character and a man, Tommy must come to understand how his relationship with his father his informed his own foundation. Tommy therefore returns to his own place of origin to make sense of both his father and himself, which is pointed to by Tommy's present behaviour mimicking that of his father's past behaviour.

The film relies heavily on the motif of war as both a literal and figurative way of discussing how conflict is resolved among men (hence the title). The film borrows from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, placing particular emphasis on the notion that, in war, if one is to be victorious in over "a hundred battles", it is imperative to both "know thyself" and "know thy enemy." [105] This philosophy is not only a useful device for reading into the film, but also something that can be pulled from the text itself. In the scene where Paddy wakes Tommy up for their first day of training together, Paddy produces a progress tracker from Tommy's early days of boxing. The poster board compares Tommy's number of victories with those of Theogenes, the ancient Greek pugilist. Tommy's goal, as is connoted by the juxtaposed meters, is to win a greater amount of fights – well over a thousand – than this historic icon. The number count implies Tommy's need to prove himself as a competent fighter, and therefore as a man, but also his desire to surpass the achievements of his forebear, Theogenes, who in this sense symbolizes Tommy's father (38:02). In an attempt to reconcile their broken past by catching up on what he's missed, Paddy asks Tommy if he ever made it to a thousand (38:17). Of course, Tommy in turn rebukes him, not providing the information that was asked for, leaving Paddy as well as

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[105] Sun Tzu, "The Art of War," *New England Review* 23, no. 3 (2002): 13.

the viewer in the dark. As Sun Tzu implies, to know your enemy, you also must become your enemy.[106] Tommy's refusal to fill Paddy in on his progress, and the overall omission of this information suggests that there is a battle yet to fight. Tommy's battle therefore is in the deepest sense one between himself *and* his father, as evidenced by the dialogue between the two when Paddy later agrees to train Tommy for the Sparta competition: "The devil you know is better than the devil you don't" (28:52). Tommy is yet to move beyond the confines of the masculinity his father has passed down to him, and the record that he has left trackless since his youth supports this. Moreover, what this suggests is that Tommy is unable to materialize greater personal success as a working-class man at this time. This insurmountable masculine standard is then further emphasized later in the film when his military service records cannot be traced by the media officials who seek to corroborate the story of his heroic intervention in the war (35:19). Tommy's accomplishments cannot be traced because working-class masculinity is no longer recognized as being complicit with the hegemonic ideal.

Regarding Tommy's inability to move beyond the confines of his father's masculinity, Tommy's insatiable rage primarily rests in his inability to resolve his personal conflict with Paddy. If he is to do so, Tommy must *see* his father be as broken and destitute as Tommy has become. Tommy's pitilessness towards Paddy throughout the film suggests that there is a need to emotionally move beyond the harmful effects Paddy and his masculinity have had on Tommy's life, and this is most evident in the scene in which Paddy seeks Tommy out in the casino after his fight in the arena. With the news about Tommy's heroic action having been released, Paddy attempts to show the pride he feels for his son; Tommy however wants none of it, saying "can you spare me the compassionate father routine pop? The suit don't fit … where were you when it mattered? I needed this guy back when I was a kid. I don't need you now. It's too late, everything has already happened" (1:35:38). Tommy has already become the man that he is, a man just like his father, but even though nothing can be done about the past, Tommy is still compelled to make sense of it in the present. Tommy follows this by saying that he has no use for Paddy, which is true in the sense of his telling, in that he has no use for a father

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[106] Tzu, *The Art of War*, 13.

figure now, but it's also a lie in that Tommy needs to overcome the pain his father has inflicted on his life, and seeing his father as broken as he sees himself is the key to that. The scene ends with Tommy insulting Paddy and throwing his cup of casino tokens at him, insinuating that he's nothing but a lowly beggar in Tommy's eyes. It's a painful scene to watch, loaded with emotional realism – one can't help but feel sorry for Paddy, as well as stung by the venom of Tommy's toxic words. The scene also happens to be syntagmatically important, as it stages the penultimate moment of gendered conflict resolution within the text.

In the scene that follows, Paddy's emotional break is both juxtaposed to, and proceeds from, Tommy's prior emotional eruption. As Tommy emerges through the door into the bright sun-lit hotel room, which contrasts with the dark and neon-lit casino floor of the scene before, he finds Paddy drunk, listening to his audio tape of *Moby Dick* through the headphones of his portable cassette player. As Paddy stumbles around, raging at Captain Ahab for leading his ship of men to their inevitable doom, he is actually lamenting a greater, more intractable issue of his own masculinity. As he wanders about crying, mumbling "somebody please stop the ship," he comes to find that Tommy is watching him, and then while marching toward him, Paddy begins shouting: "Ahab, you Godless son of a bitch, you stop the ship!" (1:38:18). Paddy's invective appears to be unleashed on Tommy while he's actually taking the character position of Ishmael who is yelling at Ahab, but the truth is that he is yelling at himself, and more specifically at the life-course he has led, over which he feels he has no power left to direct.

Paddy's red face, teary eyes, loud voice and dishevelled demeanour are more than just an index for the state of his inebriation, but also signify what it means to be a man whose life has been destroyed by his own configuration of practice – to be a *man* who is simultaneously *broken* by his masculinity. Paddy makes of himself the image that Tommy has had of him from his childhood, but it is not the *same* image. All the false strength and meanness is gone, and all that is left is sadness and desperation. Tommy mirrors this by accepting him for the broken man that he is, letting go of his own anger, and letting slip his façade of impenetrable strength. As Tommy pulls him into his bed to

put him to rest, Paddy repeat the words "We're lost, we're all lost Tommy. We'll never make it back" (See Figure 1). He's pining over the fact that there's nothing they can do to change their past, and at a broader level their course in history. Once in bed, Paddy continues muttering "you know I've always loved you" (1:40:28) to Tommy, who is holding him in his arms, similar to the position a wrestler would be in if he had another man locked in a rear-naked-choke, except that he's consoling Paddy – a single moment of true compassion, and then nothing.

After this scene Paddy disappears. It can be assumed that he's either left because he's made a fool of himself by relapsing and doesn't want to be seen, or that he's fallen completely off the wagon and has gone to drink in a bar somewhere. Metaphorically however, what Paddy's disappearance suggests is that as a man he has dissolved into nothing through this breakdown, and therefore no longer has a place in the story as a supporting character. Moreover, it suggests that his part has been played in resolving the struggle within Tommy, who following this scene, is acknowledged for the first time within the diegesis as Tommy Conlon, and not Riordan (his mother's maiden name). It is discovered by the tournament officials that Tommy and Brendan are brothers, but by harmonizing the brother's relationship through their names what is being symbolized is

Tommy's inner transformation. He has now emerged from the battle between himself and his father to step into the ring to battle his brother. The conflict that arises here is one of incompatibility between the brothers' masculinities. Even though they share the same paternal name – indicating the working-class lineage they are both tied to – the brothers are two different men, with different configurations of practice.

The strength of the film's allegory rests in its ability to speak to the deeper content of men's lives while simultaneously making an overt spectacle of violence, which is a practice that masculinities tend towards both on and off screen as a way of resolving interpersonal conflict. The father-son aspect of this struggle is what frames the masculinities in this text, furthermore it is the masculinities of these characters that are at the centre of this struggle. The metaphor for this central place of struggle in the text is the arena in which Tommy and his brother come to fight, which symbolizes, as Connell explains, "the structure of social relations that centers on the reproductive arena."[107] Tommy's relationship with his father should be understood as one that fixes Tommy's masculinity in place. By giving context to the working-class lifestyle that Tommy has inherited, the viewer comes to see how working-class masculinity has become inconsistent with the changing social environment. For working-class men then, the world has become increasingly more difficult to navigate, since – like a compass that no longer points north – working-class masculinity offers no direction in the neoliberal era. By coming to understand Tommy's masculinity, we also come to learn how disjointed it is. The moment of resolution between Tommy and his father only helps us understand the conditions of their lived experience, it does not however resolve the problems of their lived experience.

Where paternal relations in the film inform the viewer of the culturally reproduced aspects of masculinity, particularly regarding the passing down of problems from father to son, the relations between brothers speak to both the distinctiveness between masculinities and their incompatibilities in the reproductive arena. Where Tommy becomes the abject reflection of his father, albeit reluctantly, Brendan manages to escape from the same patrilineal trappings. There is a certain irony in this, as Brendan says that

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[107] R.W. Connell, *Gender* (Cambridge, UK;Malden, MA;: Polity, 2002), 10.

he stayed behind when his mom and Tommy left because he thought he could get his father all to himself (49:58). Although Tommy and Brendan are only paired in two scenes together (first when the reunite on the beach, second in the final fight of the Sparta tournament), the film strategically compares the brothers' masculinities through various scene breaks and juxtapositions. The viewer thus comes to understand how the brothers' masculinities relate through the syntagmatic pairing of scenes even before the brothers converge in the same mise en scène.

Tommy and Brendan's masculinities are contrasted primarily along lines of lifestyle and class. Following the opening scene where Tommy is drunkenly waiting for his father in the dark, Brendan is shown in the light-of-day, having his face painted at his daughter's princess themed birthday party. The guarded stoicism and virulence of Tommy's character is juxtaposed to the joyful compliance and humility of Brendan's character. Brendan, who is a high school physics teacher, a husband, a homeowner and a father of two, leads a middle-class life marked by a fair amount of social and material success. One could easily assume that Brendan has a closer association with hegemonic masculinity as a result, except for the fact that these roles which provide him his social status also require him to make a great many concessions – concessions that would appear to be emasculating. Such men, as Connell explains, are not truly hegemonic figures, as most men are not. Because of their success in the reproductive arena however, such men continue to reproduce patriarchal dominance and maintain men's position in the gender order, but in ways that have been pragmatically adapted to work with the times. The fact that men such as Brendan are complicit with the ideals of hegemonic masculinity gives them a claim to the patriarchal dividend, something which marginalized masculinities – such as the working-class masculinity Tommy has inherited – no longer have access to, because as configurations of practice they no longer align with the ever-evolving strategies employed by hegemonic masculinity to maintain patriarchal dominance.

As the film progresses, class relations become more and more entwined with gender relations, to the point where class and gender inform each other, as much as the brothers inform each others' masculinity. Where Brendan trains in a designer gym, with a

coach who makes him listen to Beethoven while he spars, Tommy runs through the desiccated, industrial streets of Pittsburgh, followed by Paddy in his car listening to his audio cassette of *Moby Dick*. Where Tommy sleeps in his childhood room in his father's house in inner-city Pittsburgh, Brendan sleeps in his own house where he supports a family in the suburbs. What brings both brothers together is that they are both compelled to fight as a last resort, and this is where their masculinities are drawn in line. There is no solace to be found between them when they finally reunite on the edge of the water outside the fight venue in Atlantic City – a place between the terra firma of the present and ocean of their distant past. On this neutral ground, where signifiers of class no longer separate them, Brendan attempts to make amends and reconnect with Tommy, who in turn wants nothing to do with Brendan. Their posture and the distance between their bodies foreshadows their impending conflict in the ring, while in this moment symbolizing the emotional conflict that presently divides them.

When Brendan moves forward to show Tommy pictures from his wallet, Tommy pushes back, emotionally distancing himself by asking: "why am I looking at pictures of people I don't know?" (1:09:57). Brendan's response then denotes his perplexity, having expected his values to translate effectively in this conversation with his brother, he simply explains with a shrug "because that's my family…" Tommy then further rejects any familiarity with Brendan by asking him: "and who are you exactly?", to which Brendan, with a demoralized sway of the head, flatly returns, "I'm your brother man", as if it should be evident that their familial relation holds a supreme value that both of them should honor. Tommy refuses to recognize Brendan as his brother, stating that the only brother he had was in the Marine Corps with him. Military brotherhoods are often seen as being more legitimate than the genetic bonds of family, because even though brothers share blood, it is in battle where soldiers bleed together. The use of this trope further demonstrates Tommy's refusal to observe the family as a central unit of value in his life, as well as it foreshadows Tommy's need to bleed alongside his brother. As Tommy walks away, Brendan tries to explain to him that everything he does is for his children, and that he forgave their father, just like he forgave Tommy and his mom, essentially so that he could move forward and create his own family, unencumbered by the weight of his past. Tommy calls him out on this, claiming

that Brendan is "full of shit" (1:12:39), which is to say that he hasn't endured enough pain to know what it means to forgive someone – that he has it all now, so his forgiveness really doesn't mean anything coming from a position of power.

Tommy has only experienced loss, not gain like Brendan, and he has been broken by the incessant experience of losing what he cares about. Tommy was there for his mother but couldn't save her. He was there for his brothers-in-arms, but he couldn't save them, and no one was ever there to save him, as he explains to Brendan: "mom needed you, I needed you. You're my big brother, and you bailed on me" (1:11:48). Tommy's flight with his mother is symbolic of his distancing from the patriarchal centre represented by his father. The irony of this however is in the fact that the more a man pushes up against the boundaries of the gender order, the more he is forced back into the center. Like a soldier who has gone AWOL (such as Tommy has), one is only met with dishonour and punishment for attempting to escape the hegemonic system. Tommy must suffer for his recalcitrance.[108] For a man, there is no exiting patriarchy, nor a way out from within the internal hegemonic struggle, there is only subordination and marginalization, which equates to a loss of power. The hydraulic model that works so well to explain the dialectical pragmatism of hegemonic masculinity is thus represented in the relationship between Tommy and Brendan. As Tommy sarcastically concedes to Brendan on the beach, "I'm glad you stayed, everything worked out for you – you leave, you get the opposite. You leave, you get to bury people." (1:11:56) Tommy has lost his claim to the patriarchal dividend because his masculinity has not adapted to the changing demands of the hegemonic ideal under neoliberalism. Brendan's masculinity, however, has. As a result, Tommy has grown cold, hard and impenetrable, a model of the masculinity he has sunk into: a provider who is unable to provide; a protector who is unable to protect. The dissonant aspects of Tommy's masculinity are then mirrored by the threat that Brendan now faces. If Brendan doesn't win the tournament, he will have lost his house and his ability to provide for his family. Brendan's masculinity appears to be on the verge of discontinuity, where Tommy's masculinity has already been discounted. As a result, Brendan must fight to hold onto his complicit status, and Tommy must fight to

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[108] Suzanne Hatty, *Masculinities, Violence and Culture* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications, 2000), 16.

prove himself powerful enough to make a claim for it: an immovable object comes up against an unstoppable force.

Out of the Furnace also presents a compelling narrative about the cultural reproduction of working-class masculinities, and the intractable complications of brotherhood. Similarly, the loss of the father is a foundational theme in this text, symbolizing the waning prowess of working-class masculinities in the reproductive arena. Following the prologue, the film begins in a montage sequence that follows Russell through his daily life of work at the steel mill. Like *Warrior*, this sequence is paired with a non-diegetic overlay (which happens to cleverly merge into the diegetic output of Russell's truck stereo) of the song *Release Me*, by Pearl Jam. The title of the song speaks to the deeper content of emotional struggle experienced by the men throughout the film, but the lyrics specifically address the cycle of cultural reproduction, where men learn how to be men from their fathers, and in a way become emotionally isolated just like them: "I see the world, feel the chill/Which way to go, windowsill/I see the words on a rocking horse of time/I see the birds in the rain … Oh, dear dad, can you see me now?/I am myself, like you somehow…" (4:30-6:20). What's more is that through this process men also often come to replace their father's position in society. Where cultural norms and values are passed on from father to son, so too are class position and social status. The function of this, to put it in all too simple manner, is to maintain a stable society, where important organs, to use a common analogy, don't start failing because new cells are no longer replacing dead cells. One of the important questions the film addresses, as I will discuss in full, is what happens to the men and their masculinities when they become obsolete – when do these proverbial organs become vestigial?

Russell, like most of the male characters in these texts, can be understood as an ordinary working-class man. What is meant by ordinary in this sense falls very much in line with how C. Wright Mills frames the tendencies of ordinary people in *The Sociological Imagination*, insofar as

> [w]hat ordinary people are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by the private orbits in which they live; their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighborhood; in other milieux, they move vicariously and remain spectators. And the more

aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and of threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel.[109]

As the song hints at, and as the film develops throughout, Russell is fulfilling the role passed down to him, though he is not necessarily aware of the fact that he is caught in a web of social, historical, and political forces. Russell simply accepts the life, the job, and the very masculine identity that has been handed down to him, and as a virtuous representation of his class, chooses not to question it but rather make the most of what he has been given. Unlike Russell, Rodney is at odds with the life that he has been born into. Rodney struggles because he sees how the working class lifestyle does not reward a man for his labour. Rodney has an (at least limited) understanding of the inconsistencies between the life worlds that men like his father and brother have become ingrained in and the neoliberal reality they are fixed within – a reality which no longer sustains the working-class myth that hard work pays off. Russell, like his father, appears doomed to die working at the mill in Braddock, and he has resigned himself to this fact. Rodney, however, wants no part of it, and in a way, he wants more. For those American men of Rodney's socioeconomic standing though, it is hard to come by an alternative to what has been allotted. Much like Tommy, Rodney leaves and enlists in the military, which is thematically presented in both this film and *Warrior* as the only real alternative, or possible way out, for men from this patrilineal and class origin. The irony of this however, as these films suggest, is that regardless of this attempt to escape the reproductive cycle, one finds themselves at some point back in the center of the very same struggle – by pushing up against the boundaries, Rodney is ever more forcefully hurled back to the place where he originated from, and with a multitude of scars to show for it.

By being more aware of the social forces that are defenestrating men like him out into the gutter, like trash from the window of a speeding car, Rodney also ends up feeling more trapped. As the rule stands (at least in the way that these films present the rule) men cannot escape participating in the reproductive arena and still be considered men. By attempting to escape instead of innovatively working his way up the hierarchy, Rodney is

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[109] C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford [England];New York;: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

only further marginalized. Symbolically, this is represented by his role as a front-line trooper. Rodney is lowest in the chain of command; therefore, he is given *no* authority, but is rather constantly driven under the yoke of more powerful men. Rodney has become a broken man as a result of his masculinity being subjugated under an authoritarian hierarchy, which is instantiated by the *breaking* that occurs in the process of becoming a soldier, and also the emotional breaking down that occurs as a result of acting in the capacity of a soldier who is ordered to fulfill both horrific and morally abhorrent duties. After returning from the war, Rodney further experiences the struggle of transitioning into civilian life. Rodney is broken by the war, but he also cannot conform to his place of origin – he is trapped in a cycle of cultural and social reproduction that has resulted in his disinheritance from the patriarchal dividend and only contributed to his mental and emotional degradation. Nonetheless, Rodney does not have a choice but to try to support and provide for his ailing father after Russell is incarcerated for manslaughter. Rodney's task ultimately, and inevitably, ends in failure as he is unable to keep his father alive. Rodney's attempts to support his father are also drawn into tension as he cannot fulfill the role required of him to do so, so he dives ever more headlong into a gambling addiction in the all-too-ironic attempt to drag himself out of the financial pit that he has dug himself into. Rodney's descent thus mirrors the impending death of his father. Rodney is unable to save himself, and is therefore unable to help his father who is also unable to help Rodney because of the chronic illness he developed while working at the mill. The icon of fatherhood dies with the father, and symbolically it follows that the working-class masculinity that he has passed on – the lived conditions of which being the suggested cause of his death – is in its death throes as well, leaving Rodney and Russell to fight for their survival in the progressively collapsing industrial wasteland of America's rust belt.

