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Hollywood Masculinities: Themes, Bodies and Ideologies in 1980s Hybrid Action
Cinema

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts by
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'Stay hungry. Stay foolish.'

Abstract

This thesis explores hypomascularity in Hollywood action cinema of the 1980s. The form of masculinity explored, sits as a medium between hypermasculinity and masculinity in crisis on the masculinity spectrum. This thesis examines how hypomascularity is a form of masculinity which is both strong and sensitive. From research hypomascularity is noticeably absent within film studies and gender theory. This further demonstrates a critical void that necessitates a wider exploration, making this study an original contribution to knowledge. Orrin E. Klapp suggests, the stars who lead these films can have one of three relationships with prevalent demographics. The third relationships of Klapp's theory, transcendence, presents the idea that 'the hero produces a fresh point of view, a feeling of integrity and makes a new man' (1969: 229) a perspective which aligns with that of hypomascularity. Using the research methodologies of thematic and close analysis through a selection of hybrid action films, this thesis examines not only why hypomascularity arose, but how and who communicated it through Hollywood cinema. Therefore this thesis covers many areas: the defining of hypomascularity, the Reagan era's effect on masculinity and the structural, financial and industrial shifts that took place within Hollywood throughout the 1980s, before finally considering existing masculinity theory and how hypomascularity may be a more applicable and contemporary form of masculinity.

The conclusion of this thesis demonstrates the defining attributes of hypomascularity, and how showcasing it in within Hollywood films of the 80s, perhaps exclusively hybrid action titles, hypomascularity allowed American manhood to realise they could be a duality of strength and sensitivity.

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	4
Introduction	6
Chapter 1: Masculinity in the Reagan Rise and Demise	16
Chapter 2: Placing and Validating Hypomascularity on the Masculinity Spectrum	29
Chapter 3: Personating Hypomascularity and the Contemporary Masculinity Sphere	35
Conclusion	64
Bibliography	69
Filmography	79

Introduction

In setting out to explore 1980s hybrid action cinema texts, the main aim of this thesis is to examine how the masculine identities of the texts, stars and characters aligned with that of hypomascularity, as opposed to the genre's common alignment with hypermasculinity. In his book, *American Cinema of the 1980s: Themes and Variations*, Stephen Prince states that 'the 1980s significantly transformed the nation's political culture, as it did the Hollywood industry and its products' (2007: 1). This preoccupation can be seen throughout the decade's vast breadth of blockbuster cinema, which simultaneously reflected, reassured and shaped the culture of decade, and, most pertinent to this research, shaped masculinity in America. Jill Nelmes reinforces the significance of masculinity to this decade of cinema when she suggests that 'the masculine body as a spectacle and performer, having a performative function, is a key theme in Hollywood film, particularly action films of the 1980s' (2003: 267). Correspondingly, Michael Kimmel argues too that, 'we cannot understand manhood without understanding American history. But I believe we also can not fully understand American history without understanding masculinity' (2006: 2), and thus, for both Nelmes and Kimmel, masculinity, American cinema and American history are inextricably linked.

The main objective of this thesis is to determine why hybridised action films produced by Hollywood within the 1980s enforced, and to a greater extent, even forged hypomascularity. This thesis aims to explore how hypomascularity is a form of masculinity that is a hybridity of strength and sensitivity. One that is no less physically capable than hypermasculinity, however unlike hypermasculinity, the form uses the perceived masculine weaknesses of sensitivity and anima as a strength. Considering why Hollywood adopted to dilute and fuse the masculinities typically displayed within the action genre, with comedy and drama, observing how when hybridised these films appealed to wider demographics, adopted a weighted and in some instances less hyperbolic narrative and ultimately presented a progressive representation of contemporary masculinity. Through close textual analysis, decoding mise-en-scène and the semiotics of constructing, critiquing or valorising masculinities, together with a broader analysis of the pertinent context of the year in which the films were produced, this study explores the necessity of hypomascularity, within a decade of great shifts and uncertainty culturally, politically and cinematically.