The tragedy of their father's death stings Russell the hardest, who is still locked away in the penitentiary when the father dies. Russell, being the oldest, is also traditionally expected to be the most responsible. His father's isolated passing while he is trapped within a veritable cage of masculinity is symbolic of his condition as a working-class man, as much as it is of the quiet passing of this type of masculinity. Russell loved his father, and by going to his house before and between his shifts to check

on him (10:48) shows both attentiveness and compassion, but that attentiveness is robbed of him by the long hours of work he must put in at the mill, and his compassion is stultified by the incessant drudgery of his working-class life. Russell cannot keep his father alive, and even though he is withering away in his very own home, the home Russell and Rodney were raised in, Russell is prevented from being there by first being economically strapped to the mill, and then legally trapped in prison. The loss of Russell's father signals a breaking point, one of the obvious sorts in which the family is spiritually broken by his loss. Furthermore, the loss signifies the fracturing of Russell's own spirit, as his father represents the man that he has become, and a masculinity that can no longer survive. The moment in which Russell breaks down and cries in the prison visiting room in front of his brother demonstrates not only an emotional release, but his need to be released from the confining structure of gender relations that he is trapped within (22:49). The mise en scène further contextualizes the symbolism of this moment: Russell is literally in prison, but he is also figuratively trapped within a structure that contains and conforms men – one that reflects the very structuring of gender relations.

Russell's breakdown occurs while trapped within the confines of his own masculinity, and it is *because* he is trapped here that this breakdown occurs. He is, however, not isolated in this moment, as his brother sits across the table from him. In sharing this moment with his brother, one might think some form of catharsis might transpire between Russell and Rodney, but there is nothing apart from the tacit recognition of Russell's pain and agony, paired with the omission of Rodney's own suffering. Even in such a moment of vulnerability, the only thing that can feasibly be done given the constraints imposed by the structuring of gender relations on masculine practice is to tolerate the feelings that have found a way to escape. Rodney is in pain, but masculine logics suggest that there is little point in sharing because what is shared will not be received, and there is also no point in continuing to feel the sadness because it only prolongs the pain, so a man must push it back inside and find ways to keep it hidden. When such pain cannot be kept hidden however, men will tend towards destructive behaviour to sublimate such socially unacceptable emotional outbursts.

Russell's release from prison signifies an important moment in the film, what might be considered a false climax – a moment of promise and hope for Russell, and thereby the rest of the story. This new hope that Russell's release signifies however is betrayed by Russell's inability to save his brother, who is not only drifting further and further away from Russell, but is also falling deeper down the hole of self-destruction. Rodney and Russell's relationship is close, but terse. Russell looks out for Rodney by working extra shifts at the mill to pay off his debts to the local loan shark so that Rodney doesn't get physically harmed, but in doing so misses much of the point of being a supportive figure in his brother's life. Rodney is emotionally damaged from his time in the war. Knowing nothing other than soldiering, but also having been excreted from the war effort, he turns – much out of desperation – to gambling on horse races. Instead of being physically present for his brother, Russell is working extra to solve Rodney's financial problems for him. Because Russell is not physically present, he is also limited in his ability to be emotionally present. The only emotional guidance Russell can provide to Rodney when he is with him is in the form of punitive remarks, such as when Russell makes a dig about meeting at John Petty's bar for a beer after he's caught Rodney gambling Petty's money away (11:21).

Russell loves his brother, just as he loved his father, that much is clear; however, their relationship as brothers is constrained by the limitations imposed by their own masculinities. The very configurations of practice that are reinforced and deemed acceptable among working-class men also doom them. What Russell does to be a good brother falls along the same lines as what he has observed to be necessary to be a good father: to work hard, protect, and provide for those you care about. Russell is not a bad man per se, he is simply a man – one who is attempting to make the most of what has been passed down to him. The sad irony of this is that what has been passed down has little to offer him, certainly nothing equal to what he proves to be intellectually and morally capable of.

The relationship between Russell and Rodney helps further explain the conflict present between both these men and their masculinities. With Rodney spiraling down the drain pipe of masculine self-destruction, Russell feels it is his duty to pull him free. The

issue with this is that Russell's own life is being pulled in ever closer to the center of the very same vortex. When Russell finds Rodney passed out on their late father's couch, and discovers the bloody bandages discarded in the trash bin, he pieces together that Rodney has been fighting for cash. Russell looks on despondently, wondering what he can do for his unlucky brother before draping a blanket over him and heading off to work (33:15). The following scene begins with Russell waiting pensively for Rodney in the living room, with over-exposed light from the window behind him pastorally washing over the wood paneled walls and the tired old furniture that is being sat in by a tired but not-so-old man. Nonetheless, Russell blends into this antiquated setting. Rodney, however, does not.

Russell's ensuing behaviour is iconically father-like: stern, but with a genuine air of concern for Rodney's well-being. Russell asks Rodney to show him his hands as a way of confronting him about the racket he's caught up in. Rodney jokingly, though still hostilely, shows Russell his middle finger. Not tolerating it, Russell stands up and moves towards Rodney, a tracking shot following him to the point where he is close enough to grab Rodney's hands, and close enough so that the viewer can see his hands as well. The closing of this spatial gap speaks to a distance that Russell is trying to cross between himself and his brother. When Russell implores Rodney once again to show him his hands, he is both more assertive and more responsive. Russell grabs Rodney's hands to look at them, but he does so tenderly, as it is not his intention to simply berate his brother, but to address the issue – quite literally – at hand (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Brothers Holding Hands. ©Apian Way, 2013.

Russell wants to help Rodney, and as a point of saying that he knows what's going on, Russell pulls the bandages out of his pocket to show his attention. Rodney is uncomfortable with the intimacy of the confrontation, but even considering how physically close the two are to one another in this scene, there is no tone of anger or aggression from Russell. Still, Russell is challenged in his ability to commiserate with his brother. Russell's quiet voice, slow movements, and calm demeanour are betrayed by his inability to communicate effectively. As a way of broaching the topic, Russell asks Rodney "Is this the best you can do?", to which Rodney responds, "What do you think I should do?" Russell sincerely contemplates this question and follows up by suggesting "Shovel asphalt for the highway department, I don't know... sell fucking shoes?" (35:19). Rodney scoffs at these suggestions, which leads Russell to think that Rodney believes such jobs are beneath him. Russell's final suggestion is that Rodney should come work at the mill with him, telling Rodney that his boss will give him a job. Russell is eager to give Rodney a way out, but all that Russell is able to offer are more working-class solutions to working-class problems, and when the issue at the heart of it all is working-class masculinity, Russell's intervention manifests as nothing more than a form of social constraint – the consequences of which involve pushing Rodney back in line with the gender norms and expectations that were imparted to both of them. Neither brother can be

blamed for their limited imaginations: they are both culturally enframed within this lifestyle, and therefore are only able to work with the social and cultural materials that are available to him.

Rodney, as to be expected, does not take Russell up on his offer, telling him "I'd rather be fucking dead – fuck the mill" (35:40). Russell, who has been composed this entire time, starts to lose his patience. He has – as far as he knows – put himself out there to try and help Rodney, only to be the target of Rodney's disrespect. Staggering over Rodney's insult, Russell reacts: "Fuck the mill? I work at the mill you little fucker," he says while gesticulating toward himself, "it was good enough for me, it was good enough for our dad." Russell puts it all on the table, and then Rodney throws it back at him, saying: "the fucking mill killed our dad!" (35:54). It is at this point that the tension at the heart of the film becomes most clear: it is not enough to be a working-class man anymore, and moreover, that the status of working-class masculinity is dying.

Now that everything seems to have been said between the two, Rodney tries to break away from the conversation; however, Russell wants to save their discussion from ending in anger. He tries to tell Rodney in a calm and consoling voice that "There's nothing wrong with working for a living" (36:09), which instead of pacifying their conflict only exacerbates it. The emotional eruption that follows is indicative of the fact that Rodney does not need more of the same – that all this paternal influence has not gotten him anywhere that he wants to be. Rodney shows Russell the scar that runs from his lower abdomen to his pectoral, asking him: "Is that working for a living? Is it working for a living when I carried my best friend's legs under this arm, and the rest of him under this arm? I saw a fucking baby with its head cut off … I gave my fucking life for this country, that's not work?" then, kicking the trash can, Rodney screams directly into Russell's face "and what's it fucking done for me?" (36:40). Rodney pulls his shirt up so that it covers his face, then hysterically yells into the darkness of the blinding fabric before bolting out of the house, telling Russell to fuck himself. The life that Rodney has led has done nothing but bring him closer to pain and misery, and ultimately closer to death, to the point where Rodney doesn't even see himself as alive anymore. In saying "I gave my life for this country," he is saying that he didn't have a life to come back to after

the war, much like Tommy in *Warrior*. There is nowhere else for Rodney to go except down the drain-pipe. He is a man living in his own epilogue, just waiting for the story to end. And Russell, similarly, is being pulled in from the edges of his own acquiescence, in a head over heels tumble down the same culvert toward oblivion.

In *Manchester by the Sea,* the loss of the father and the loss of the brother are one and the same incident, signaling both the demise of working-class masculinity, and the inability of men to save it from its imminent doom. The film takes place in medias res, though it opens with a flashback of Lee's brother Joe and Lee's young nephew, Patrick, recreationally fishing off Joe's commercial vessel. The scene is significant because it establishes a point of reference from which to understand the character development of Lee, and his relationship with Patrick. In this scene the camera focusses on Lee and Patrick who are fooling around on the deck while Joe is at the helm, driving the boat. Lee is caught up in a jovial conversation with Patrick – an emotional tone that we do not see from Lee in his present context – about who would be the best man to have on a desert island. Lee sets up the scenario by saying: "There's a lot of stuff that he [Joe] just doesn't understand about the world that I understand that makes – that makes all my actions when I move through the world – I do things better because I can see it all laid out like a map. Have you ever looked at a map? … your father's a perfectly good guy, but there's just a lot of stuff that he doesn't understand about the world that I understand" (02:21). Jokingly, Lee is attempting to elevate himself above Joe as a man in Patrick's eyes. The reason for this is because Lee is the younger brother of the two, and as the uncle to Patrick, knows he cannot live up to the same standard as Joe, but is nonetheless making a mockery of this fact to evince his acceptance of it. Patrick then tries to run to his dad to stand up for him, when Lee laughingly grabs him saying: "Wait … I haven't asked you a question!" followed by "if you could take one guy to an island with you and you knew you'd be safe because he was the best man, and he was going to figure out how to survive, he was going to make everything – he was going to make the world a good place on the island, he was going to keep you happy – he is the best man for the job, no matter what. If it was between me and your father, who would you say?" to which Patrick inevitably responds, "my daddy" (03:30). The question is also framed by the mise en scène, in which the guys are sailing towards an island, which later in this

flashback sequence Lee refers to as Misery Island. Even though this happens to be the actual name of the island, allegorically it suggests that the three of them are heading towards desolation and misery, and only two of them will survive.

The best man for the job, as selected by Patrick, does not live, however. The symbolic irony of this is important, because as these films suggest, the best man can no longer be a working-class man. Joe is, from the very opening scene, symbolic of working-class masculinity in its pre-eminence – the status of which can no longer survive, and therefore neither can Joe. The following scene focusses on Lee in the present, listlessly working as a janitor fixing bathrooms in apartment complexes. Lee is then contacted by Joe's colleague, George (C.J Wilson), who tells Lee that Joe has been hospitalized. By the time Lee drives to Manchester from Quincy, Joe is already dead. Lee deals with the news in an apathetic manner that suggests he doesn't know how to feel any worse about his life than he already does. The only evidence of emotionality that comes across from Lee is a momentary outburst in which he concedes: "Fuck this..." (18:08), before he composes himself and apologizes. The flat affect that characterizes Lee is contrasted with George, whose manner is as much working-class as Lee's is, but cannot stop himself from spontaneously bursting into tears. As Lee is riding the elevator down to the morgue to see his brother, his memory flashes back to the moment when Joe was first diagnosed with congestive heart failure (20:17). What this scene shows is firstly a terminal diagnosis of Joe, who represents the successful working-class man. Following this diagnosis, Joe's wife becomes distraught and leaves Joe in the hospital room with his father and brother, symbolizing the loss of status of working-class masculinity in the reproductive arena. Furthermore, Joe is left solely in the presence of his father, who is never seen again in the present context of the film, which suggests that he passes away in the interim, and Lee who in the end is unable to help his brother survive, suggesting that he indeed is not the best man, but nonetheless must live on. That Lee must live where Joe must die symbolizes how working-class masculinity has become progressively marginalized in relation to neoliberal hegemonic masculinity.

With Joe's passing, Lee is expected to take care of Patrick. The relationship between Lee and Patrick is at this point best described as distant and formal, which is

largely due to the fact that Lee only comes around when Joe has had a medical emergency (35:12). The film places a great deal of emphasis on the interpersonal struggles experienced by both Lee and Patrick, and especially the complications in the development of their relationship, as neither of them ever appear adequately willing or capable in their ability to connect with or understand one another. Lee, being a broken man due to his own past tragedy, does not see himself as a fit figure to take care of anyone, and constantly betrays his pseudo-paternal commitment to his nephew. Patrick in turn routinely exhibits the emotional processing malfunctions one would expect from most teenagers. As another example of the tragic irony of masculinity as seen through assessing the gender relations in this film, Patrick's emotional limitations hardly seem to stand out when compared to Lee, who even as a fully-grown man seems to possess even less capacity to function emotionally than Patrick. The contrast of emotional maturity between the two suggests that working-class masculinity – as a configuration of practice – is emotionally paralyzing.

The circumstance that defines Lee as an altogether broken man, characterized by an incessant preoccupation with avoiding his inner turmoil, is that several years past his children died in a house fire that was ultimately his fault. The event is reflected upon by Lee while he is sitting in the lawyer's office, going over the details of Joe's will. Without Lee's knowledge, Joe listed him as Patrick's guardian in the event if his death. Aghast by the decision outlined in the will, Lee exclaims: "I can't be his guardian!" (49:32), which, as a form of exposition, is a way of saying that he is both not fit to take care of anyone because of the tragedy of his past, and that because of this tragedy he is not emotionally fit to be involved in anyone's life anymore. As Lee looks from the window of the lawyer's office over the frozen waters in the harbour, the viewer is confronted with the imagery of a man who, while he exists in the present, is forever trapped in the frozen waters of his distant past. When the lawyer remarks, "it was my impression that you'd spent a lot of time here, over the years," Lee must confront the fact that it was out of necessity, and that he doesn't belong in Manchester now, saying: "I was just the backup. I came up here to look after Patty, yeah, if Joe was in the hospital after my father couldn't do it, but we – it was supposed to be [uncle] Donny. I'm just the backup…" (51:20). Lee's flight from Manchester is a testament to this – at least in terms of his *belief* that he

now must be exiled as some form of self-imposed penance for his dereliction of duty as a father – as well as the reason why he avoids any social interactions that might involve emotional investment. Lee's return to Manchester is thus a painful enterprise for him, as much as having the role of being Patrick's guardian foisted upon him. Lee cannot live out the rest of his days in quiet solitude now, while simply waiting to die, as much as he believes he should, and he struggles with the responsibility of having to be a surrogate father figure for Patrick, who himself is struggling in his need for such a figure who is never present. Lee is broken but must still seem put together. He is constrained because he must seem like he is in control, and so the only emotions that ever escapes his façade are passive frustration and sudden anger.

As Lee is leaving the lawyer's office, Patrick hassles him, asking him "Where are we going, to the orphanage?" to which Lee simply tell him to "shut up" (1:04:11). Lee refuses the idea with the lawyer that Patrick be sent to a group home, and now must find a way to, somehow, make everything work out. The scene then ends on another close-up shot in front of the window looking out at the frozen lake, suggesting that he is forced to operate from within this metaphorical setting. Once out of the office, Lee explains to Patrick that they're going to have to get rid of Joe's boat because it's going to cost them too much to maintain, and that Patrick is too young to operate it. Patrick however, doesn't want to sell the boat, because it's one of his only ties to his father and the memories that they shared. Furthermore, it's a symbol of the working-class masculinity that would be passed on from Joe to Patrick. Lee does not – can not – understand Patrick's side, as he is only able to address the problems set before him without feeling, which is to say that his role now as a father figure is to think purely logically for the well-being of Patrick, at the same time needing to disregard his emotions (or so he thinks).

The inability to effectively communicate is a prominent theme within this film, something that will be addressed more in Chapter 3, but should first be understood as socio-relational element within the text. Patrick is passionate about retaining his father's boat, seeing himself embarking on the same life course as his dad after he's finished high school, which is noted late in the film when he tells Lee he does not plan to go to college (2:11:24). Lee, however, is dispassionate about the boat because to him it is

merely an object that stands in the way of him clearing an unburdened path for Patrick's future. The boat here is synonymous with Joe's masculinity, and moreover the very heart of working-class masculinity. As Joe's heart fails before his time, so too does the heart within the boat: the engine. The boat is the vital organ of Joe's masculinity because it is the object from which all his labours extend, as well as revolve around. The boat *is* Joe's masculinity, something he has been directing while his brother and son ride along with him (as in the opening seen) – something that presumably cannot survive. By Lee considering to sell the boat, he is metaphorically considering the best future for Patrick, one which is not bound up with a dying form of masculinity. Lee and Patrick's dispute ends with Lee saying: "Patty, I swear to God, I'm going to knock your fuckin' block off" (1:05:01), which even though he's not serious, attracts the criticism of a bystander, who makes the sarcastic comment: "great parenting...". Lee is functioning the only way he knows how but is not adequate to be a functioning father, as the remark suggests, which speaks to his state of arrested development as a working-class man, and furthermore, the inability of working-class masculinity to continue working within neoliberal society.