Academic interest in masculinity studies can be seen to have grown considerably since the late eighties. The status of masculinity can be seen to have evolved and adapted alongside societies and economies throughout the decades. However, a correlating reason for the influx of academic interest, besides the eighties' rejuvenation of Hollywood, is the cause and affect gender movements had upon the sphere of consumption and popular culture. The movement can be, in part, tracked as a response to second wave feminism, that emerged firstly within the 1970s and progressed into the 1980s. John Beynon suggests that:

Masculinity is in rapid transition, and for many, change is painful...the unquestioned authority of men (along with other former 'male certainties') have evaporated, leaving a deep sense of being lost. (2001: 94-5)

Simultaneously emerging were queer theory and gender studies that further questioned traditional gender identities, and further fuelled masculine anxieties 'about the stability of traditional notions of masculinity' (Purse, 2011: 94). Accompanied by the socio-political instabilities, it is of no surprise that Kimmel regards that 'by some evidence American men were more confused in the 1980s than ever before' (2006: 192). The tectonic gender shifts and anxieties in contemporary culture led key theorists, activists and journalists, such as Kimmel, Yvonne Tasker, Susan Jeffords and Robert Bly to emerge, agree and similarly argue 'one defining parameter: contemporary masculinity is in crisis' (Kord, Krimmer 2011: 1). Elaine Showalter describes this crisis in her book: *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle* specifically as 'fears of regression and degeneration, the longing for strict border controls around the definition of gender, as well as race, class and nationality' (1990: 4). Although cinematic and societal examples of masculinity in crisis pre-date the 1980s, Leon Hunt suggests that 'Whenever masculinity's 'crisis' actually started, it certainly seems to have been in place by the 1970s' (1998: 73). Bly notes in his observation of the 90s American male that they 'know how to go with the flow, how to follow rather than lead, how to live in a nonhierarchical way, how to be vulnerable, how to adopt consensus decision-making' (1990: 62). Journalist Charles Gaines interprets Bly's reading of the 90s man, noting the following:

Such a man does not know is his deep masculinity... And he will never meet and connect with a woman cleanly. What he needs, according to Iron John, is to

descend into his own psyche and do the dark, wet work of scooping down into the pond of his soul to find his own Wild man. This is the step that the Nineties male has yet to take, says Bly, and until he does he will never be freely and wholly a mature male (Gaines, 1991).

As can be observed from the large amount of scholarship produced a decade later directly addressing the crisis in manhood, it would assume its greatest significance in the 1990s. In order to understand hypomascularity, then, this thesis must consider how the crises in masculinity, influenced and shaped hypomascularity and its place on the spectrum of masculinities. To achieve this, this thesis will seek to explore the influences and implications which hypermasculinity had on manhood of the decade. As Donna Peberdy remarks:

Rather than existing in stark contradiction, hard and soft masculinities depend on the existence of the other for definition. Representations of masculinity are inherently bipolar, moving between hard and soft modes (2011: 102).

Given masculinity's inherently bipolar relationship as Peberdy refers to it, it is no wonder that scholarship which define masculinity and contradicting theories of it exist. In *Hypermasculinity in the Media*, Ben-Zeev, Scharnetzki, Chang and Dennehy point towards images in the media as the most important factor influencing hypermasculine behaviour, stating 'After all, media does not only reflect cultural norms but can and does transform social reality' (2012: 59). Zaitchik and Mosher themselves also state that:

The hypermasculine male is characterized by the idealization of stereotypically masculine traits, such as virility and physicality, while concurrently rejecting traits seen as feminine and thus perceived as antithetical and even inferior to machismo, such as compassion or emotional expression (1993: 54).

During the Reagan years, the male hard body or hyper body in films represented an effort to re-masculinise the nation, after the widely perceived post-Vietnam impotence, and rise in manhood discovering their anima which Reagan symbolised as a perceived crisis of nationality. Such films as *First Blood* (1982) and *The Terminator* (1984) thus became metaphors for symbolic resolution of perceived crisis of nationality and wider socio-political conflicts and crises.

When defining hypomascularity, it must be taken into consideration that existing theory and examples of hypomasculine behaviour, have previously been coined and used to describe the form of masculinity. Writer and social activist Robert Bly charts a mythological and often mystical path that requires getting in touch with the 'Wild Man', which he defines as a kind and nurturing masculinity, that is buried within all men.

As men began to examine women's history and women's sensibility, some men began to notice what was called their feminine side and pay attention to it. This process continues to this day, and I would say that most contemporary men are involved in it in some way (1990: 3).

Peberdy comments:

The Wild Man was a prevalent pop culture figure that raised questions about the state of masculinity at the start of the 1990s, frequently appearing in self-help books, on magazine covers, in politics, and on the screen (2011: 95).

Furthermore, Susan Jeffords describes her 'New Man' or 'soft body' masculinity as she alternates, to be 'one who can transform himself from the hardened, muscle-bound, domineering man of the eighties into the considerate, loving, and self sacrificing man' (1994: 153) which stands in opposition to her 'hard body' masculinity. For Raewyn Connell and her research entitled *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* (2005), which reimagines and multifacetedly reads the term 'Hegemonic Masculinity', considering the unique context, to which Connell applies her sociological concept. Recognises that multiple masculinities arose from its time period, culture and individuals. Perhaps the most recent definition that will inform my own understanding of the term comes from Peberdy's book *Masculinity and Film Performance: Male Angst in Contemporary American Cinema* (2011), which raises her male 'angst' theory and concentrates on performing masculinity and considers the emotion emitted by the male performers and characters they portray, bound between the socio-cultural context of the time. From extensive research, Peberdy's use of hypomascularity, is the first use and application of the term in film studies scholarship. Peberdy's research proposes that masculinities are fluid and dependant on both hard and soft attributes, and therefore hypomascularity and hypermascularity should be seen more on a sliding scale, rather than diametrically opposing forms. Whilst this

thesis aligns with Peberdy's understanding that masculinity is fluid, it is her application of the term 'wimp' to hypomascularity, where this thesis' definition of the term differs. Rather this thesis explores and argues how hypomascularity is a culturally absorbent form. One that is no less physically capable than that of hypermascularity, that understands and synthesises emotions and how to effectively communicate within society. One could argue, that this form of masculinity, can be seen throughout film history and emerged to its most effective and culturally visible form during the overindulgence of hypermasculine action cinema of the 1980s. Murray Scher observes the following definition of hypomascularity in his book *Handbook of Counseling & Psychotherapy with Men* (1987):

It is important to emphasize that the distinction between hypomascularity and hypermascularity is phenomenological in character. The terms refer to an inner experience of one's manhood... Hypomasculine types are no more or less socially competent, intelligent, strong or attractive than their hypermasculine counterparts... some of those men have inner feelings that may be diametrically opposed to their efforts at maintaining the tough facade they believe they "should" embody (1987: 323).

This definition, which originates from and is applicable to the field of psychology, is perhaps the best applicable definition of hypomascularity, and aligns with the core concepts of hypomascularity that this thesis proclaims. The peak in theory surrounding and converging masculinity studies, can be mapped to the early 1980s, reaffirming Kimmel's earlier remark, that American men were more confused in the 1980s than ever before.

Additionally worth considering, is the notion that hypomascularity is not bound by race. The fruit of the 1980s offered a creative flowering of 'rom-coms', comedies and action movies that were made up of or came from African-American stars. This perhaps more importantly allowed, for the first time for race to be transcended to mainstream cinema audiences, alongside honest, intelligent portrayals of both modern African-American life and US history from a black perspective. Paula Massood remarks,

This is related to the intellectual environment of the 1980s and 1990s, which experienced an expanded interrogation into the structures of representation and identity, particularly concerning race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (2003: 249).

As explored within chapter three of this thesis, stars such as Eddie Murphy and Danny Glover, two franchise action stars of the decade, advocate and author hypomascularity throughout numerous films of the past forty years. The transcendence of race, by stars such as Richard Prior, James Earl Jones and Bill Cosby throughout cinema of the 1970s and 80s, can be seen to have encouraged multiple generations of actors. The careers of Jamie Foxx, Chris Tucker, Cuba Gooding Jr. and many more African American actors and actresses' have only been possible due to the seismic African American acting within the 70s and 80s.

In her book, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, Susan Jeffords opens with a quote from American journalist Haynes Johnson, who declares 'In their impact on social, economic, political/governmental life, and on the attitudes and personal values of Americans, the eighties were the most important years since World War II' (1994). The ostensibly sharp divide, separating Hollywood cinema of the 1970s from Hollywood cinema of the 1980s, is not only showcased cinematically, but by the amount of scholarship. Research surrounding 1970s Hollywood, often paints and projects the decade axiomatically for its fruitfulness and artistic finesse. As for the 1980s, which when written about, is often considered pejoratively, being sandwiched between two decades that are scholarly considered of greater significance, the 1980s is frequently 'dismissed as a period of artistic and ideological retreat in which movies became simplified and empty vacuous entertainment' (Kendrick, 2009: 5). Similarly, masculinity in movies of the 1970s and 1990s, which are frequently viewed as formative decades in the ideological development of masculinity studies, have hence been heavily researched and debated. However as Prince expounds, 'the eighties is a decade of incomparable importance to the history of American film. So much about cinema as we know it today is traceable to the events of those years' (2007: 21), considering this quote and other material alike, through scholarly digest and textual analysis, it appears that there is comparatively little written about masculinity and foremost hypomascularity in 1980s Hollywood cinema.