Both Lee and Patrick's positions are recapitulated in the following scene where the two go to confer with George about their options regarding the boat. Lee is still desperate to flee to Boston, even though, as Patrick later points out, all he has is a room and a job as a janitor which he can do anywhere, while Patrick explains: "All my friends are here. I'm on the hockey team. I'm on the basketball team … I work on George's boat two days a week. I got two girlfriends, and I'm in a band" (1:26:50). In his interaction with George, Lee eagerly asks if George would want to be Patrick's guardian (1:06:25). George uncomfortably has to refuse, which leads to Patrick criticizing Lee's etiquette on their way out, asking him: "Are you brain damaged? You can't just talk to people like that. You don't want to be my guardian, that's fine with me" (1:06:50), to which Lee responds, "It's not that, it's just the logistics…". Patrick doesn't understand Lee's condition, and so assumes that he is unwanted by Lee. This lack of understanding however is not Patrick's fault, as Lee is unable to communicate in a way that expresses his condition while simultaneously maintaining the strength – or at least the appearance of strength – needed to act as a father-figure. By Lee being emotionally crippled –

only being able to explain things "logistically" – Patrick in turn suffers as well, thinking similarly that he cannot possibly connect emotionally with others because others do not – or can not – care about the way he feels.

The inefficacy of communication between Lee and Patrick is representative of the reproductive cycle by which patriarchal norms are transmitted from one generation of men to another. Working-class men are not encouraged to share their feelings, or communicate beyond the most basic ideas, lest what they say expose some weakness – some crack in the patriarchal armour. Furthermore, it shows that the transmission of such norms and practices is not necessarily a boon, but rather can be a blight upon men, especially for working-class men. Even though Lee is dedicated to helping Patrick, he cannot help but spread his affliction, which happens to be deeply rooted in his masculinity. This is not to say that Lee does not earnestly try to help Patrick, it's just that the configuration of his masculinity limits him. The limitations of Lee's masculinity also happen to speak louder than any words he manages to share (literal and figurative), demonstrated in the scene in which Patrick finally breaks down over his father's death. Patrick is bothered by the reality that his father's body must remain frozen until the spring, so that they can bury him when the ground thaws. Lee struggles to explain away Patrick's concern, only mustering an empty platitude about how "It isn't him, because he's gone. It's just his body" (1:10:40), which of course fails to put Patrick at ease. As the two of them climb into Lee's car, Patrick continues to press on Lee about how uncomfortable he is with his father being left in a freezer. The scene is compelling insofar as it demonstrates mimetic features on both sides of the character relation. Patrick is giving Lee a hard time about how cold it is in the car. Despite Lee explaining that the car takes some time to warm up, Patrick launches into him about how old the car is, and finishes his polemic by saying: "Why don't we keep my dad in here for the next three months? We'd save a fucking fortune" (1:11:28). Patrick is feeding his emotional discomfort through a prism of anger and frustration as a way of making a point to his uncle, who like many working-class men only know how to operate within those emotional frequencies. In response, Lee shouts: "Would you shut the fuck up about the freezer? Want me to have a nervous breakdown because there's undertakers and a funeral?" (1:11:38). Lee is in one way making a mockery of a very real situation that he is

facing, but not allowing himself to give into. Lee knows from experience that should he allow any of his repressed emotions to arise during this period, he is liable to break down, and that is why he must maintain a stoic edifice in the face of adversity. The obvious complication with this is that men become conditioned to live out their lives this way, never addressing the emotions they continuously refuse to feel. It gets to a point – presumably – where one chip in the granite will bring down the entire column, so one must go to all lengths to avoid exposure. We see fragility especially played out via Lee's drinking habits which lead to violent conflict, though this will be addressed in Chapter 3. Patrick however is still learning. Lee's mockery foreshadows Patrick's emotional breakdown, which is not surprising since the two share in the same masculine condition, Lee is just further along.

The following night while Patrick is looking through the fridge for a snack, he opens the freezer and several packages of frozen meat fall out. After repeatedly trying to shove the meat back inside, and slamming the freezer door without success, Patrick breaks down crying, and tells Lee that he thinks he's having a panic attack (1:29:48). The imagery of the frozen meat, and its association with Patrick's father being frozen in a freezer, causes Patrick's panic attack. Furthermore, the event and Patrick's behaviour are an index for Patrick's inner turmoil: he is trying to keep his feelings about the death of his father coldly packed away, but despite his best efforts, they proceed to burst out and take him by surprise. In what follows, Lee must attempt to help Patrick with what is happening, but also betrays his inability tend to any of Patrick's real issues. Lee goes through a list of things Patrick might want him to do, such as get rid of the food, take Patrick to a hospital, or call his friends, repeatedly asking him: "What do you want me to do?" (1:29:55). Where Patrick is clearly not in a position to know what he needs, given he doesn't even know what's happening to him, Lee, despite himself, still expects Patrick to provide him with a rational answer – something Lee can tend to concretely, because he is incapable of doing anything else. Lee, much out of panic himself, defers the responsibility of tending to Patrick's emotional problems because he is not even capable of tending to his own. The exposure of this gender-deep incapacity speaks voluminously to the more general predicament by which men in kind cannot save each other from the conditions of their masculine destruction.

Patrick bolts upstairs and locks his door to escape from his badgering uncle who is clearly overwhelming him. Lee reacts by following him up, then asking Patrick to open the door, who in turn refuses, telling Lee to fuck off (1:30:09). In what is perhaps the most comically emphatic and awkwardly masculine scene of the film, Lee kicks Patrick's door in, demanding to know if Patrick is alright, worriedly shouting: "I said open the door. Are you having a breakdown? Should we take you to the hospital?" Patrick in turn has to calm Lee down, assuring Lee that he's fine, and that he's "just freaking out" (as if that somehow qualifies as being fine). The humour of this scene however does not detract from its emotional realism. Lee is on auto-pilot, not having a versatile array of emotional tools to help fix Patrick's problems, he clumsily relies on what he has, and uses physical force to bypass physical obstacles in an attempt to get close enough to help solve Patrick's emotional crisis. Even once inside the room, Lee is unable to do much at all accept sit in a chair beside Patrick's bed, and wait for him to calm down. As with some remedial system of logic shared among many men, an attempt, or at least a feigned attempt, to maintain physical proximity is enough to help other men with their problems.

Neither of them knows how to deal with their problems, and Lee cannot show Patrick how to survive as a man through reference to his own masculinity, because his own masculinity is one that has been metaphorically abandoned – it has become untenable, and dialectically jettisoned from the vessel of hegemonic masculinity. His inability to rise to the occasion, such as demonstrated in the aforementioned scene, is exacerbated by his past failure to keep his family alive, a traumatic event that, like Coleridge's albatross, is hung from Lee's neck to serve of a constant reminder of his undoing. The loss of Lee's family symbolizes his inability to compete in the reproductive arena as a working-class man. The ensuing marginalization of Lee's masculinity is thus indexed by his perpetual state of listlessness. He has nowhere to be, and nothing to do of any consequence now, and that, as he finally suggests to Patrick, is why he cannot keep living like the father that he can never be. Lee is too broken and dejected to fill the role, he has written himself off as a capable man, as much as working-class masculinity has been written off as a configuration of practice that is conducive with the neoliberal hegemonic form. This is most prominently displayed near the end of the film when Lee explains to Patrick the arrangement that he's made, telling Patrick that he plans to move

back to Boston and work as a custodian once again, but that Patrick won't have to come because George plans to adopt him and take care of him until he is of age to take on the estate. Lee knows that he cannot guide Patrick along, and so sets everything up, from replacing the boat engine to renting out the house, so that Patrick can make his own decisions when he's of age, and so he doesn't have to rely on Lee. All Lee can do is help complete the cycle of cultural and social reproduction that both are trapped in, but he cannot do more than that. Patrick falls to sorrow once it occurs to him that Lee won't be around anymore, and Lee has to reassure Patrick that he does care about him, but that he cannot stay because, as he says in the most telling moment of exposition, he simply "can't beat it" (2:06:49), which he then repeats for further emphasis. Lee cannot beat his past, but he also cannot beat the man Joe was. Lee knows he cannot be the man at the helm of the boat because that man no longer exists, both literally in the sense of Joe being dead and therefore physically irreplaceable, and metaphorically in the sense that working-class masculinity is no longer in the position to navigate the course of hegemonic masculine norms and practices – it has become rudderless. Therefore, Lee also cannot beat, or get past, the limitations of his masculinity; however, after he confesses this to Patrick, we see for the first time an honest attempt by Lee to console Patrick, by wrapping him in a warm embrace. Lee's instance of opening up also allows him a moment of true compassion, whereby the cold silence of the frozen waters between them are melted if only for a brief moment by this revealing, suggesting that life as symbolized by the closeness of social relations is possible if one is willing to adjust their sails to the tides of change.

Gender is a relational term. Therefore, by reading into the aspects of social interaction between men, including the often unaccounted for processes of social and cultural reproduction between fathers and sons, it is possible to not only delineate how working-class masculinity is represented in distinction from other configurations, but also to gain insight into the conditions by which working-class masculinity has become engorged in crisis tendencies. The theme of loss and discontinuity of paternal bonds in these texts has suggested that where working-class masculinity is something that has been passed on from father to son, it is now a configuration of practice that is fading due to its incompatibility with the neoliberal hegemonic ideal. The men in these films can no longer rely on working-class masculinity to garner them the privilege it once did, or find resolve

in the support of other working-class men, because there is nothing that can be done at this point to fix what has already been written off as eternally broken. As brothers in these texts fail to support each other, their lives become pulled in closer to the vortex of crisis that threatens to swallow them whole. The following chapter discusses in greater detail how working-class masculinity has been marginalized as a configuration of practice in relation to the neoliberal hegemonic configuration, with particular emphasis placed on how working-class practice as social action has contributed to the (self)destruction of working-class men, and their positions within society.

Chapter 3: Gendered Practice

Work, Crisis, and Violence

Those who have crossed

With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom

Remember us – if at all – not as lost

Violent souls, but only

As the hollow men

The stuffed men

– T.S Eliot

The previous chapter's focus on gender relations has been an important step toward making legible not only the masculinities of the characters in these texts, but also toward framing the problems of lived experience among working-class men in post-2008 America. Since Connell explains that masculinities are "configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting,"[110] to develop a full understanding of how working-class masculinity is represented in these films, it is necessary to examine in what ways working-class practices are configured. It is then by examining such practices that insight can be gained into what the films have to say about the conditions of working-class masculinity in America at this time.

This chapter will begin with a close reading of how these men live out their masculinities through forms of work. Work in this sense can be understood as a body-reflexive practice, which informs men's masculinities through social action. As Connell explains, bodies are "both objects and agents of practice."[111] Since gender is constituted in practice, masculinity must be understood as being mediated through the body, and it is then by acting out one's masculinity that the logics of the practice are reconstituted in the act, and thereby the body. Since work is a form of social action that is mediated through

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[110] R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 836.

[111] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 61.

the body, who these men are is to a large extent defined by the type of work that they do and how they do it. Reading into the working practices of working-class men will assist us in developing insight into the conditions of working-class masculinity in these films. Since work is an economic practice, an analysis of the work-oriented nature of these men's lives also helps situate these men's masculinities in their economy contexts. The struggle to provide is a prominent theme throughout these films, one that has already been touched on lightly in Chapter 2 but will be explored more thoroughly in the following section. Access to resources is one of, if not the most important features, of hegemonic masculinity under capitalism. To be competitive in the reproductive arena a man must have the ability to provide for that which gives him his reproductive capacity: the family. To support the patriarchy, men must be able to reproduce it, which is meant literally, but also reproduce their position in it by passing on patriarchal norms. Men, therefore, must also maintain their status, and their access to resources in order to compete. The men in these films show that their very masculinities – that being the power they have because of their masculine status – are tied not only to working practices, but moreover to their ability to provide. The lack of access to resources, and the ensuing struggle experienced by these men is an analogue of their loss of access to the patriarchal dividend. Working is no longer enough for these men to sustain themselves in the economy as much as working-class masculinity is no longer an adequate configuration of practice in relation to neoliberal hegemonic masculinity.

Masculinities are not only constructed through the work that men do but are also contextualized within the working-class cultural milieux that men inhabit. Codes of behaviour are an aspect of such configurations, insofar as the way men expect other men to act not only reinforces patriarchal norms, but provides men with a road map of how to live out their lives. The dogmatic following of such informal rules and logics however can be a problem for men, and what these films show, as will be analyzed in the following section, is how such ritualized practices can lead to, or be the cause for, moments of extreme personal crisis. The failed patriarch is thus another dominant theme that arises in these films, and one that follows from the struggle to provide. As established in Chapter 2, what these films show is that working-class masculinity is longer complicit with neoliberal hegemonic masculinity. As demonstrated through variations of masculine

practice, these films show how these men's actions lead to their own undoing because such actions no longer align with the dominant configuration of masculinity, and thus they are no longer acceptable within society. With the prowess of their masculinities compromised, these men proceed through crisis and into socially destructive violence, a violence that represents the struggle to hold onto their former positioning, and a violence that is used in protest as a last resort against total emasculation.

Struggling Providers and Failed Patriarchs

In *Warrior* the struggle to provide is most acutely demonstrated through the character of Brendan Conlon. Although Brendan himself is not a working-class man, what his financial struggles show most of all is the very real threat of being pushed down and out of his complicit, middle-class status. It is through contrast then that Brendan's struggles represent the destitution of working-class masculinity, as to fall from his position would mean to lose everything that he has materially, and therefore all of that which makes him a successful man. What distinguishes Brendan from Tommy most is his complicit status, which is at first evidenced by the concessions he makes by being a father and a husband, but also through his job as a teacher, he is shown teaching a new generation of men. The intelligence that Brendan is fostering can, in this sense, be understood as a key ingredient of entrepreneurial success under neoliberalism. At the same time however, what Brendan is teaching in his physics lecture is the science behind force, which represents the logics of violence being harmonized within the current hegemonic discourse. In this scene a male student demonstrates a use of force which is sanctioned by the symbolic hegemonic figure, Brendan. While being cajoled by his peers in the sterile classroom environment that frames the environment insofar as it makes the ensuing act seem non-violent – such as how violence has been progressively rendered more invisible – Tito (Carlos Miranda) takes a bat and flexes performatively before crushing an object on the desk. Tito does this while Brendan is calmly explaining to him that "if you have enough acceleration, you might have a chance of breaking the body at rest" (12:09), and once the demonstration is complete, Brendan confirms with the class that they've internalized the logics behind the show of force, to which another student assures him: "force equals mass times acceleration" (12:37).

The scene ends with Brendan moving on to explain Newton's third law: "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction" (12:55). Brendan then extrapolates by means of a behavioural infraction within the classroom, that "if Casey does not stop the action of sending texts in class and tell her posse outside to beat it, then my reaction might be to send her down to principle Zito's (Kevin Dunn) office – thus setting the world back into proper balance" (13:01). In saying this, Brendan establishes himself as a disciplinary figure, one with the authority to regulate the behaviours of others because of his complicity with hegemonic masculinity. Brendan's warning to the student also reinforces patriarchal dominance. Since Brendan is a male disciplinarian and the student is a female subject, the disciplining of her insubordinate behaviour would serve to force her back into a position of subordination in relation to him. Furthermore, Brendan's quoting of Newton's third law also establishes a parallel between the laws of physics and the laws of family that are presented as being just as immutable. The course Brendan is set on in this film resembles the same closed-ended logical certitude as his physics lesson: he must provide for and protect his family, or be nothing at all.

Brendan's complicity with hegemonic masculinity is dependent on his access to resources. Brendan has a good job that, when paired with his wife's income is good enough to afford a nice house for their family in a suburban neighbourhood, but not a job that is good enough to sustain the financial shock of his daughter's heart surgery. Even with three jobs between him and his wife, Brendan is struggling to keep his head above water. Being upside down on his mortgage and close to drowning, and having already refinanced twice, there's very little Brendan can do to save his house from being foreclosed on by the bank. In pleading with the banker who oversees his account, Brendan once more explains his situation, as he has before to the uncaring banker, whose forgetfulness serves as an index for the indifference that financial institutions hold towards their borrowers. After asking the banker if there's anything that can be done to help him stabilize his finances, the banker responds: "have you considered bankruptcy? It's a viable option. There's no shame in this these days" (18:21). The implication is that because so many people were forced into similar circumstances as a result of the 2008 market crash, that it is no longer a shameful thing to lose everything, but rather actually something that has become quite normal – normalized destitution. Brendan refuses the

option, saying "That's not how I do things" (18:30), which is a statement that arises not simply out of ego-defence, but moreover from a deeply entrenched understanding of what it means to be a man. Brendan's masculinity, a masculinity that was born of working-class origins but since has been socially elevated, has no room for the practice of submission.

Having previously been a professional mixed martial arts fighter in the UFC, Brendan reverts to moonlighting in amateur MMA events in his local area to make extra income; however, by doing so Brendan comes into conflict with both his wife and his boss. The reason Brendan left the life of fighting in the first place was because he had incurred a traumatic injury in the ring and made a concession to his wife who refused to ever see Brendan so seriously damaged again. By choosing to fall back on this avenue of work, Brendan must lie to his wife, which compromises the integrity of their marriage and thereby symbolically jeopardises the stability of his masculinity which depends on it. The cuts and bruises that he receives while pursuing this after-hours work inevitably leads to discovery by his wife, but also lands him in a chair before his boss. In an ironic turn of events, it is Brendan who ends up sitting before principal Zito. Zito establishes that such practices are not conducive with his role as a teacher, telling Brendan: "You're a God damn teacher, you got no business in the ring with those animals" (33:11), implying that the overt use of violence is a practice that belongs to a lower and more despicable class of men. Coming clean, Brendan informs Zito: "I used to be one of those animals … I guess I forgot to put that down on my application" (33:16), suggesting that his current status is predicated on the denial of his working-class origins, origins that are now compromising all that he has reconfigured in order to succeed as a man. Although Zito is sympathetic with Brendan's situation, the superintendent proves not so tolerant. As a result, Brendan is suspended without pay for failing to comply with the behavioural standards expected of teaching professionals, which can be extrapolated as a failure to comply with masculine practices that are conducive to the hegemonic ideal. Because of his suspension, Brendan's access to resources becomes even more limited, putting him at even greater risk of losing access to the patriarchal dividend.

Brendan's very masculinity begins to fall into crisis, a crisis which proceeds from his inability to provide, and exacerbated by his naive attempt to use hyper-masculine solutions to solve masculine problems – solutions that betray his working-class origins and are as much a cause for social dismissal as the dismissal from his job. Brendan is slowly being pulled in from the outer edges of a masculine-economic vortex which he has hitherto managed to swim clear of. By resorting to such primitive means of financial restoration, Brendan's violence undoes him, and only pulls him into closer and more desperate contact with further violence. It is by the logics of his masculinity that he must fight for the stability of his family and his status as a man, which the film frames as being mutually reinforcing. Where Brendan's daughter's heart symbolizes the vital essence of his family, the home that he is about to lose symbolizes his paternal responsibility as a provider and protector. Presumably, Brendan cannot lose one and maintain the other, which puts him in a double-bind that he believes he must fight his way out of. The violent conflict that Brendan becomes embroiled in is thus representative of the code of practice that is deeply embedded in his masculinity: a code that suggests men must fight for their place, and for what is theirs; a code that is literal and made manifest in the diegesis through violent competition.