Hybrid films offer the banding together of two or more genres. The Hollywood device, which can largely be seen to assume its full potential in the 1980s 'blockbuster-maina', is a technique used to attract a wider demographic of audiences and greater financial gain. Steve Neale suggest that, 'the concept of genre has for some time served as a means to a link Hollywood's practices and Hollywood's output to Hollywood's audiences and to the socio-cultural contexts within which its films are produced and

consumed' (2000: 5). Hybrid action cinema encompasses a range of films and genres - from science-fiction, drama, crime and thrillers, disaster and comedy - thus presenting a clear propensity for hybridity within Hollywood films. The films considered within chapter three, display dually through their critical and financial success, the positive reception hybridising action and comedy received. Hybrid action titles have allowed the genre to become more accessible and less weighted, creating sub-genres such as buddy films and action parodies. The comedy action films explored within chapter three, present a humorous, touching and action capable male, a form which exists in contemporary cinema, due to the hybrid characters of the 1980s. As observed by critics, theorists and commentators of contemporary cinema, action cinemas hybridising with comedy and parody, has led to greater representation and progressive roles for femininity within the genre. Yvonne Tasker suggests that:

Our approach to genre needs to recognise not only the context provided by film history but the fact that 'many Hollywood films - and many Hollywood genres - are hybrid and multi-generic'. Researching this cinematic form I have found myself relying on not one but several terms of formulations, each with rather different nuances: 'action', 'adventure' and 'action-adventure' of course, but also 'action thriller', 'action-fantasy' or 'action genres' for instance. This last acknowledges the diverse, and clearly generic, traditions from which our contemporary idea of action cinema is assembled... Most contemporary or post-classical action films are indeed more or less hybrids, drawing on and combining generic plots, settings and character types (2004: 3-4).

As Tasker argues, hybridity is an innate attribute to the action genre, with the earliest iterations and examples of the genre, such as westerns, showcasing a hybridity with drama and romance. One could also argue for the hyper-linearity of hypomascularity, with examples of hybridised forms of masculinity, being noticeable throughout the genre's history and evolution, from Western to swashbucklers, and from spy thrillers to war films and continuing to exist within contemporary cinema.

First and foremost, the primary research materials are the films that will be studied, but as this research is inherently concerned with contemporary masculinities and socio-political culture of 1980s America. The thesis will also interact with key secondary sources, such as; books, journals, magazine articles and interviews. Robert Eberwein's *Acting for*

America: Movie Stars of the 1980s (2010), serves as a companion in illustrating the acting and masculinity on offer in the unique time period. Key academics such as Stephen Prince and Graham Thompson, both of whom have published on 1980s American culture and film, are of particular significance to this study with their books dually acting as the originating bedrock to this thesis, whilst too having allowed one to identify a gap in the current field of scholarship. The qualitative methodological approach taken by this thesis, allows for a comprehensive socio-cultural insight into the phenological masculinity, Hollywood and society sphere. Considering how cinema and society and inextricably bound, and how they each fed off each other throughout the decade, and consequently informed the masculine landscape of America in doing so. By adopting this form of methodology, it will also aid in rationalising, why hypomasculine surfaced and was explored and embodied by stars and filmmakers.

Chapter one will contextualise the socio-political landscape of the decade, navigating the Ronald Reagan revolution and Reaganomics, alongside the traumatic events from the decade prior, considering the magnitude of after-effects had upon the manhood of America. As Jeffords notes, 'The Hollywood film industry itself shaped the Reagan presidency and the 1980s through many images, characters, and narratives that Reagan borrowed from film and used in his work as president' (Jeffords, 1994: 4). In addition to contextualising the decade, Jeffords' 'New Man' theory will provide a theoretical framework for both the socio-political aspect this study concerns itself with and masculinity. Additionally, this chapter will introduce and consider the works of Laura Mulvey, introducing her theory before expanding and further applying it to hypomascularity in a later chapter. This chapter also considers how Hollywood cinema of the late 70s through to the long 80s was designed and packaged for conglomerate success in an increasingly capitalist society, implementing money making structures through studios, narratives and filmmakers eyeballing for the masses.