Temporarily unemployed and without a stable source of income, Brendan commits to fighting for cash in as many local low-tier MMA events as he can to keep his family afloat. In order to compete at this frequency however Brendan must also train regularly, and so returns to his former coach, Frank Campana (Frank Grillo), with hands open and no where else to turn. In this scene Brendan tells Frank that he needs to ask a favour of him, and in doing so confides in Frank that he is on the brink of financial collapse, and close to losing his house. Frank misconstrues what Brendan is asking for and calmly offers to do what he can in terms of providing Brendan with a loan. Brendan refuses the offer in a tone that suggests he would be ashamed to even ask for such a thing, suggesting that the code of practice that Brendan operates by prevents him from lowering himself to ever ask for money, because to do such a thing would demonstrate that he was dependent on other men to provide him with the resources needed to support the very thing which makes him a patriarch. Brendan instead asks Frank to help train him so that he can fight tooth and nail in the proverbial dog pits of small-town entertainment venues,

destroying himself and other men in a spectacle of violence so that he can "take home the bacon", and keep his family afloat (23:29).

Brendan is caught in a web of masculine (self)destruction and the most logical option happens to also be the most illogical. After Frank's main fighter is injured during a sparring session, Brendan presses Frank to let him fill the empty spot in the Sparta competition, which happens to be worth five million dollars. Frank accepts, albeit reluctantly because of how under-prepared Brendan is – even Brendan knows that he does not stand much of a chance in the competition – but nonetheless he is driven by desperation to maintain his status. Even though the practice of fighting has cost Brendan his job, the loss of which is certainly going to cost him his house, he is convinced that he must fight for it all or lose everything. However his reasoning is challenged by his wife who, unlike Brendan, and logically so, does not value the integrity that Brendan struggles so hard to maintain by adhering to the strictures of his code of practice. "It's a lot of money Tess," Brendan tells her, trying to convince her that this is their one way out from impending destitution, which is really the only option that will allow him to both save his family and maintain his status as man. Tess is not concerned with the threat to Brendan's masculinity, but is more focussed on the well-being of the family, *including* him, as she explains, "I don't give a shit about the money Brendan, and I told you that, I'm going to end up cashing in your life insurance policy before we pick up that prize money" (1:02:14). Brendan attempts to assuage her fears by promising that he's not going to get killed in the ring, but Tess continues to explain how flawed his thinking is: "You're not going to get killed but you promise me you're not going to get hurt? You're not going to end up in the hospital? You're not going to end up paralyzed? You'll have no prize money, we'll have no house, we have payments for hospital bills...", to which Brendan interjects, "I promise you this, if I don't try, in three weeks they're going to take the house. How's that for a promise?" (1:02:38). Brendan is so tightly bound within his configuration of practice that he will not allow himself to consider another alternative. Brendan has already unintentionally compromised his status by falling back on practices that do not align with his current configuration, so he will not entertain any option other than that which will allow him to restore his place in the internal hegemonic hierarchy.

Brendan's house, and therefore his masculinity, is being threatened by foreclosure – a threat that represents the crisis experienced by millions of Americans after 2008. He is desperate to preserve his and his family's middle-class lifestyle. Brendan's desperation is based on having everything to lose, where his brother Tommy represents a man who has already lost everything. Tommy's resignation is set in contrast to Brendan's desperation, because all that Tommy stands to gain is money. Where the superlative access to resources is certainly a condition upon which hegemonic status is achieved, one must still act accordingly. Without reconfiguring his masculinity, such a cash prize would not solve the problem of Tommy's dejected masculinity. Tommy is already a broken man being swallowed by the vortex, so he fights out of protest, demanding to be witnessed, and determined to inflict the pain of his losses on other. Such determination, although perhaps perceived as sadistic, is really a form of communication. Tommy is acting his crisis out, the crisis of his life, and the crisis of his masculinity, and the only way he knows how to communicate this is through violence. First it is violent protest as public spectacle, second as a crucible through which Tommy and Brendan resolve their differences.

Out of the Furnace is, at its thematic foundation, a film about survival, and about men surviving each other. Although a great deal of the film focuses on the theme of inter-masculine violence, at its core it addresses, similarly to *Warrior*, all that is involved in keeping one's masculinity alive. The struggle to provide is a theme that foregrounds this text, because the crisis that the men in these films experience stems from their (in)ability to compete in the reproductive arena, which is based on their access to resources. Russell's character in this film is the iconic working-class man, and the film strategically places emphasis on working-class aspects of Russell's character to establish what is a regional configuration that is meant to mimetically align with a more local rendering of working-class masculinity. It is by this strategy that the film hopes to establish its authenticity and it's verisimilitude. In many ways Russell's masculinity and socioeconomic status are mutually reinforcing character elements. Russell works at the mill because that is what working-class men do in Braddock, Pennsylvania, and he is a working-class man because he works at the mill in a working-class town. There is not much room for negotiation between these two points of reference, and everything else he does appears to be informed by how they interact.

The repetitive montage sequence that shows Russell working at the mill establishes how Russell's life outside of the mill is inescapably conditioned and informed by his time spent there. Russell's life is interminably pinioned on a wheel of stultifying labour that crushes his spirit as much as it entrenches him in his working-class milieu. That the director opts for a montage to present Russell's work-time experience is paradigmatically significant, as it establishes a certain idea of how Russell's life flows inside and outside his work. Russell's work day is condensed into a simple set of actions that would normally span an entire shift or longer, but nonetheless *can* be condensed into a series of fragmented practices because the labour that Russell is committed to only represents one thing: passive nihilism. The montage first occurs quite early in the film, where Russell is shown tending to the foundry behind a heat screen, pyrometer in hand and dressed in aluminised clothing (5:16). The high temperatures that foundries emit is intense, often resulting in heat strain among foundry workers, and as Russell steps away from the furnace, he pulls his mask off, tilts his head back and takes a deep breath, then sighs desperately.[112] His sigh indicates not only the strenuousness of the work, but also his resignation towards doing it. The scene cuts to Russell discarding the protective gear in the break room, and then changing out of his blue-collar uniform before heading out into the light (5:41).

The scene echoes that of one of its forebears', *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978). Set in a similar working-class Pennsylvania town, *The Deer Hunter* also opens with a montage of a group of men labouring under extreme conditions at a steel foundry (03:00). The men walk out of the furnace in the beginning of the film only to be thrown into the firefight of Vietnam. *Out of the Furnace* pays homage to its predecessor, and does so with the purpose of pointing out that there has only been a gradual decline in the status of working-class masculinity since the end of the 1970's (consistent with the rise of neoliberalism). It suggests that many of the themes addressed by *The Deer Hunter*, concerning the trials of working-class men, have remained consistent and have become even more apparent over time. Where the men of the American working-class were sent

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[112] S. Parameswarappa and J. Narayana, "Assessment of Heat Strain Among Workers in Steel Industry a Study," *International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences* 3, no. 9 (2014): 861-862.

to die on the front lines of Vietnam in *The Deer Hunter*, it is working-class masculinity that is dying on the front lines of economic transition in *Out of the Furnace.*

When the montage sequence recurs, it begins with Russell strapping on the reflective gear before once again striding out to the foundry to gauge its temperature (33:23), a scene that is nearly procedurally identical to the one previous, but occurring later in the diegesis. The repetition of the montage is symbolic insofar as it speaks to the incessant sameness inherent in Russell's working-class life: his work does not change, and therefore his masculinity as a configuration of working-class practice does not change either. Furthermore, the repetition of the montage evokes feelings of penance-like monotony, carrying the theme of incarceration beyond the confines of the carceral environment. The second sequence occurs after Russell serves his term in prison, suggesting that on either side of the bars he is still locked in the mill. Even more so, while Russell is incarcerated, he is shown working with an arc welder, repairing the prison's mechanical structure, dressed in a garb that is quite similar to what he would be wearing in the mill. Russell's job as a foundry worker at the steel mill defines his life as much as it defines his masculinity, and vice versa, his masculinity binds him to a life of work at the mill. In these early stages of the film Russell is shown to be comfortable in his lifestyle, mainly because he has something to work towards: a family. As the film progresses however, Russell loses more and more of what gives his life and work purpose. With Lena leaving him for police chief Barnes while Russell is locked away in prison, Russell loses his chance at starting a family – a chance that presumably will not come back to him because his masculinity has failed. Russell's father has died, signalling the passing of his masculinity, and Rodney is being pulled through the vortex of masculine self-destruction. Stripped of its context, that Russell is working to provide for others, his work becomes a practice that is acted solely out of desperation: he has nothing else to do, no one else to do it for, and nowhere else to go.

What gives Russell hope, and what sustains his masculinity, is being stripped from him, much as he is shown stripping the paint from his father's house after he inherits it. Russell's life is being directed through new efforts to reconfigure the masculinity that has been left to him, and the cinematic focus of him fixing up his father's house is an

index of this internal process. The scene follows Russell's melancholic observance of Lena while she's working at her job at the day care. Watching Lena work with the preschool children reinforces in Russell that his time has passed, and that he will never be able to have the family he yearns for, because she will never return to him (27:56). Finding some closure in this witnessing, Russell returns home and throws himself into the work of repainting what is now his house (28:12). Russell's work in this sense can be understood as a practice by which men seek catharsis, and among working-class men this tends to be one of the few reactions that is codified as acceptable when responding to emotional turmoil – to channel emotional pain through the medium of physical labour. The practice of repainting and refinishing also symbolizes the process of the old being replaced by the new. The issue with this analogy, however, is that even with a new coat of paint, the structure of the house remains the same – it is the same structure that Russell's father lived within, which now Russell is trying to refit for himself. The house is as symbolic of Russell's masculinity in *Out of the Furnace* as it is of Brendan's in *Warrior*, except that Russell's house represents all that has been lost, not all that could be taken away. The structure equates to the configuration of practice that Russell resides within. This structure however is empty if he is the only one who is left living in it, which is to say that Russell's masculinity affords him no power or place in the world unless it can compete in the reproductive arena. Even though he demonstrates himself as a committed provider, Russell is unable to keep up with economic change, and therefore his masculinity which is configured around working-class practice is falling behind as well, unable to adequately compete in the reproductive arena.

The masculine life-force that flows like a river through the town of Braddock is running dry, and men like Russell are drying up with it. One reason for this, as Russell discusses with Lena, is because the work at the steel mill is being outsourced to China (42:00), but at a broader economic level the mill has been shutting down for a long time. The steel mill in Braddock is thus a vestigial part of an economy that has long since transitioned; it is a holdover of a bygone era that did not see the writing on the wall. Russell is now at the ground level of this crisis of economic dispossession, one which is tied to the banishment of his masculinity from the neoliberal hegemonic paradigm. There is, however, more to the crisis that Russell experiences than the pressures of globalization

and neoliberalism. Although access to resources is a key element to being competitive in the reproductive arena, the reason why Russell fails in his relationship with Lena in the first place is because he is incarcerated. The reasons for Russell's incarceration, even though manifestly are due to his role in the car accident which killed a family, latently rest in the code of masculine behaviour that Russell abides by when he downs the glass of whiskey before driving home from John Petty's bar – the drink which turns the accident into manslaughter.

The situation which led to Russell's accident was predicated on the fulfillment of a masculine code of practice. When Russell finds John Petty in the back of his bar, he does so with the good intentions of bailing his brother out of debt. Russell is not a criminal, but he knows how to navigate the world of men. When Russell steps through the swing-door into Petty's dimly lit office, he pretends not to have noticed that Petty was already occupied with another guest, Harlan DeGroat (Woody Harrelson). Russell interrupts on purpose as a way of saving Petty from the tumultuous conversation he's having with DeGroat, who can be overheard saying "If I got to come all the way down here again, I swear to God I'll gut your fucking ass" (13:29). It can be deduced that Russell's intervention saves Petty, at least in the moment, from receiving any more of DeGroat's wrath. DeGroat is a man whose tendencies towards violence are perhaps the most salient aspect of his character. DeGroat's wrath, though abated, gets transferred onto Russell as he passes him in the narrow door way on his way out of Petty's office. Coming to an abrupt halt where Russell stands, DeGroat pensively stalls before asking him: "Did your momma teach you to barge in like that?" (14:05) DeGroat's question is meant to both taunt and mock Russell, insofar as he is in one sense calling Russell out for a breach of etiquette, one which contravenes a code of practice whereby men should not interrupt the business of other men. Additionally, DeGroat is implying that Russell did not receive proper instruction in how to behave as a man, and that Russell's behaviour smacks of feminine influence. Russell, however, does not back down, but rather looks DeGroat squarely in the eyes and asks him if he has a problem. The mutual stare-down is an important moment because it at once implies the binding of the code whereby men are expected to stand their ground, and additionally the locked gaze can be interpreted as a way of signifying a challenge, and is therefore a bold move, or even a risky gambit. The

practice of locking eyes fixes both Russell and DeGroat in equal proportion with one another, where if one were to avoid contact it would imply that he is accepting of his subordinated position in relation to the other.

DeGroat passes by Russell without further conflict, but the moment nonetheless foreshadows an impending quarrel between the two. As Russell proceeds through the doorway, approaching Petty's desk, Petty hands him a tall glass of whiskey by way of recognizing Russell's intervention: a loyal gesture fulfilled on Petty's behalf (14:46). Russell refuses the glass at first, but Petty insists as if he were offering Russell a gift, and so Russell takes it – to refuse again would be an insult. The sharing of the drink however is less of a gift and much more like a locked gaze, insofar as it is a way of holding a man in equal esteem with another. Petty respects Russell, and to deny this offering would be both for Russell to disrespect Petty as he would be disrespecting the codified practice which Petty both implements and maintains, as well as it would be an act of disrespecting himself, as Russell would denigrate his position as a man in relation to Petty. After handing over a portion of Rodney's debt, Russell asks Petty not to tell Rodney that he has paid for him, because he knows that it will damage Rodney's pride to know his brother is sorting out his financial problems for him, and behind his back at that. Petty agrees, but not before disparaging Rodney's delinquency as a man, ironically suggesting that given his recent self-destructive tendencies, "he might be safer over in Iraq" (15:14). To signal that their dealings have been resolved, Petty stands up to be at eye level (equal elevation) with Russell and clinks his glass against Russell's before knocking his own back in a single gulp. Petty does this all the while staring unflinchingly at Russell, pressing him to reciprocate the gesture – to honour the code (See Figure 3). The shared practice of downing of the drink is similar to the confirmation of a ritualistic pact in this scene. The two men are bonded in this act, and even though Russell would rather not participate, he knows that he must if he is to maintain his status as a man in relation to Petty, who exudes authority in this locale.

Figure 3. Honouring the Code. ©Apian Way, 2013.

The tragedy that follows Russell's visit with Petty is one that he is not at fault for, but is nonetheless guilty of. As Russell is driving home, a car backs out from a hidden drive way onto the dimly lit highway, and even though Russell appears to be driving perfectly fine, he does not have enough time to stop, and so his pickup truck slams full force into the side of the silver station wagon (15:52). The family inside is dead on impact, and Russell is sentenced to prison for several years because he was intoxicated at the time of the accident. By adhering to the code of masculine practice, and downing the glass of whiskey, Russell undoes himself. The very code which supposedly underlies the foundation of what it means to be a man, at least in terms of how working-class masculinity is presented in this film, is that which also makes an unwilling murderer of Russell. Furthermore, Russell loses all that he cares about because he did what he thought a man in his position was supposed to do – to down the drink, even though he didn't want to. The code which maintains and binds Russell to his masculinity is proven to be no ally of Russell's, because Russell's masculinity as a configuration of practice is no longer aligned with what is deemed acceptable within contemporary society. The neoliberal hegemonic configuration no longer recognizes such practices because they are no longer deemed socially acceptable – such senseless behaviour is not becoming of the new entrepreneurial man, whose public image, much like a brand, must be maintained at all

costs. Responsibility over one's life is thus a virtue, and because Russell maintains adherence to practices that are no longer complicit with the neoliberal hegemonic configuration, he finds himself unsupported by the patriarchy; moreover, everything that was afforded to Russell because of his privilege – his access to the patriarchal dividend – is taken from him. When Russell is finally released from prison, the only one he really has left is his brother Rodney, whose own state of crisis is leading him towards his death. Russell must find a way to survive – that is, to keep his masculinity alive – by putting an end to the aspects of masculine practice which have rendered his life low, and destroyed his family. Russell's ensuing conflict symbolizes the final descent of working-class masculinity, with him becoming the arbiter of his own fate.

In *Manchester by the Sea*, Lee Chandler is the model of a failed patriarch, whose struggle to provide is ultimately rendered inert by the practices which configure his masculinity. Lee is presented as a man who has passed through the crucible of struggle and loss, emerging far more broken than intact, and far more dead than alive. In the present Lee works listlessly as a janitor, a job that is symbolic of Lee's marginalized position in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Lee's degradation of status is condensed into a series of acts that serve only to describe how bland and vacant his life truly is, as well as how truant he is from mindfully engaging in his work. As in *Out of the Furnace*, a montage is used in the early stages of the film to show how Lee acts out his working days, repeating the same dull and mindless tasks, such as shovelling snow, hauling out garbage, or unclogging other people's drains and toilets. Lee's lack of enthusiasm is paired with an equally disagreeable nature, in which social interaction is posed purely as an obstacle to his incessant and discordant reverie. In the introductory montage, Lee awkwardly refuses sexual advances from one tenant, and then rebukes another tenant who claims that he is making sexual advancements toward her (6:05/8:05). The scene emphasizes that Lee is not only asocial, but that he has no desire to participate in the reproductive arena anymore. Furthermore, even when Lee is put in a situation where he might be able to contribute some thought or expertise on the matter – such as competent men in positions of power are wont to do – he defers his opinion as best as he can so as to take on as little responsibility as possible.

Lee's deferral of personal involvement in the decisions of others is a present theme in the introductory montage. While Lee is tending to a leaky faucet, he is called out by the tenant for refusing to give him a professional recommendation on how he should proceed, to which Lee simply shrugs and responds, "it's really up to you" (4:32). What Lee can do as a janitor is limited, but he is also resigned to the limitations of his job as much as he has resigned himself to a set of limitations imposed on his life. As is demonstrated through working practice, Lee does not hold any claim to pride or prowess, but rather has accepted the marginalization of his masculinity, because deep down he knows that he has lost his claim to the patriarchal dividend. It only makes sense then to see Lee proceed from a state of such anomie, since Lee's masculinity has been all but devoured. Therefore, Lee has no problem deferring all important matters to an actual professional, such as when he explains over the phone during his ride to Manchester, that he "wouldn't do anything with Mr. and Mrs. Friedrich's ceiling until [they] get a real plumber in there" (14:98). In this short but important scene, Lee places great emphasis on the word *real,* which is as much of a way of saying that Lee himself is not a real plumber as it is to say that Lee is not a real man, at least in terms of his hegemonic status. Instead of attempting to elevate his status by accomplishing such work himself, Lee evades making more of himself, and the reason for this is because he doesn't have anything or anyone to work for.

It is a sad but also important feature of Lee's character that his work happens to be the only thing that really defines who he is – that is, besides his past. Lee is an empty shell of a man, whose mind is never focussed on the present even if his actions are. His labour is ironically however the only thing that keeps him living, which is not to say that Lee's physical existence is dependent on him being a janitor, but rather that as a man, and specifically a working-class man, there is nothing left in Lee's life to define him except for the work that he does. Lee could indeed continue to live without his job, at least to some degree, but he could not continue in the film as a character – there would be no dimension to him. The film goes to great lengths to emphasize Lee's apparitional semblance, frequently reminding the viewer that Lee cannot continue to live in Manchester because Manchester is not a place that he can get a job. Following the scene in which Patrick accuses Lee of not caring about how important living in Manchester is to

his life, with Patrick saying: "you'd rather drag me to Quincy and ruin my life than let somebody else be my guardian" (1:37:17), Lee makes an effort to find a job there so that he can appease Patrick's needs; however, the issue with this is that no one will hire him. When Lee arrives at the boatyard office, he explains to Jerry (Brian A. White) that he's back and looking for work. Jerry is cordial with Lee, as one would be when seeing an old friend after a long time spent apart, but when Lee leaves the office, Jerry's wife, Sue (Erica McDermott), who is presumably the office book keeper, tells him "I don't want to see him in here again" (1:39:06). The reason Lee cannot work in Manchester is twofold. For one, it is because of the incident of Lee's past, in which his children died in the house fire that he was responsible for. Lee is made into a pariah in Manchester for being responsible for this travesty, and as a result no one in the town is willing to trust him, or get too close to him. Secondly, and as described in Chapter 2, for Lee to find work and live in Manchester is for Lee to pretend that his life can go on as it was before the incident – a sort of sick parody that Lee cannot allow himself to entertain.

The conditions of Lee's present life are inescapably framed by the failures in his past – failures he cannot out live. As a complicit working-class man previously, Lee was committed to a life of work as a way of providing for his family, which in turn is what qualified his complicity with the hegemonic configuration. Lee's very masculinity was predicated on his performance as a father and a husband, but it is also because of his masculinity that he lost his status as such. Much like Russell in *Out of the Furnace*, Lee as a working-class man is representative of a masculinity which has been cut from the hegemonic program because the practices which constitute it no longer align with what is considered hegemonic. Lee's crisis manifests in a phantasmagoric instant, and the speed at which his life falls apart also signifies the irrecoverable shattering of his masculinity. When Lee's house goes up in flames (55:44), it is not just the physical structure that burns down. The house is a symbol of Lee's masculinity, much as it is in both *Warrior*, and *Out of the Furnace,* so as the house collapses so too does his masculinity. Much like Brendan's daughter, Lee's children, who are lost in the fire as well, both constitute and represent the family unit that qualifies Lee as a patriarch. Without his family, Lee has no claim to the patriarchal dividend, but more importantly, Lee's house and family are not simply lost, but are rather lost as a result of his own actions.

Lee's actions preceding the fire are typical of working-class masculine practice, and for this reason they are not codified as being wrong or irresponsible by anyone from the male cohort that he surrounds himself with, as represented by the group of men partying in his basement earlier in the night of the fire. Lee's wife Terry, however, becomes irate with both Lee and his friends for their excessive loudness at such a late hour, telling him to get his "moron" friends out of their house (52:38). As Lee procedurally ushers his friends out of his driveway, he makes a sardonic comment to one, shouting at him: "don't drink and drive!" (53:11), which is hardly an emphasized part of the dialogue, but it points to the fact that all of these men are indeed drunk, and yet all of them are driving home. The configuration of working-class practice as exhibited in this film as well as in *Out of the Furnace* does not account for the irresponsibility of drinking and driving. There is a certain hubris to this masculinity, a hubris that informs the opinion that men become more fully actualized while drinking, and therefore to be drunk is not to be hindered, but rather to be fortified; not to be destabilized, but rather made more stable in the face of the ever-pressing vicissitudes of life. The narrative then contradicts this tacit assumption and shows the great error in the code of practice that suggests that for one to be a man, one must use his leisure time to get drunk with other men in order to sustain the what would be the shrivelling edifice of patriarchy.

After kicking his friends out, Lee decides to walk to the store to buy more beer so that he can continue drinking. He makes it clear while talking to the police after the fact that he decided not to drive to the store because he was drunk, which for him is a responsible decision given the details of the previous scene. However, even though Lee is attempting to be make the best decision given his circumstance, those circumstances are still framed within a masculine context. Lee might walk to the store, but he is nonetheless still drunk, and has spent the night cavorting with his pals, ignoring the needs of his family. Furthermore, Lee's decision to go to the store is framed by his need to keep drinking, which wouldn't be the case if he was not impelled to party that way with his friends in the first place. Before Lee leaves on his walk, he adds more wood to the fireplace to keep the house warm, but in doing so he forgets to put the screen back on. While he's gone a log rolls out of the fireplace, setting the house ablaze, which likely would not have occurred if Lee had gone about the task soberly. The way in which Lee's

masculinity is configured operates upon a set of assumptions that are mutually agreed upon by other men who share in the same or similar configurations. These assumptions, or this code, is what inform men like Lee that the practice of excessive alcohol consumption and drug use is the primary and most acceptable way to relate and engage with fellow men. It can be surmised that as a central nervous system depressant, the effects of alcohol are conducive to the functioning of a masculinity that places limitations on emotionality, but that aside, such practices are what ultimately lead to the loss of Lee's family and the death of his status as a man. Much like Russell, it is Lee's very masculinity as a configuration of practice that is the root source of his undoing, and furthermore, it is because such practices no longer align with the neoliberal hegemonic configuration that Lee's masculinity is symbolically cast away. However, this is not to say that Lee's family dies because his masculinity no longer lines up – as if there is some real-world connection between the two – but rather that the film uses the event to symbolize the destruction of Lee's masculinity, and the overall decline in prowess of working-class masculinity in the reproductive arena because of its lack of coherence with neoliberal hegemonic practice.

What follows from this tragic event is the consummate breaking-down of Lee's spirit. When Lee discusses what had occurred that night with the police, he presents the information with honesty, and he does so for the purposes of holding himself supremely accountable so that he can receive the full extent of the penance he deserves. The police however do not charge Lee with anything, judging the event to be a very tragic mistake but nothing criminal. Unlike Russell, Lee is not imprisoned, and for Lee the lack of sentence appears to be worse than receiving one, as when he goes to leave the police station, he attempts to steal a pistol from an officer's holster with which to shoot himself (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. Lee's Departure. ©Amazon Studios, 2016.

The attempt is prevented, but nonetheless it signals a departure for Lee, insofar as he knew there was no coming back from what had happened, and that there was no life left for him to live, even if he was still alive. Lee continues to live, but only as a dead man, a hollow man as it were, one whose soul is not violent, but empty.[113] It is this emptiness that defines Lee: it defines his past, as much as it defines him in his work. Lee continues to live in his own epilogue, a symbol of his own masculinity, which is dying as well, and there's nothing Lee can do about it, such is evidenced by his final discussion with his now ex-wife, in which she tells him after trying to make amends that he "can't just die…" (1:47:43). The only thing Lee manages to say in response is that "there's nothing there" (1:58:14), as if he's some how assuring her that there's nothing left to save. All Lee can do is find a way to exit the conversation because the truth is, he is already dead, as there is no life left in him worth living. It is the death of Lee's essence – the loss of his will to live – that symbolizes the death of working-class masculinity's privileged status. Lee must continue in resignation to a life that is already over but is still lived out in vain under the pervasive shadow of mute anger and quiet frustration, the only emotions that are left to him.

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[113] T.S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men," in *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), 79.

Masculine Destruction

For the men in these films, the crises that they experience proceed from events which ultimately represent the failures of their masculinities. The men in these films struggle to provide for a family, but this happens to be a struggle that they cannot sustain as they have been repudiated by an economic system which no longer needs their labour – one that renders them obsolete by a hegemonic configuration which no longer recognizes working-class masculine practice to be conducive to the maintenance of patriarchal domination. The failure to provide combined with the failure to reconfigure their masculinities has resulted in moments of profound crisis for these working-class men. It is then from such states of desperation and disaffection that these men then proceed into violent conflict. Violence, as it is acted out, should be understood as a visual manifestation of the consequences of crisis tendencies as experienced by the central male characters within these films. Violence is perhaps the most sensationalized of masculine practices to be represented in film, but it is also for its ability to startle an audience that depictions of violence can be used for instructive purposes. The instructive quality of violent spectacle rests in its destructive capacity, whereby if violence can be depicted in relation to all that it destroys, then celluloid acts of violence have the imminent potential to reveal hidden problems about violence itself, and furthermore, those who act violently. If Chekov's gun must be fired, it's best to show the true devastation wrought by the bullet, so that no one is left thinking, somehow, that the act was heroic.

Because they have lost their claim to the patriarchal dividend, the male characters in these films have been unwittingly caught in a web of violent conflict, whereby they are impelled to fight amongst other men in order to claw their way free, or at least up the internal hegemonic hierarchy. As much as these men are pushed towards the destruction of the externalized male other, their violence also demonstrates a need to communicate the pain that they feel, which happens to be the pain that they simultaneously seek to inflict. The recourse to violence that is thematically shared across these films can be best understood through the concept of masculine protest as first introduced by Alfred Adler, but further employed by R.W Connell in her theory of hegemonic masculinity. As Connell explains, Adler's concept of masculine protest "defined a pattern of motives

arising from the childhood experience of powerlessness, and resulting in an exaggerated claim to the potency that European culture attaches to masculinity."[114] Connell establishes however that the difference between masculine protest and "protest masculinity", as she repurposes the term, is that "this is a collective practice and not something inside the person. Very similar patterns appear in the collective practice of working-class [men] … in the United States." Protest masculinity can thus be understood as an emergent configuration that arises out of desperation in social settings in which forsaken men must make "a claim to power where there are no real resources for power."[115] Many of the men in these films are compelled to prove themselves powerful where they have no such access to resources, and where their masculinity has all but lost the entirety of its cultural potency. Violent practice within these films can be understood as forms of protest within the internal hegemonic framework of masculinity.

In *Warrior*, the brothers Tommy and Brendan are pressed by hardship into a setting whereby their capacity for violence is meant to be the determining factor of personal victory as much as it is a strategy for masculine survival. The Sparta tournament itself, which frames the diegesis, should be understood as a structural symbol of internal hegemony, which as Demetriou explains, "refers to a social ascendancy of one group of men over others."[116] Being a single elimination tournament, Sparta is meant to determine who the single most powerful contender is, or as the tournament founder explains: "Growing up, we all wanted to know who the toughest kid in the neighbourhood was, right? I want to know who the toughest man on the planet is" (1:04:07). Through the violent competition that is Sparta, the film makes use of allegory to provide insight into the struggle for hegemonic dominance amongst men. At the surface level, the desire to figure out "who the toughest man on the planet is" is a subtextual way of determining which configuration of practice proves to be authorized by the hegemonic model.[117] Internal hegemony relies on a dialectical process whereby hegemonic masculinity is consistently being transfigured to maintain external hegemony over women. Depictions

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[114] Connell, *Masculinities*, 111.
[115] Ibid., 111.
[116] Demetrakis Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique," *Theory and Society* 30, no. 3 (2001): 341.
[117] Ibid., 346.

of violence between the men in this film symbolically articulate this dialectical process insofar as the men who are ushered into single combat represent varying configurations of masculine practice that either win or lose based on how coherent their masculinities are with the hegemonic ideal. Between Tommy and Brendan, who come to represent the final two competing masculinities in the film, the dialectic comes to represent something more insular: a conflict between a working-class masculinity which has failed to evolve, and a middle-class masculinity that must demonstrate its entrepreneurial fervour.

Tommy's reasons for entering Sparta are not as clearly defined as Brendan's. Although it is explained that Tommy's intention is to donate the prize money to his fallen comrade's widow should he win, it appears to be more of an afterthought, or way of rationalizing his decision to enlist in the tournament. Tommy is not desperate in the same sense that Brendan is, which is to say that Tommy is not desperate for money because the money will not solve the problems of his masculinity like it will for Brendan. Brendan needs to save his house to maintain his status, but Tommy doesn't have a house, nor does he really have a family – if anything he is a proxy provider for a family that is not his – and all that he does have is his pain and his anger, two composite elements of his masculine being which he is desperate to communicate as much as alleviate. Tommy's course of violence is one pursued out of protest, meant to be witnessed or seen but not necessarily revered. By competing, Tommy demonstrates his disaffection not simply with society (as represented by the institution of the Marine Corps which he deserts) but with internal hegemony itself – with that hydraulic model that has pushed both his life and his masculinity out to the margins. Tommy's masculinity is a marginalized masculinity that is configured towards protest, meaning that he does not have access to material benefits of patriarchy, i.e. the patriarchal dividend, so therefore must use what is available to him to make a statement.[118]

What Tommy does have available to him are his body and his ability to fight. Unlike the other men present in the tournament however, the way Tommy approaches fighting is purely out of a desire to destroy, and without concern for the glory of victory. Tommy is fighting out of protest not for fame, but for vindication – that is, not to be the

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[118] Connell, *Masculinities,* 231.

one working-class man who 'makes it', but rather to make a mockery of the system which has ejected him – and this is made most conspicuous through his fighting style. When Tommy is first substituted in for Pete "Mad Dog" Grimes' (Erik Apple) sparring partner, Tommy is not concerned with testing his opponents' ability, as a proper sparring partner should, but rather sets himself to quickly and brutally dismantling him. Tommy in fact does the opposite of what he should do, leave the contender in far worse shape than when he stepped in the ring, which would normally be rebuked by the managers and trainers, except for the fact that Tommy's performance intimidates even them. To add insult to injury, as Tommy is exiting the ring from the sparring session, he taunts Grime's manager, telling him "you owe me two hundred bucks" (16:27), the agreed upon amount for "keeping [his] boy warm for [him]" (14:38). Grimes in this represents the ego-driven class traitor, the man who trains in a working-class setting and who keeps a working-class coterie, but flaunts a middle-class lifestyle. Tommy makes a mockery of Grimes first in the gym, and then again in the tournament by way of demonstrating the reality of Grimes' masculine status, which reflects the truth of Tommy's own. Tommy destroys all false semblance to make visible the truth of his personal collapse, a collapse that is meant to represent that of working-class masculinity at large, and this is why Tommy claims nothing for himself beside recognition for his disaffection.

What signifies Tommy's masculinity as a protest masculinity is most prominently his fighting style, in which he is committed to physically destroying his opponents by brutally and remorselessly incapacitating them. There is no art, flare or patience to Tommy's approach, but rather a hell-bent desire to make a fool of any opponent he meets in the octagon, as well as the crowd who cheers for him, and the very competition itself as he barges out of the cage and then the arena after each fight without a moment to observe institutional norms (1:43:35). Tommy's behaviour smacks of repugnance, as it is meant to. Tommy's violent display is all about optics, about making a statement, which is evidenced by the fight commentator's acknowledgement of Tommy's ruthlessness following his fight against Grimes in semi-finals, suggesting that if "You do that to someone on the street, they lock you up and throw away the key" (1:43:32). Much like how Tommy continues to pound his fists into Grimes' face well past the point of rendering Grimes unconscious (1:43:13), Tommy goes as far as he can to communicate

his pain *through* violence, just as he makes visible all that he has lost by physically destroying others who presume to have greater hegemonic status than he does. After all, it is Tommy's being seen that gets him his place in Sparta. While Tommy was sparring with Grimes in the gym, a bystander recorded the first humiliating beat-down, which subsequently went viral on the internet. Tommy had no intention of joining the tournament until he knew that it was an option, and moreover, once he knew that he could make a stand by doing so, and show everyone the misery that has ruined him by using it to destroy others. Tommy is emotionally constrained by the configuration of masculine practice that he operates within, as well as a system of gender relations which denies him the opportunity to express himself except through anger and ultimately violence. Tommy has nothing or presumably no one left to save him, or is worth saving in return, and so as he circles the drain of masculine oblivion it is his desire to go down fighting, and in doing so make a testament of his demise and the demise of his masculinity.

Brendan on the other hand, is presented as an underdog in this tournament. His lack of esteem and potency, both physical and masculine, are due to a lack of visibility. Brendan is a fighter past his prime. He fought in the UFC long ago, and even then he was considered an underdog, much as his coach points out: "When you were on the right side of thirty you were barely a five-hundred fighter" (44:08). Brendan is not fighting to be seen however, as his fight is not one of masculine protest (at least not yet), but rather he is fighting against the current of masculine oblivion which is close to swallowing him up, much like it is doing to Tommy. If Brendan can break free from the vortex then he will get to maintain his access to the material benefits of patriarchy – those which verify his complicity with hegemonic masculinity – and even though his "soft", untenured, middle-class masculinity is derided in relation to those he must fight, Brendan is presented as the one with the most legitimate claim to the patriarchal dividend, which is symbolized by the five million dollar cash prize he is destined to claim. Unlike Tommy, Brendan's fighting style is not bent on spectacle, but rather is pragmatically aligned with hegemonic practice, insofar as he is committed to making his opponents submit to him rather than physically obliterating them. Brendan's style suggests that the overt and ruthless use of violence is not becoming of hegemonic masculinity, and although he is beset on all sides by far more barbarous men than him, it is the prerogative of hegemonic men to assert an internal

hierarchy by which what is hegemonic is defined in relation to what is subordinate and marginalized. Subordinated and marginalized masculinities must exist for the hegemonic form to hold value, and therefore a strategy bent on the coerced submission of Brendan's opponents is not only more tactful, but also yields to the internal logics of hegemonic masculinity.[119] In Demetriou's contribution to the theory of hegemonic masculinity, he agrees with Connell that "hegemonic masculinity relates to non-hegemonic ones only by subordinating and marginalizing them"[120], but adds that there is a dialectical process by which the pragmatic, or coherent aspects of practice amongst certain groups are uploaded to the hegemonic form whilst the rest are discarded. Hegemonic masculinity is always in the process of negotiating the social terrain it stands on so that men can remain dominant in the gender order. Male hegemony over women is dependent on the structure of inter-masculine hegemony, as Demetriou remarks "internal hegemony or dominance over other masculinities … seems to be a means for the achievement of external hegemony rather than an end in itself,"[121] therefore the battle within is just as, if not more important than the battle without.