Chapter two will build upon the contextual analysis of both cinema and society, and begin to explore, how and why they are inextricably bound and equally necessitate a new form of masculinity. Considering Robert Bly's opening remarks of *Iron John: A Book About Men*: 'We are living at an important and fruitful moment now, for it is clear to men that the images of adult manhood given by popular culture are worn out' (1990: ix), this chapter aims to further validate and define hypomascularity. By reviewing the existing paradigms of masculinity theory, established by the likes of Fred Pfeil, Donna Peberdy and Susan

Jeffords, alongside observations from journalist and author Robert Bly and Barbara Ehrenreich. This chapter considers the limitations and gaps in existing scholarship, using coinciding theory and examples of hypomascularity, this chapter re-evaluates, defines and places hypomascularity against the existing spectrum of research.

Consequently, chapter three will home in and consider Eddie Murphy, Bruce Willis and Mel Gibson for their representation as hypomascularity bodies of the 1980s action genre. The stars this chapter explores, intentionally and unintentionally restore, reassure and forge contemporary societal and masculine ideologies through their fictional action character's. Considering how onscreen identities simultaneously aided and detrimentally affected masculinity, as observed by Nelmes:

The construction of identity, how and why we identify with a character, is complex, a fantasy that we engage in when watching a film. Mainstream film is a site for questioning these rich and often ambiguous character identities and the study of gender in film questions what these identities are and asks how they work (2003: 266).

By assembling and further decoding examples of hypomascularity, the films and the genre's which they reflect, address what the American male archetype 'needed' to be, revealing, challenging or, more problematically reifying brands of masculinity that grew from the social, cultural and political zeitgeist. Jeffords remarks,

During the Reagan years, the male 'hard body' or 'hyper body' in films represented an effort to re-masculinise the nation, after the widely perceived post-Vietnam impotence, rise in manhood discovering their anima to which Reagan symbolised as a perceived crisis of nationality (1994: 179).

To the same end, the films of the 1980s, spanning 1978-1992:

In which the male hard body has not only been critiqued but seen as the source of men's personal, emotional, and social problems, would seem to endorse Bly's conclusion that images of Rambo, "lethal weapon," and one-lining, hard-shooting cops are "worn out." Bly certainly is critical of these images and heralds the

exploration by men of their “feminine,” perhaps more domestic sides, as parents and lovers (1994: 179).

As such, the films and characters explored within this thesis form a cultural barometer indicative of the shifting gender roles of the time, mirroring the decades back-and-forth of hypomascularity, hypermascularity and prelude to masculinity in crisis that would assume its greatest significance a decade later. The contemporary landscape of Hollywood masculinities is also considered and explored within the chapter, observing the longevity and evolution of hypomascularity, hypermascularity and the action genre.

The conclusion will rationalise how the culture of the decade necessitated hypomascularity, amongst the mass of hypermasculine bodies within dominated and intoxicated action cinema and society of the 80s. Alongside highlighting existing theory, models and observations aided in this thesis’ model of masculinity and which definition of the form is most applicable to the examples explored within this research.

Chapter One:

Masculinity in the Reagan Rise and Demise

To talk of 80s America, then, is to traffic in true-ish generalisations. What is true enough, however, is that Reagan's 'Morning in America' signified a great public vindication for the small government-minded conservative movement as championed by William F. Buckley Jr and Barry Goldwater (Pinkerton, 2018).

This chapter explores the years between 1981 and 1989, which are widely remarked by Jeffords, Kimmel and Prince as the 'Reagan Revolution'. The term refers to the dramatic changes ensued in American politics, economy and society, during the eight years of Reagan's presidential reign. The phrase is synonymously interchanged through this thesis with the term Reagan Era, to illustrate a time when political conservatism was in full bloom due to the restorative nature and patriotic optimism conveyed and enforced by Reagan, as Michael Schaller affirms:

Over the next eight years, through recession and economic recovery, intensified Cold War and a renewed dialog with the Soviet Union, Reagan forged a powerful bond with the public.... His connection to voters transcended specific policies and tapped into a popular will to restore a sense of community, real or imagined, that had been lost since the 1960s (2011: 36).