Brendan's approach to fighting emphasizes subtlety, and even though he appears always outmatched by his opponents, he strategically uses their will-to-violence against them. By knowing that these men intend to make a spectacle of their victory, Brendan waits for the precise moment to turn their hubris against them. In Brendan's most dire scene, where he must face down Koba (Kurt Angle), the commentators even point out that "He's got nothing more to prove. He's lasted two rounds with Koba, and you wonder what's keeping this guy up" (1:48:39). What keeps Brendan up is clear, and his coach reiterates this, reminding him: "You don't knock him out, you lose the fight. Do you understand me? You don't knock him out, you don't have a home" (1:48:18). The fact is that Brendan is not there to *prove* anything, because he is not fighting out of protest like the others, he is there in a last-ditch attempt to safeguard his position in the masculine hierarchy so that he doesn't have to fight out of protest. Brendan is desperate, yes, but his masculinity has not yet fallen from grace. If Brendan must prove anything it is not that he

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[119] Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique," 348.
[120] Ibid., 346.
[121] Ibid., 344.

is tough enough, or mean enough to go to battle with the gladiators, it is that he must prove himself worthy in his allegiance to the hegemonic ideal. Brendan defeats Koba by allowing him to brutalize his body up until the point where he is committed to finishing Brendan off. A spectatorial knockout is exactly the kind of ending Koba wants from this fight so that he can further prove his status among fighting men, but Brendan is not a fighting man, much as his coach points out: "These guys are animals, you're a teacher..." (44:16). Brendan's masculinity is *not* one of protest, and so he holds on for three rounds while being pummeled, waiting for Koba to cross the Rubicon before seizing the initiative and converting Koba's strikes into submission holds: first an armbar, and then a leg lock – a trap which Koba cannot get out of, a trap that is a metaphor for the pitfalls of a protest masculinity. Finally, Koba is forced to submit lest his leg be broken. With Koba defeated, Brendan has one person left to fight, his brother Tommy.

It comes as no surprise when Tommy and Brendan are forced to fight in the final act of the film, even if it is framed as a shocking turn of events within the diegesis. It is the unaddressed conflict between the two central characters that drives the narrative, and furthermore, creates a demand for the resolution of this conflict in the film's denouement. By analyzing the film from the perspective of how it addresses conceptual conflicts between masculinities and not just men, it also becomes clear who is meant to triumph over the other – not because of skill in the ring, nor because of who makes the greatest show of masculine fortitude, but because of whose masculinity best demonstrates coherence with hegemonic practice. Violence, in this sense, can be understood as "the expression of extreme undifferentiation,"[122] not simply between brothers, but between their masculinities. When Brendan fights Tommy, there is nothing that changes between either of their fighting styles. Both brothers approach their battle with one another using the same practices that got them through the tournament. Tommy's heedless pursuit of total annihilation has hitherto made a fool of all his opponents, showing them that he can play their game better than they can because he is not consumed by the false illusions of grandeur which both impel their desire to fight, and hamstring their ability to commit the entirety of their focus to completing their objective. Tommy uses the logics of protest

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[122] Suzanne Hatty, *Masculinities, Violence and Culture* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications, 2000), 11.

masculinity to expose how absurd the competition is; to address what it means to truly fight from a position of masculine destitution, and to make a statement about the reality of that destitution at both a personal and wide-spread level (local and regional).

Where Tommy seeks to subvert the dialectical process, which has rendered his masculinity obsolete, Brendan seeks to uphold it. Brendan lets Tommy launch into him because he knows there's nothing he's able to do to stop him – Tommy is the unstoppable force to Brendan's unmovable object. Where Tommy's ambitions are vacant, what drives him is still very conspicuous. It being clear that Tommy is bent on physically undermining all his opponents for the sheer sake of it, Brendan leads him by his own desires. Tommy's rage is also that much more intensified towards Brendan, not only because he is the brother that Tommy resents for abandoning on him, but because in this scenario Brendan represents the hegemonic mode which Tommy loathes for also casting him aside. As already established, Brendan must win because internal hegemony is framed as an inescapable structure within these films, but just the same, Tommy must also resist. Tommy's defiance of hegemonic norms is sensational as it is palpable. By bursting out of the cage after every match, Tommy signifies his refusal to occupy a place in the internal hegemonic hierarchy within which he is fixed. Furthermore, while in the cage, Tommy insults hegemonic practice by way of disregarding the norms and rules of the sport, i.e. by beginning the fight with Brendan without touching hands, and then by deliberately delivering a late blow to Brendan after the round is called to an end (2:00:09).

Much like in his fight against Koba, the moment Tommy commits himself to finishing Brendan off is the moment Brendan turns his violent momentum against him, figuratively showing Tommy the weakness of his practice in relation to its socio-historical context, and asserting the dominance of the configuration that Brendan seeks to uphold. Locking Tommy in a Kimura, Brendan knows that there is no way out for Tommy, and so tells him repeatedly to tap before finally having to break Tommy's arm. The arm lock that Brendan has Tommy trapped in in this scene further reinforces the metaphor that internal hegemony cannot be escaped so long as one exists within the gender order – a man is either complicit with the hegemonic ideal, or finds himself

subordinated or marginalized in relation to it. Tommy refuses to submit, and so his arm is broken, an event that signals the final collapse of his masculinity. It is not Brendan's wish to continue hurting Tommy, primarily because he knows his brother is defenseless, but Tommy nonetheless forces Brendan to continue the fight until he himself has been entirely annihilated. Brendan pleads with him to throw in the towel, but Tommy makes Brendan finish the job. It is in this scene that Paddy, who had been absent from Tommy's corner, finally arrives to see the fight play out. Paddy's absence is juxtaposed with Tess's presence, further emphasizing the waning of working-class masculinity in relation to the hegemonic form that Brendan's middle-class masculinity is complicit with. As Paddy arrives, the song *About Today*, by The National starts playing, recapitulating sentiments that emerged at the beginning of the film. The Lyrics of the song read: "Today/You were far away/And I/Didn't ask you why/What could I say/I was far away/You just walked away/And I just watched you/What could I say/How close am I/To losing you/Tonight/You just close your eyes/And I just watch you/Slip away" (2:06:59). Brendan makes eye contact with Paddy as the song begins to play, and just before he sets about ending the bout, receiving the gesture of a nod from Paddy, suggesting that it must be done – that Tommy must be finished off, and their shared masculinity must come to an end. The song speaks to both the absence of Tommy's father when he needed him most, and therefore the failure of his masculinity, and as it continues to overlay Tommy and Brendan's final struggle, it illuminates the complexities of the conflict in the relationship between the brothers themselves. The song articulates a dialogue that Brendan and Tommy ought to be having with words, but because of how constrained they are as men, are resolving through violence.

Brendan knows there is only one way to resolve their conflict now, and so draws Tommy out before delivering a devastating kick to his head – a blow that seems to pain Brendan emotionally as much as it does Tommy physically – preceded by Brendan wrapping Tommy in a rear naked choke on the canvas floor of the caged fortress of their own emotional incompetence. The chokehold is symbolic insofar as it brings Brendan and Tommy as closely together as any submission lock could, and furthermore reflects the position that Tommy sat in when consoling his drunken father in the hotel room earlier in the film. The violence in this scene is meant to mimic an overly masculinized sense of

intimacy – as close a semblance to hugging as two men in violent conflict could engage in. This scene, therefore, although physically dramatic, symbolizes the emotional turmoil that has separated the two brothers. In one sense there is a distinct sadness to the thinking that the closest these two men could come to having an emotional breakthrough is through an intense bout of regimented violence. In another sense however, it is a staggeringly honest portrayal of the way such conflicts do tend to be resolved.

What the scene shows is indeed a competition between configurations of masculine practice, but it also makes a point of showing all that constrains the emotional experience of being a man. Tommy's life has been especially difficult, and his masculinity has reinforced a set of socially acceptable practices by which he can, and must process his emotional turmoil. Cold silence and emotional distance interrelate, but take the form of a metaphorical suit of armour that a man like Tommy wears to keep himself protected from malign influence. What Michael Kaufman explains in his book *Cracking the Armour*, is that masculinity is source of power as much as it is pain.[123] Much like a suit of armour, that protects a man, but keeps him from engaging closely with anyone – especially other men. By breaking Tommy's arm, Brendan symbolically puts a crack in Tommy's armour, which is why when Brendan puts Tommy in the final chokehold, Tommy actively chooses to tap out instead of allowing himself to go unconscious – to be rendered completely inert. Tommy does this, because while Brendan is strangling him in a perplexingly compassionate yet violent embrace, he confesses to Tommy that he's sorry, and then tells him repeatedly that he loves him (2:09:04). Tommy's physical vulnerability mirrors that of his emotions, and it is in this moment, and only this moment, that Tommy can let his brother in once again. Tommy submits in this moment because he knows at a personal level all is not lost – that he does still have his brother, and that contrary to the tone at the outset of the film, there is a man whose masculinity he can rely on, if not his own.

Unlike *Warrior*, the conflict at the heart of *Out of the Furnace* is not between the two brothers and their masculinities as much as it proceeds from the intractable dissolution of masculine status that both Russell and Rodney experience. Russell's pursuit

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[123] Michael Kaufman, *Cracking the Armour: Power, Pain and the Lives of Men* (Toronto: Viking, 1993), 8-9.

of violence follows on the heels of Rodney's pursuit of self-destruction. The moment of crisis which signifies Russell's descent and lands him in prison is, as mentioned, also that which distances him from all that he cares about and makes him the man that he is. When Russell finally gets out of prison, there seems to be little that he can do to pull Rodney out of his death spiral, and so resorts to a path of violence, committing himself to killing the man who ended Rodney's life – in doing so asserting his internal hegemonic authority, vindicating not only himself, but his brother's masculinity as well.

Much like Tommy, Rodney's masculinity is one of protest. As a working-class man with very little access to resources, Rodney first turns to the military as a way out. It is possible that many men who lack cultural power through economic prosperity attempt to find it in the military, as a soldier who can use their body as a resource of power where they cannot find access elsewhere. Soldiering gives a man a means to use violence with impunity, and thus is presented as a compelling incentive for marginalized men. However, war is hell, as they say, and Rodney returns from it a broken man – more broken than he was before he enlisted. Following his return, Rodney resorts to a life of criminal violence, first as a way of paying off the gambling debts he incurred because of his state of financial (and likely psychological) desperation, and secondly as a way of communicating the trauma he experienced during the war. Like many soldiers Rodney appears torn up by his inability to relate the horrors of his military experience – the male hysteria that he demonstrates when unloading his memories on Russell earlier in the film is a testament to this. The underground, bare-knuckle boxing racket that Rodney gets caught up in quickly becomes more than just a way out from under the weight of debt he owes to John Petty – it serves Rodney both as a form of catharsis through which he is able to unleash the pent up agony of his military experience on the bodies of other men, and as a form of contrition, similar to an act of self-flagellation, by which he is able to feel redeemed for what he did in the war through the violence that he incurs.

The scenes of Rodney fighting are juxtaposed with scenes of Russell fixing up the house, which as previously mentioned, is symbolic of Rodney's descent as it is of Russell's attempt to patch his life and his masculinity back together. Rodney proceeds through crisis into protest, while Russell is attempting to repair what he can. Rodney's

first brawl demonstrates that he wants to be witnessed as much as he wants his pain to be ameliorated through immersion in a wave of bodily destruction; a baptism of masculine violence, where a circle of men who form the fighting ring cheer him on like the zealots of a church congregation. Rodney bathes in the pain of the fight, allowing himself to be punished by his opponent up until the point where his psyche breaks, and he unleashes the entirety of his blind wrath. When Rodney is first knocked down, he does not show frustration or shame, he simply smiles and stares up at his opponent who eggs him on, saluting him and saying: "come on man let's go – this 'aint fucking Iraq. Let's go soldier boy" (28:55). It's at this point that Rodney switches gears. The pain of his past has been evoked by his opponent's taunt, and even though Rodney is supposed to take a dive as per his arrangement with Petty, he cannot help but pour all of his energy into the physical destruction of the man in front of him: demonstrating, much like Tommy, all that he has suffered as a man by physically transferring that suffering onto another.

The notion that Rodney is resolving his past through this form of physical conflict is further evidenced by how he presents himself in the fight. Rodney does not have a particular style per se, like Tommy and Brendan, but he shows up dressed from the waist down in his military fatigues. His boots and camouflage pants signify that he hast not left the war in Iraq, but has rather carried it home with him, and carried it even further into the fighting pit. The tattoos that mark Rodney's upper half also signify the permanence of the war not just on Rodney's body, but beneath his skin, insofar as what the ink represents aligns him with a particular configuration of masculinity from which he cannot escape. The piece that covers Rodney's back is that of an M4 carbine, muzzle buried in a pair of combat boots, with its stock protruding upwards, covered by helmet. As a fixed piece of imagery on Rodney's body it is significant insofar as its location suggests that what is behind Rodney will always remain with him, and that even if he cannot see the effects that the war has had, and is having on his life, these effects are nonetheless always present. The tattoo also takes the shape of a phallus, with the boots forming the testicles, the carbine the shaft, and the helmet the head. The symbolism of the tattoo makes it that much clearer that Rodney is fighting out of protest – that his shirt is off so that his masculinity can be put on display and proven in the crucible of violent conflict.

As much as Rodney welcomes pain, he also longs for oblivion. Unable to get out from under his debt, Rodney presses Petty to get him a fight in the Ramapo mountains of New Jersey, which is where Harlan DeGroat runs his criminal organization. Petty refuses, telling Rodney: "I'm trying to protect you" (37:57), but Rodney persists despite Petty's warnings about how irascible a man DeGroat is. Rodney is not concerned about his safety, but rather seeks out greater danger and further pain. When Petty finally caves in and arranges the fight with DeGroat, he gives Rodney what he is wishing for. By going to the mountains to fight, Rodney forfeits his life, and to an extent this is something he desires. There's nothing special about the geography, but rather it's his proximity to DeGroat, who comes to see Rodney as a threat, though not to his organization, but his masculinity that matters. When they first meet, DeGroat attempts to intimidate Rodney, which is similar to his earlier attempt to intimidate Russell. The difference is that Rodney doesn't simply stand his ground, as Russell does, but rather balks at the attempt. In doing so, Rodney manages to illuminate the discordance within DeGroat's masculinity, and he does this by signifying his own absence of fear. After failing to intimidate Rodney, DeGroat makes the remark: "I like this one, he's tough – angry", which is to say that he recognizes Rodney's masculinity as one of protest, like his own. What DeGroat sees is indeed a similarity between their two masculinities, but it is a similarity that illuminates the truth of DeGroat's false hegemonic claim. Attempting to further clarify what motivates Rodney to fight, DeGroat asks him: "why the hell do you want to come up here to fight, or hell anywhere, when you've been fighting over there [in Iraq] for so long," to which Rodney responds, "I just need the money man." The reason Rodney gives DeGroat is a lie, and it is a lie that DeGroat recognizes, indexed by the cocking of his neck to the side, followed by a surreptitiously unconvinced half-smile, saying "Ya, well, we all need money" (51:28). It is Rodney's lie that resembles DeGroat's lie, which is why DeGroat acknowledges it. It is the lie that money alone can buy power, but as a criminal this is not entirely true, because DeGroat's practices are not authorized as hegemonic practice, but rather disfigure hegemonic masculinity by being so blatantly recalcitrant and ignorant of the shifting terrain which underpins the social structure that legitimates the patriarchy. DeGroat's false claim is thus destabilizing to the patriarchy because not only does it not pragmatically align with hegemonic masculinity, it also undermines practices which have

evolved in response to resistance that has both rendered hegemonic practice visible had deemed necessary the abolition of patriarchy. In short, DeGroat makes hegemonic masculinity look bad, whereas hegemonic masculinity would rather not be identified at all.

Like Rodney, DeGroat's masculinity is one of protest, though dissimilar to Rodney's in that he uses extreme violence and ruthlessness to feign hegemonic status, where Rodney, much like Tommy, is trying to make a statement about his masculinity as it is, and what it has made of him. Rodney is in a sense choosing to go out with a bang, rather than a whimper.[124] DeGroat, on the other hand, is asserting his claim for that which he has no legitimate access too, and so uses illegitimate means to make his claim. What Rodney demonstrates in his interaction with DeGroat is an honest lack of a fear, which is not merely pantomime like it is for DeGroat who goes above and beyond to make others fear him, but rather emerges from a resignation of the will to live. Rodney has accepted that he might as well be dead already, a sentiment that is symbolically associated with the dissolution of his masculine prowess. Unlike DeGroat, Rodney is not interested in proving himself worthy of hegemonic recognition, but simply wants his departure to be communicated – to make a testament of the man that he is and what he has suffered before he is gone forever. DeGroat then murders Rodney because Rodney's existence makes clear the falsity of DeGroat's hegemonic claim, which is evidenced by the way DeGroat executes Rodney. A presumably pitiless man, DeGroat refuses to make eye contact with Rodney while he commences the killing act. The stare down between them signifies mutual recognition, and by looking Rodney in the eyes DeGroat cannot help but see himself in relation to Rodney, much as C.H. Cooley has commented poetically: "each to each a looking glass/reflects the other that doth pass."[125] Being uncomfortable with being forced to recognize who he is, and the lie that he convinces himself and everyone else of, DeGroat tells Rodney: "Don't look at me… look away" (1:04:20), to which Rodney responds: "fuck you, you fucking coward" (1:04:26). Rodney calls DeGroat out on being exactly what he is, which is why DeGroat is compelled to kill him in the first place – as a way of eradicating the harbinger of his own self-doubt in a naive attempt to

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[124] Eliot, *The Hollow Men*, 82.
[125] C.H. Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Scribner's, 1902), 179-185.

eliminate the truth of the doubt itself. To make Rodney's longing for oblivion abundantly clear, as well as to demonstrate his conviction – the very conviction which undermines the pretense of DeGroat's hegemonic claim – Rodney grabs DeGroat's gun, and pushing it against the top of his skull, enforces DeGroat's will for him, uttering the last words "I don't care… I don't care…" (1:04:38) as both a sign of resignation to a death that he welcomes, and as a final rebuke against DeGroat who thinks himself powerful, but only because he can use peoples' fear of pain and death against them.