It is necessary at this point, to discuss some of the policies employed by Reagan's administration and how alongside the socio-cultural happenings of the previous decades, aided and simultaneously infected America. Firstly, for its tectonic implications on Hollywood and longevity of effects which are still felt throughout contemporary society, is Reagan's restoration of the country's economy, an event which is perceived both positively and negatively for its variation of socio-cultural connotations. The decade's relationship with money is best perhaps described as hedonistic, as the revival of the economy brought about greater economic freedom that was previously unattainable, with Reagan continuously lowering taxes throughout his two terms, from 70% to 50%. From a Hollywood perspective, the decade's encouraged spending aided in birthing the blockbuster and increased box office sales, alongside the materialistic and consumerist

trend that swept the country. Larry Taylor remarks that the beginning of the decade brought:

New restraints from higher-ups, coupled with the changing ideologies in the country- Ronald Reagan's presidential victory and his "Morning in America" mentality, cultivating a hedonistic spend-first attitude in the U.S.-pointing studios in certain directions to try and match the collective disposition of society. Bleary-eyed paranoia and distrust of the government was no longer the mood of the country, and the entire film industry began to shift accordingly, especially in their approach to action films (2018: 4).

However, the tax reliefs only benefited the more affluent demographics of society, which furthered the already existing class, race and economic divides felt nationwide. Despite this, perhaps the most distressing aspect of 'Reaganomics', could be perceived as its creation of the 'Yuppie', derived from the phrase 'young urban professional' and coined in 1982 by Joseph Epstein, to define the reimagined neo-liberal middle-class that hosted off the decade's materialism and Wall Street success, as Daniel Lindvall describes:

The defining personality traits of the yuppie, superficial individualism, empathy deficit disorder, conspicuous consumption. Perfectly embody the ethos behind the ongoing, ever-deepening and widening marketization of society and the accompanying and seemingly unstoppable increase in inequality (2016).

The yuppie, as showcased and critiqued through cinematic examples such as: *Wall Street* (1987), *Lost in America* (1985) and *They Live* (1988) which released concurrently with the movement, illustrate how the yuppie further redefined social class and wealth throughout America. The cause and effects then, of 'Reaganomics', can be seen to have spun off in directions that substantially impacted America culturally, not just in terms of how economic conditions are represented, but also in terms of how culture is produced and consumed.

Whilst this research is inherently related to and concerned with masculinity within the 1980s, the socio-political events that unfolded decades prior, must be considered when evaluating the Reagan era. Firstly, it must be said, that the Reagan era transformed American culture and politics wholesomely steering it in a rightward direction. Perhaps the

most important event which Reagan had to navigate, and which captivated the culture, politics and society of the decade, was the Vietnam War. Spanning between 1954-73, the costly and divisive conflict, pitted the communist government of North Vietnam against South Vietnam and its principal ally, America. Opposition to the war heavily divided American society, even post America's withdrawal in 1973 and President Nixon's resignation, the war still perceivably weakened and divided America for its immorality of forces and excessive loss of American and Vietnamese civilian lives. Amid pacifying tensions over a war that had just ended, the conflict was intensifying in the Cold War between America and the Soviet Union. The second influential and noteworthy event, which can be seen to have had knock on effects decades later, is the Women's Rights social movement. Emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, the movement forged for increased opportunities and freedom for women and is recognised as the starting point of second wave of feminism, which brought about enhanced liberation politically, in the workplace, at home, and concerning their sexuality. Simultaneously emerging, as a challenge for the Reagan era and sexualities of the 1980s, the AIDS crisis ravaged specific communities across America and in the process transformed the social, cultural, and political discussions surrounding sexuality within the United States.

As Robert Bly's goes on to explain in his influential book *Iron John: A Book About Men* in which he argues for a history of masculine periods throughout American history. However, the two events which he argues formatively impacted American manhood, were the Women's Rights movements and Vietnam. He marks the first shift in American manhood within the 'sixties male', which for him, became more feminised and began to treat women differently, post the women's movements which span throughout the 60s and 70s. He then goes on to describe the 'seventies males' as 'soft' who possess a 'gentle attitude towards life', and that they are 'not happy' principally because they lack 'energy' (1990: 1-4). Before coming to the monolithic presumption that by the 1980s, following the turmoil injured by the afore-referenced events, that manhood in America was 'worn out' and the manhood presented by cinema 'the tough man does not work in life' (1990: VIII). Whilst these events pre-date Reagan's presidency and the bounds of this thesis, for their impact on manhood and society, they must be considered for the evolvment, decline and articulation of manhood in 1980s America. Despite the fault lines appearing in masculinities as a result of the prior decade's events, of which Reagan combated with hypermasculinity, he 'received widespread praise for restoring national pride and an unembarrassed muscular patriotism that had lapsed after the debacles of the... 1970s

(Schaller, 2011: xi)'. Additionally, Reagan navigated and dealt with presidential assassinations, space exploration and increased racial tensions.