DeGroat establishes dominance through intimidation and violence, but within the internal hegemonic hierarchy he still resides at the bottom as a marginalized masculinity – it likely being the case that he grew up in poverty and crime, given that Petty derides DeGroat and his coterie for being lowly "inbred mountain folk" (14:31). Moreover, DeGroat's actions demonstrate that he operates antithetically to what is deemed to be appropriate hegemonic practice. In the prologue, before the story even begins, DeGroat's masculinity is personified as if he were hegemonic masculinity itself, but represented in the ugliest and most undisguised form. The scene begins with DeGroat sitting in his car with a woman (Dendrie Taylor) in the passenger seat at a drive-in movie theatre – a setting which is meant to deepen the viewer's apperception, as if one were situated between two opposing mirrors. As DeGroat takes a swig from a bottle of liquor, his date asks him "are you going to be able to drive?", to which DeGroat assures her: "this fucker drives itself" (2:22). His date's concern for his ability to drive while drunk speaks to the theme of drunkenness as a standard practice of working-class men that is shared across these films – a practice which is no longer deemed socially acceptable. It being the woman in this scene who addresses this point represents how the hegemonic configuration has been altered due to feminist resistance. When his date scoffs at his reply however, DeGroat's first instinct is to "put her in her place." Taking the hotdog that she is holding in her hand, DeGroat tosses the bun out of the car window, and proceeds to forcefully shove the phallic object down her throat until she chokes, then bashes her head off the dash board (3:12). DeGroat's intention is to subordinate her through violence, which is further emphasized by him calling her a "fucking whore" after he does so. This act symbolizes DeGroat as a pseudo-functionary of external hegemony, through which masculinity accomplishes its domination over femininity in the gender order. Following

DeGroat's assault, a man in the car adjacent to DeGroat's gets out to address the domestic conflict. DeGroat tells the man to mind his business, but the man asserts that, "when you slap a woman around, it is my business" (3:34). The intervening male in the scenario represents how hegemonic masculinity has evolved to preserve patriarchal dominance, that is, by gaining the consent of women by assuring them that they can be protected by men. The domestic abuse of women and children is easily the most heinous aspect of what is understood to be toxic masculinity, and is not becoming of hegemonic practice because it makes visible its violence where patriarchy prefers to render its domination invisible, such as Joseph Femia points out, "hegemony is the predominance obtained by consent rather than force…".[126] Having his practices challenged by the male interloper, DeGroat gets out of his car and savagely beats the man within an inch of his life. The opening scene sets the tone of the film, and demonstrates how DeGroat uses violence to bluntly assert external and internal hegemony.

DeGroat's masculinity is indeed a protest masculinity, and not actually a hegemonic configuration, much as Connell explains, "class deprivation generates ugly expressions of masculine supremacy,"[127] and protest masculinity "picks up themes of hegemonic masculinity in the society at large, but reworks them in a context of poverty."[128] DeGroat must use violence to prove that he is a hegemonic male because he does not have a legitimate claim to the patriarchal dividend. Hegemonic masculinity fails if it behaves this way at a socio-structural level, knowing that patriarchal power must be as invisible as the way it is implemented. Therefore, DeGroat is the antithesis of what is actually hegemonic, and even though he is presented as the most fearsome man in the film. He is nothing more than a bottom feeder that – as per the logics of internal hegemony – must be snuffed out.

It is then Russell who, in a surprising turn of events, becomes the assailant whose task it is to eliminate DeGroat and restore internal hegemonic order. Russell's crisis and subsequent prison sentence result from a failure to adapt his configuration of masculine

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[126] Joseph Femia, *Gramsci's political thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 24.
[127] Connell, *Masculinities,* 237.
[128] Ibid., 114.

practice. On the other side of the bars however, Russell appears to have reformed to some extent, though not in a himself criminological sense, as he was never truly a criminal in the first place, but rather he proves committed to reforming the working-class masculinity that has been passed down to him through patrilineal descent. Much like Brendan in *Warrior*, Russell is not really a fighter, since his masculinity is not one of protest, but comes to represent the male competitor whose configuration of practice is most complicit with the hegemonic ideal, and thus is preordained to emerge victorious over DeGroat so long as he continues to yield to the behavioural standards of the neoliberal hegemonic configuration. Russell demonstrates his reformation first in the scene where he is brought hunting with his uncle Red (Sam Shepard). Russell is ushered into the practice of hunting by his uncle, who being a respected male figure in Russell's life, has influence over him. When in the forest Russell embarks on the hunt separate from his uncle, tracking a deer which he finds, but ultimately decides not to shoot (54:08). The scene is also reminiscent of the scene in the *The Deer Hunter*, in which Michael (Robert De Niro), pulls his shot before killing the buck that he's tracked (2:19:41). Having survived Vietnam, Michael understands the true cost of violence, especially when it is carried out en masse by millions of men who blindly yield to a code of honour, following the orders of a hegemonic military hierarchy. Similarly, the scene in *Out of the Furnace* suggests that Russell now possesses an awareness of why he does the things he is compelled to do, specifically how his practices are conditioned by his relations with other men. Russell becomes aware of the fact that he does not *want* to kill the deer, and so chooses not to, rather than claiming the tag to make a statement of his prowess as a hunter and therefore a man to earn his uncle's recognition. Russell instead lets the deer go, and then humours his uncle when he produces his own quarry (55:20).

The next scene that demonstrates Russell's reformation is the one that best depicts Russell's departure from the prescriptive code of practice imposed among working-class men. With Rodney dead, but only officially missing, Russell takes it upon himself to find out what happened to his brother, and sets himself to tracking down DeGroat who is the only link they have to Rodney's disappearance. Working his way into a drug-house in search of information, Russell makes a drug purchase to keep up his front. When the dealer demands that he "fire that shit up" (1:17:37) on the spot, Russell takes the

calculated risk of defying him. The scene contrasts that of Russell's earlier convention with Petty, in which he knocks the drink back despite his better judgement. An intense stare down occurs between Russell and the dealer when it is discovered that Russell has left the drugs behind (1:19:12). When the dealer produces the forgotten baggie, he indicates that he knows Russell was not really there for the drugs. The dealer bores into Russell with his gaze, signifying that he has caught onto the ruse, but decides to let Russell walk away anyway. One would expect a physical conflict to arise if it was not for the fact that Russell maintains adherence to a reformed configuration of practice, which is to say that at the level of allegory, by aligning himself with the hegemonic ideal, Russell was not called to prove himself.

Russell is then escorted back to Braddock by the police at Chief Barnes' request. Being warned against returning to the Ramapo's. Following Russell's return to Braddock, Barnes approaches him in the parking lot of the mill (1:23:30), a scene identical to the one at the beginning of the film where Russell is first shown finishing up his shift (5:42). Barnes informs Russell that they've found Rodney's body, confirming the death that they all expected. The symbolic value of the film's title swings on this very moment, as the repetition of Russell's working-class practice comes to an end. This is the last time Russell walks out of the furnace before committing himself to triumphing over DeGroat and all that he represents. Being prevented from tracking DeGroat down however, Russell sets the bait and lays a trap for DeGroat, drawing him back to Petty's bar in Braddock to finish him off once and for all. Russell's course of violence might seem contradictory given his reluctance to kill the deer earlier in the film, but these scenes actually harmonize more than they contrast. By letting the deer go, Russell makes the same decision as he does by killing DeGroat, that being: to overcome the masculinity that DeGroat represents; the masculinity that reflects his own but in its most debauched form. Russell transcends the baser practices of his masculinity but letting the deer run free, just as he does by symbolically putting to death the most ignoble aspects of his masculine configuration as personified by DeGroat.

When DeGroat arrives in Braddock at Petty's bar, the first thing he goes for is Petty's money. Russell counts on this, knowing that DeGroat primary motivation is the

acquisition of capital, because it is capital that assures men hegemony. Of course, DeGroat's methods are illegitimate, and therefore so is his hegemonic claim. Russell disables DeGroat's vehicle before following him into the bar, then after a brief shootout, chases DeGroat out the back door, and into dawn-lit field that foregrounds the distant steel mill. Russell holds off on shooting DeGroat in the field, because to do so would not demonstrate a true triumph, so instead follows him through those rusted-out catacombs of heavy industry. In this scene the mill is shown for what it is, now divorced from Russell's working practice, it is nothing but a vacant tomb. Russell's violent pursuit distances him from the locale insofar as it signifies a transfiguration of character. As he finds his way about the empty ruin, Russell becomes entranced by how uncanny the setting has become to him. Standing still between two rafters he hears the distant sounds of his childhood playing out over the clattering of steel walk-ways, reflecting on everything that his life has culminated in. Russell finds DeGroat as he is emerging out of the back side of the mill, and knocks him down by quickly driving the butt of his hunting rifle into the bridge of DeGroat's nose. A fight proceeds from which Russell emerges on top after delivering a kick to DeGroat's groin, a blow that followed by another kick to the chin, lands DeGroat on his back, symbolizing an attack directly against DeGroat's masculinity, and ending with him lying in a position of subordination. Even from this position DeGroat protests, raising his fists to show the tattoos on their underside, which read: fuck/you. Russell draws his scope up, but decides to shoot DeGroat in the thigh to make the point of fully diminishing him before he ends him entirely, telling him to "get up" and "keep going" (1:42:45) down the train tracks that lead the two of them out of the mill. Pacing slowly behind DeGroat, Russell shoots him again through the flank, waiting once more for him to get up and continue his flight. DeGroat's futile attempt to escape symbolizes the persistence of working-class masculinity despite all prevailing evidence of its certain demise. Russell leads him out of the furnace to finish him off in the field, signifying a transition not only of setting, but of his masculinity. When DeGroat finally collapses, Russell stoops down beside him to inform him that he is Rodney's brother, to which DeGroat smirks and nods, saying with a dried voice: "tough kid." Russell wants DeGroat to know who he is, not simply by way of fulfilling a desire for revenge, but to vindicate the loss of his brother and their masculinities through his triumph. Russell is moving on,

and to do so he must put DeGroat, who represents the recalcitrant aspects of working-class masculinity, to rest. Before DeGroat rises one last time, he asks Russell: "do you hear them birds?" (1:45:29). Morning has come, and the birds are singing with light of the new day, which is symbolic of the transformation that is unfolding. Furthermore, DeGroat's last words hark back to the song that plays at the beginning of the film, which also reverberates throughout its closing sequence. Through death, DeGroat is looking forward to being released from the trap that he's been caught in, much like Rodney, and by killing DeGroat Russell aims to release himself, which is why when Russell fires the killing shot, he proceeds to let out a long-abated sigh of relief, a release that brings the narrative to a close.

Working-class masculinity is dying, at least in terms of its status, and DeGroat, as Rodney before him, represents the aspects of it that are being killed off. The violent conflict between these men is not simply about which man is able to dominate over the other, but rather is about the life and death of working-class masculinity based on its pliancy and agreement with the neoliberal hegemonic ideal. Russell and DeGroat both represent working-class masculinity, as both are working-class men, and therefore their conflict symbolizes the workings of dialectical pragmatism by which hegemonic masculinity develops. Where Russell represents the reconfiguration of working-class practice, DeGroat represents a configuration of protest which undermines hegemonic practice. Once the conflict is resolved, Russell continues to linger, but for how much longer can he continue to pine away in this valley of dying stars that is the American Rust Belt? [129]

In *Manchester by the Sea*, the theme of inter-masculine violence is employed much less to the effect of resolving internal hegemonic conflict as it is to communicating the experience of one's own demise, which in this case is the demise of Lee's masculinity. There are various instances throughout the film in which Lee resorts to acts of violence to both make visible his pain and the residual presence of his masculinity. Furthermore, much like Rodney in *Out of the Furnace*, Lee willingly incurs violence upon himself as a form of contrition for the death of his children, an event for which he

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[129] Eliot, *The Hollow Men,* 81.

was never legally held responsible. Lee's violence thus proceeds from the crisis of his past, a crisis from which his masculinity has been driven down and out to the margins, and then turned towards protest. Having lost everything that would constitute his masculinity as having a claim to the patriarchal dividend, Lee turns towards protest, picking fights with strangers in bars, though not because he has any personal problem with them, but simply because it is all he can do to continue existing as a man.

Early in the film, after Lee is cited by his boss for his belligerent behaviour with the tenants, Lee seeks a respite by getting drunk in the local pub. Repeated throughout the film, Lee's drunken behaviour proves significant because it demonstrates his way of returning to the scene of the incident in a misguided attempt to gain some deeper understanding, or sense of closure about how the tragedy all unfolded. Lee imbibes when the burden of his angst accumulates and becomes too much to bear, but it was his being drunk in the first place that led to his children's death and the death of who he was as a man. Lee pushes himself through the memory of this tragic event as much as he punishes himself for it, again and again, out of a near sadomasochistic urge to gain mastery over not just what he lost, but how he lost it. Lee knows that he is a doomed man, as much as he represents a doomed masculinity, but as with the logics of internal hegemony, Lee is doomed to live in order to serve as a testament of the marginalized man he has become. The film differs in this sense from *Out of the Furnace*, insofar as violence and death do not serve the same metaphorical function of harmonizing hegemonic practice, but rather suggest that living on is in some ways worse than dying. Where Rodney, and then DeGroat, find a release in death from the marginalized trap they have been caught in, that release is not provided to Lee. He attempts it once in the police station, but it is prevented by all the men around him, which symbolizes the reluctance of hegemonic masculinity to let him die. Lee survives as an object lesson for other men: hegemonic masculinity needs marginalized masculinities if the hierarchy is to be recognized at all. Lee is thus forced to live on as a veritable hollow man, without an impulse towards anything except for in recapitulating the pain of his past.

Lee's lack of, or capacity for desire, is demonstrated in the first bar scene, whereby Lee rejects the advances of the woman who flirtatiously engages with him

(10:06). Following Lee's awkward failure to connect, he instigates a fight with a man sitting across the bar from him. Lee's lack of enthusiasm with the woman suggests that he does not feel comfortable even existing within the reproductive arena, let alone competing in it. As he observes two men talking to each other across the bar, Lee decides to pick a fight. The closeness of their interaction suggests something intimate about the relationship between the two men who are conversing, behaviour which could easily be construed as characteristically homosexual (11:16). It is not clarified whether the men are gay or not, and the truth is it doesn't really matter. What their behaviour signifies is all that matters to Lee, who sees a reflection of himself in their masculinities (gay masculinities being subordinate to heterosexual masculinities). In this moment, Lee feels compelled to prove himself as something different, as if by assaulting one of them he can establish that he is at least still heterosexual, and therefore that he still exists in some ways as a man. The act is vulgar, of course, and reinforces what Connell describes as "compulsory heterosexuality", a code of practice that men regulate amongst each other both to maintain the hegemonic status quo and to assert their position in it. [130]

Lee does not appear aware of his reasons for fighting however, as he does not seem to be aware of much except for the fact that he has nothing left to live for. Lee acts within the boundaries of his configuration, never pushing outward because of how tightly his practices have hedged him in. Lee is therefore emotionally hamstrung, and his emotional process tends to follow the steps of feeling more despair than he can handle, which then results in him attempting to drown the despair in booze. The booze then makes him incoherent, as much as his masculinity is incoherent with hegemonic practice. Deep in the throes of guilt and anger that are exacerbated by drink, Lee unleashes his emotions in a violent fury. He can't get past these feelings and he can't make sense of them either because he can't communicate them, so he displays them the only way he knows how: through violence. Violent practice is the only opening available to Lee, similar to what Donald Bloxam describes as "zones of exception", whereby within a repressive structure (a state structure, in Bloxam's explanation, but a structure of practice regulated by gender relations in this sense). [131] When there is one available opening, or

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[130] Connell, *Masculinities*, 103.
[131] Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (New York;Oxford;: Oxford University Press, 2009), 285.

zone, through which all repressed aspects of one's life can be channelled, it will all be channelled through that opening. Artists, and writers often speak of their work as being an opening of this sort, such as William S. Burroughs, who in the introduction to his book *Queer*, explained that after the miserable accident in which he killed his wife that, "I have had no choice except to write my way out."[132] Violence is thus the only practice left by which Lee is able to unload his pain and articulate his being – who he is (was) as a man.

The obstruction of communication is another theme that resounds throughout the film and is very much connected to the theme of violence. When Lee is first driving Patrick to the hospital to see his father, the dialogue between the two not only occurs in a *forced* sense, but it also appears confused. The two seem unable to connect meaningfully with each other because of all the emotions that are in the way, the emotions of their losses that they refuse to address, because as men they are uncertain how to address them. When Lee asks Patrick if he would rather see his father's body or just go home, Patrick responds by simply saying: "Let's just go" (38:24). Lee mistakes this as Patrick saying he wants to just go home, and so proceeds to drive off as Patrick is attempting to get out of the car. The miscommunication sends Lee into a fit, whereby he shouts: "What the fuck's the matter with you? … I could have ripped your fucking leg off" (38:33). Patrick then apologizes sarcastically, saying: "I'm sorry I misused the English language" (38:36), which suggests that this eruption of anger by Lee is a result of a failure to communicate. After a pause Lee apologizes, saying "I'm sorry too, I just get scared" (38:48), which also establishes that Lee is not cognizant of the reasons behind his aggressive outbreaks, until perhaps after the fact. Lee also seems driven by a need to articulate mundane details accurately, which is a trait that pervades much of his dialogue, but can be recognized as almost obsessive at points, such as how he agonizes over having to remind his father that the name of Joe's doctor is Dr. Bethany (Ruibo Qian) (22:23). Lee also reveals his neurotic fixation with detail when he exasperatingly reminds both Joe's lawyer how to enunciate "Minnetonka, Minnesota" (50:55), and Patrick who mistakenly refers to the place as "Wonkatonka" (1:06:58). Lee stresses over expressing such details accurately largely because he is unable to express his emotions at all. The breakdown of

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[132] William S. Burroughs, *Queer* (New York: Viking, 1985).

communication is further emphasized at Joe's funeral, when George and his wife start incoherently shouting back and forth across the room about getting Lee a plate of food that he doesn't even want (1:24:46). There's a struggle to make clear what Lee needs even at the most basic level, which is made even more obscure and out of reach at the social-psychological level, an obscuration which besets him and drives him towards acting out violently.

Lee's pain remains tightly contained within his metaphorical suit of armour, but the pain is so volatile that it outwardly manifests in violence and self-destruction. Lee's tendencies towards violence are a desperate attempt to resolve his crisis, to make visible his pain whereby he cannot speak, and to find meaning in the pain that is eternally present in his life. By starting fights, Lee not only welcomes the violence in return, but is driven towards the destruction that he believes he deserves. Like Rodney, Lee longs for redemption as well as oblivion, and the fighting is a way of enacting penance upon himself, as well as it provides him the illusion of an escape. Following the stunted conversation between Lee and his ex-wife, whose forgiveness he cannot allow himself to accept, he not only gets drunk and picks a fight in a bar, but he does so knowing that he will be battered by several more men in return (1:58:50). Lee picks the fight knowing he will be battered because he yearns to feel redeemed through some form of punishment. Furthermore, Lee wants an escape and is therefore compelled towards acts of self-destruction. Lee is driven by pain to feel pain in hopes that it will end the pain. Pain is all Lee knows, and it is all that his masculinity now affords him. Furthermore, as much as Lee tries and fails to alleviate his emotional pain through physical violence, there is also a false sense of emotional recovery as he physically recuperates from a brawl. Lee proceeds through the physical – through violence – because he has no other means of resolving the emotional problems of his life and his masculinity, and therefore represents not only a protest masculinity, but moreover how marginalized and dejected working-class masculinity has become. Lee is a dead man walking, and is symbolic of all those who follow him – all those working-class men who fail to reconfigure their practices. Lee's presence defines his absence, the disappearance of his working-class masculinity as a complicit configuration of practice in relation to hegemonic masculinity. His violence and

self-destructive tendencies speak to how working-class masculinity is now standing on its last legs, driven towards its own demise unless it is reconfigured by working-class men.

Masculinities are constituted in practice. To classify a masculinity as working-class then is not only to situate it within an economic hierarchy, but to assess its form based on the trends of practice that carry across a strata of men who participate in similar forms of wage labour. Work in itself is thus a practice, and to understand the conditions of men's working lives is to understand a large portion of what constitutes their masculinity. To be complicit with the hegemonic ideal, men must be able to protect and provide for a family. The patriarchal objective to reproduce gender relations through the family has been the mainstay of working-class masculinity for some time. Under neoliberalism however, as these films have shown, especially following the 2008 financial crisis, working-class men have been finding it increasingly more difficult to meet these traditional demands, and to align their configurations of practice with the new entrepreneurial ethos of hegemonic masculinity.

Where the men in these films are portrayed as experiencing life altering moments of crisis, they also represent how crisis tendencies have debilitated working-class masculinity within the gender order. As these male protagonists proceed through crisis and into violent conflict, they embody not only a rage that needs to be communicated through force, but the very will of the texts to make visible the death spiral that working-class masculinity has been caught within. The only way forward for the men in these films is to reconfigure their masculinities so that they are brought in line with the ordinances of the neoliberal hegemonic configuration. To do anything other than reconfigure is to be pushed out to the margins, and to lose the privilege that patriarchy awards men who are complicit with hegemonic masculinity. Thus, to proceed as a working-class man who upholds a working-class configuration of practice is to welcome one's own demise within the gender order. These films use violence not for mere spectacle, but to demonstrate how (self)destructive violence as a mode of practice truly is, and furthermore, how destructive internal hegemony is to men, and male relations. To actually move forward then is not only to recognize this apparent need for working-class reconfiguration, but the problems inherent in masculine hegemony itself.

Conclusion:
The Final Breath

What these films have described are not only the lived experiences of working-class men in America, but the conditions of working-class masculinity specifically following the 2008 financial crisis. There is an understanding within these texts about how this crisis, and the historical forces leading up to it, have had reverberating effects on American culture, leading to crisis tendencies within the gender order. As cultural products these films thus describe the effects of this crisis through the representation of working-class life, and in doing so say a great deal about how working-class men have been unable to adjust to the demands of neoliberalism, which has redefined what constitutes hegemonic masculinity. As I have argued, working-class masculinity has lost its reproductive potential. The absent, and conflict-ridden father-son and brotherly relationships paint a bleak picture for working-class masculinity being able to survive through social and cultural propagation. With their socio-economic positions being pushed down and out under the weight of a destabilized neoliberal economy that has been rendering working-class jobs less and less prosperous for decades, the very masculinities of working-class men have become increasingly marginalized. Without the resources available to provide for a family, the ability for the men in these films to compete in the reproductive arena is compromised, suggesting that their masculinities are no longer complicit with hegemonic masculinity because they can no longer fulfill their patriarchal roles. Since the imperative of hegemonic masculinity is to ensure patriarchal dominance, the ideal configuration of practice that is deemed hegemonic must continue to adapt to the changing social terrain, lest it lose its footing. Therefore, as the men in these films have failed to adequately reconfigure their masculinities, they have also lost access to that which gave them their positions of privilege within society: the patriarchal dividend.

Throughout these films, working-class masculinity is shown to erupt in crisis primarily because of its marginalization. These men incur moments of crisis, which are shown to cinematically emerge from their failure to observe the standards of hegemonic practice. The failure of these working-class characters illuminates how working-class

masculine practice contradicts the idealized practices of hegemonic masculinity under neoliberalism, and furthermore that working-class masculinity is being cut loose because it no longer supports the hegemonic imperative. It is then, as the men in these films proceed through crisis, that they engage in violent conflict, which as a form of protest serves to communicate the loss and tragedy the characters have experienced. Violent conflict as enacted out of protest by characters in these films functions allegorically, insofar as it allows these films to communicate not only the characters' tragic experiences, but the marginalization of working-class masculinity in relation to the new hegemonic configuration. Additionally, violent conflict has a symbolic function in these films, as it represents how internal hegemony operates, and the processes by which hegemonic masculinity is reconfigured through dialectical pragmatism. The way these working-class men destroy each other and themselves is a model of the way internal hegemonic politics articulate what aspects of masculine practice are permitted to live on as hegemonic masculinity evolves.

For the men in these films, their very lives and livelihoods are brought into contest to connote the dire situation that working-class masculinity is up against. For the characters who do continue to live on, in one way or another, their only hope is the extensive reconfiguration of who they are as men, as all aspects of working-class masculinity are – at least in terms of how these films present them – being progressively jettisoned from the neoliberal hegemonic vessel. In essence, the men in these films cannot continue to live as characters so long as they continue to live out working-class configurations of practice. These men cannot do so because such practices do not uphold the hegemonic standard and, therefore, they can no longer hold a claim to the patriarchal dividend which gives them their traditional position of privilege within society, which also means that they can no longer constitute a traditional cinematic form. The final scenes in each of these films identify that there is no proper resolution for these working-class characters, just as there can't be for these films, because there can be no resolution or way forward for working-class masculinity.

The closing scene in *Warrior* shows Brendan holding Tommy upright as the two of them walk out of the cage, and then the Arena together (2:10:28). Both brothers are

teary-eyed, and even though Brendan has won, instead of parading his victory, he chooses to leave the scene with Tommy, pushing through the crowd of people who converge on them, with only a concern for his brother's well-being. The scene emphasizes both physical, as well as emotional, support and dependency between the brothers. The song *About Today* continues to envelop the scene much like how Brendan's arms envelop Tommy's body. The brothers are shown holding hands – as best as they can with gloves on – and Brendan is even shown leaning his head against Tommy's neck (2:10:39), suggesting that he is not simply carrying Tommy from the ring to a place where he can physically recover, but also that he is committed to helping his brother recover emotionally from the pain of his past (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. Towards Reconfiguration. ©Lionsgate, 2011.

What this burgeoning relationship means is that it is not only Brendan's role to help Tommy heal, but to assist him in reconfiguring his masculinity. The final scene resets the story, so to speak, symbolizing both the loss of Tommy's masculinity, and the ascendance of Brendan's, but furthermore, by showing Tommy now willingly leaning on Brendan, he is also now relying on Brendan's masculinity for guidance. There is a sense of hope to the finality of this film, as at the surface level the brothers appear to move beyond their differences, towards mutual coalescence; however, subtextually the only hope that can be

gleaned from this final scene is that Tommy's masculinity can now be reconstructed through his renewed relationship with Brendan. Thus, where it might seem hopeful, what this scene truly suggests is that there is no hope for working-class masculinity, and that the only hope for working class men is to reconfigure their masculinities in the relation to the present hegemonic orthodoxy. Where Tommy was once unable to turn to his brother to help him with the problems of his own masculinity, he is now directed towards the reconfiguration of that masculinity, and Brendan serves as the referent for his remaking.

Although it is a relatively brief scene, the epilogue in *Out of the Furnace* sufflates a great deal of meaning into the text, and much like in *Warrior*, resets the narrative to a point without closure. The scene fades in from black, focussing on Russell's gaunt and reposed demeanour as he sits alone in a chair at his dining room table. The warmth of the wooden aesthetic frames Russell in the present moment, a present which is contrasted with the cold blue tones of the industrial scenery that seep in from the window behind him, symbolizing a past which he can no longer return to (1:48:08). Russell sits, isolated in this room, and isolated within the present with his right arm stretched out across the reflective surface of the hard-wood table so that it looks like he's counting the beads of the rosary tattooed on his forearm (See Figure 6).

Figure 6. Russell Repentant. ©Apian Way, 2013.

The imagery of the setting aligns with the symbolism of Russell's tattoo, insofar as it suggests – much like the ink on Rodney's body – that he cannot escape the scars of his past. Russell's positioning in the scene also aligns with the positioning of the tattoo, signifying that it is only through repentance and reflection on who he was that he continues to live free from incarceration. By all rights Russell should have gone to jail, this time for intentionally murdering someone, but he didn't, and this is because his acts had symbolically been authorized by the hegemonic configuration, leaving Russell in a state whereby he must continue to reconfigure his masculinity, or fade away like the others. By focussing on Russell sitting in his house alone, what the shot signifies is that even though Russell is not behind bars, he is still in a sense cut off from the world. Russell's loneliness permeates this final scene, as there is no family left to fill the empty void that is now his life. Even though Russell has adapted some of his practices, he is still fixed within the same cultural milieu – the same local working-class setting – suggesting he is still struggling to escape all of that which defines him as a working-class man. Russell is thus metaphorically trapped in a state of limbo, as if a repentant soul who is not truly damned, but must serve a term in purgatory before the final judgement is written. The shot fades back to black as Eddie Vedder's voice hums out somberly once again, with Russell fading into the mise en scène of the empty house, a house which is fading along with the rest of the scenery in Braddock; fading into economic obsolescence, like a memory that would rather be forgotten, but cannot be fully ignored because it protrudes at points, like the smoke stacks of a rusted-out foundry in busted-down town.

The closing sequence of *Manchester by the Sea* is important primarily for its nuance. Like the other films, the ending does not actually resolve the issues at the heart of working-class masculinity, but rather reinaugurates them in the light of subtle change. Lee has found another maintenance job, starting off in a similar place as where he began, except for the fact that he's made room for Patrick in his life, both literally in the sense that he is looking for a place with an extra bedroom in case Patrick wants to spend time with him, and figuratively insofar as he has found a way to open himself up to being a masculine figure for Patrick to rely on. Lee has changed, if ever so slightly, and his willingness to take care of Patrick, even at a distance, suggests this. Furthermore, Lee's altered demeanour also serves as an index for his willingness to adapt under the pressures

of hegemonic conformity. As Lee and Patrick walk away from Joe's funeral in the early spring – a time of year that symbolizes rebirth – he picks up a stray ball in the outdoor seating area of the ice cream parlour that Patrick walks into. Lee proceeds to bounce the ball, passing it back and forth between him and Patrick, signifying his willingness to play. Although this gesture may seem small, it is the first time in the present context of the film that Lee demonstrates a desire to not only engage in an enjoyable activity in the present moment, but in a ritual activity that suggests he is moving forward in his relationship with Patrick. Patrick is the symbol of Lee's future – the thing Lee is willing to adapt for – and thus Patrick represents the possibilities of Lee's reconfiguration: a new formation that Lee can see himself in reference to, similar to that between Tommy and Brendan. As the two continue walking up the slope of the road, the ball is dropped in a failed pass which Patrick jovially blames Lee for (See Figure 7).

Figure 7. "Just let it go." ©Amazon Studios, 2016.

When Patrick passes the ball back, Lee also fails to catch it, and then lets it roll back down the hill, saying "just let it go" (2:11:54). The scene symbolizes both Lee's failure to pass the configuration of his masculinity on to Patrick, and also his willingness to let it be cut loose, and fall away as it has from the hegemonic norm. Lee shows that he is ready to leave the past behind him, but as Patrick persists to keep the game alive, so too must Lee continue to play, catching the ball one last time before they reach the summit of the hill.

What this emphasizes is that, even as the film comes to its apex, Lee cannot fully escape the past that is behind him, and the masculinity that has been passed down to him, unless he reconfigures it entirely.

The epilogue then mirrors the prologue, with Lee and Patrick fishing off of the back of what was Joe's boat, but is now Patrick's (2:12:18). By resetting the narrative, but keeping it in the present, what this scene identifies is that even as these two men sail out to create new memories, those memories will only exist as echoes of a dying past: the dying past of working-class masculinity. Whatever way forward there is is not present in this scene, and where there might be a hope for the future of these men, there is not one for their masculinities so long as they remain bound to working-class practices. The scene positions Lee and Patrick in a state of limbo, between the past and the incalculable future, much like that of Russell at the end of *Out of the Furnace*, and the juxtaposition between the epilogue and the preceding scenes in each of these films also suggests something of the same nature, that the only true way forward is the accepted death of working-class masculinity as a complicit masculinity, and the full reconfiguration of practice amongst working-class men.

The final scenes in these films are chiastic. Where one might expect an overarching resolution to follow from these conflict-ridden narratives, there is not much to be found. What seems at points like a character will undergo a heroic transformation, one does not actually occur. The extent to which violence is employed in these films demonstrates how crisis tendencies arise from masculinities that undergo a loss of complicity with hegemonic masculinity – that which provides men access to the patriarchal dividend. Moreover, depictions of violence are used across these films to illustrate the sad but honest irony that violence is not productive, but rather destructive. Men are often pushed to use violence to find a resolution that will never fully materialize because of how much is destroyed in the process. Even though Brendan saves his house, and Russell walks free, and Lee can care somewhat for someone in the end, what these films illuminate is how much pain is suffered, and how much life is lost as working-class men undergo the trials of their economic marginalization – the crisis of their masculinity's progressive execution. How these films differ then, from others before

them, is that, much as they frame how intractable the problems of working-class masculinity are, violence does not bring about any actual resolution, just the illusion of one – it brings about an ending without it being clear what has actually been accomplished. Where there might be an illusion of hope, or the semblance of closure, there is very little substance in these final scenes to qualify for anything more than a cyclical process of masculine relations.

Although these texts end without offering any real resolution, they do suggest more than just the imminent demise of working-class masculinity. The small amount of hope – and really the only hope that these films provide for these men as they continue to navigate their lives in the afterword – is as mentioned, that of total reconfiguration. This ultimatum that is laid out coincides with the notion that as a society that appears to be incessantly confronted with the problems imposed by patriarchy, there appears to be no way out. As Connell explains, "the general interest of men in patriarchy is formidable," and as a system of violence and domination is unfortunately extremely difficult to dismantle, largely because "men's interest in patriarchy is condensed in hegemonic masculinity and is defined by all the cultural machinery that exalts hegemonic masculinity."[133] Yet, as she develops her thought, "this interest, formidable as it may be, is fissured by all the complexities in the social construction of masculinity … [t]here are difference between … masculinities; oppositions between hegemonic masculinity and subordinated and marginalized masculinities. Each of these configurations is internally divided…".[134] So, to follow Connell's argument, with recognition of how it aligns with the final tone of these text, there is in a sense a mystical appearance of hope, but the truth is that the best we can hope for is a better hegemonic configuration. The prospects that Connell outlines are illusory, and as a utopic vision hardly serve to galvanize one's spirit, as her explanation that follows describes the best we have to look to:

> men's relational interests in the welfare of women and girls can displace the same men's gender-specific interests in supremacy. A heterosexual sensibility can be formed without homophobia, so alliances of straight men with gay politics becomes possible. The pattern of change in patriarchy in metropolitan countries … means that the familiar array of masculinities will continue to be produced and

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[133] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 241.
[134] Ibid., 242.

institutionalized, but a cultural reconfiguration of their elements has become possible. Thus the paradox of masculinity politics in the 1980s: reactionary gender politics in the state and mass media (in the leading capitalist powers), and displacement of the pro-feminist Men's Liberation impulse by masculinity-therapy; but at the same time progressive shifts in many relationships outside state control, and critical analysis of hegemonic masculinity reaching new levels of precision and sophistication.[135]

This is hardly a hopeful conclusion for how to conceive of a society under the grip of patriarchy. The reconfiguration of hegemonic masculinity is nonetheless painted as the only real hope we have moving forward, much the same as the only hope the men in these films have is to reconfigure their working-class masculinities into something that is pliant and complicit with the neoliberal hegemonic ideal – to uphold, as Connell remarks, a "willingness to disregard other ties and to generate a particular kind of performance – the life denying labour of entrepreneurial management."[136]

What I have identified throughout this analysis is as a crisis of transition that has arisen from the notion that working-class masculinity is a configuration of practice that is becoming more and more difficult to sustain under the pressures of socio-cultural, and political-economic change. The crises experienced by the prominent male characters in these films, whether punctuated or protracted, represent the crisis tendencies of working-class masculinity at the societal level. As I have argued, the financial crisis of 2008 has provided a distinct cultural impetus for the production of such texts, insofar as that abject economic tragedy has had resounding effects on the lives of millions of Americans, and it is often the role of film media to interpret and reflect on cultural events toward a deepening of apperception amongst audiences whose lived experience is tied to the unfolding of such events.[137] It is through representation of struggling working-class men that these films make visible the crisis tendencies that pervade working-class masculinity at this time. Much as characters throughout these films use violence to communicate the insufferable pain of their masculine beings, so too do these films attempt to communicate the impending doom of working-class configurations of practice. As working-class men

[135] Connell, *Masculinities*, 242.
[136] Ibid., 242,
[137] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012): 45.

are represented falling into despair, destroying each other and themselves, so too do these films attempt to show how working-class masculinity can no longer survive under the economic conditions fostered by neoliberalism.

A moment has come to think about and reflect on what is occurring in American culture at this time, specifically with regards to how gender relations among working-class men are breaking down, and how configurations of working-class masculinity are dissolving. Whether this is an entirely good or a bad thing is too long a discussion for this venue, but there is nonetheless something different being relayed through many of the cultural products of our era, suggesting that the masculinities of many working-class Americans have fallen, and are intermittently falling into crisis. Though I am cognizant of the problems of sympathizing with those who have long held central positions of power, particularly within America, and within the global structure of capitalism, I cannot help but acknowledge the problems of the gender order that have culminated in the mass media. I see signs such as these, and I am compelled to contemplate what is happening that could be destabilizing the world that we know, and the gender order as we know it. I do agree that it is often not enough to simply describe the world as we see it, but it is my hope that by providing critical insight into these cultural texts that I have opened a door way, or rather and entry point, into considering the broader implications of what the collapse of working-class masculinity, as these films and many others like them present it, might mean to our society at large.

If what these texts portray is more or less accurate, and that the imminent demise of working-class masculinity is underway, many men will continue to struggle, while others rise to the top. What, if anything, we must be concerned about regarding this occurrence, is the effect it will have on social structure. Neoliberalism has thus far been scrutinized (fairly I might add) for its destabilizing effects on society. The reconfiguration of hegemonic masculinity may over time prove to be beneficial for those under its yoke, men included, but the destabilization of millions of lives is not something a strong society can sustain again, and again, especially if such destabilizing factors progressively result in greater amounts of violence. If working-class masculinity is indeed in its death throes, let us learn from what we have lost, and work towards reconfigurations that allow for greater

competency in communication and social relations, so that men are not pushed towards violence and (self)destruction when crisis tendencies become so prominent. Let us move towards greater openness and compassion, so that we can help guide those who find themselves lost.

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