However, despite Reagan's restorative nature, and political slogan, 'let's make America great again', which is now being rehashed by current president Donald Trump, Reaganomics triggered the deindustrialisation of America. The deindustrialisation demographically affected the working class the worst, and geographically, the area of the country which is described as the 'Rust Belt', which refers to the region known as the manufacturing heartland of the nation. The importance of mentioning this event particularly, is to recognise how it triggered a momentous increase of unemployment and displacement within American manhood. As Bret Carroll notes,

The end of continuous economic growth, and the decline of heavy industry... made the class distinctions and class-based notions of manhood generated by industrialization less meaningful. Michael Moore's documentary *Roger and Me* (1988), a study of the decline of Flint, Michigan, as a result of GM plant closures, suggested that the workingmen felt powerless, alienated, and unable to adjust to new realities by articulating new and meaningful definitions of manliness and class (2003: 98).

Considering this, alongside the Reagan administration enforced cuts to welfare which were happening concurrently, these events further demonstrates another critical blow to the manhood of America. Consequently, strengthening Kimmel's earlier referred to remark, that 'American men were more confused in the 1980s than ever before' (2006: 192). Necessitating the wider exploration of masculinity within the unique context of the decade.

Hollywood in the Reagan Era

Perhaps one of the key reasons for Reagan's presidential success and ability to implement change; socially, economically and culturally, was his link to one of the most pervasive and influential features of American culture, the Hollywood film industry. Reagan's success and popularity presidentially, can be in part linked to his past employment as a Hollywood film star. Reagan's career largely took off in the 'golden age' of Hollywood, where he was usually cast as the quintessential chiselled American man,

trustworthy and handsome which was ultimately the masculinity necessitated at the time. Films of his such as, *Kings Row* (1942), *Night Unto Night* (1949) and *Stallion Road* (1947) are titles which perhaps best illustrate this, however what these films also display, is that Reagan was not always the lead role for many of the films he starred nor were his characters hypermasculine males, rather they often exhibited attributes of 'soft' masculinity. This form of masculinity, which typically presents the males to be softer, more sensitive males, who are perceptually weakened by female love interests, is exhibited by numerous films and actors of the 'golden age' seen best perhaps within Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944).

In an attempt to retell key events which occurred in the American social and political sphere. That had positive and negative effects on masculinity, cross-indexed with events from the world of American popular culture, particularly if not exclusively its cinema. James Hoberman argues within his book *Make My Day* (2019), the degree to which these spheres are in fact one and the same thing, 'It would be equally implausible to suggest that there was no connection between films that attract large audiences and wider cultural or ideological currents (King, 2000: 7)', with the Venn diagram becoming a single circle under the reign of the first movie star elected to the presidency, Ronald Reagan. However, by no means should 'Hollywood films be read unproblematically as simple reflectors of American culture, even when they attract large audiences. Hollywood cinema remains the product of highly specific industrial and institutional mediations (2000: 6)'.

A contributing factor that can be discerned to have fed and further intoxicated masculinity of the decade and led to the creation and constant overlapping of masculinities that arose, is the perpetual search and aim to exhibit the all American 'hero', a feature heavily romanticised by many titles of the western genre and 'golden age' cinema so richly evocated by Reagan and Hollywood blockbusters. American sociologist Orrin E. Klapp explores the multiple relationships between star, character and audience, and the forms, functions and, as Klapp argues, the three relationships between them. The first of these being reinforcement, to which the star and character abide by classic functions of heroes in society, providing a model masculinity, alongside maintaining social values. The second relationship Klapp proposes, seduction, he argues the hero breaks rules and norms, be it socially or morally with fictional characters and stars showcasing it is possible, permissible and admirable to stand out. The third relationship proposed transcendence, Klapp argues 'the hero produces a fresh point of view, a feeling of integrity and makes a new man'

(1969: 229). Klapp's categories of definition, or reinforcement, suggest that stars embody dominant social values, and in the case of this study they, 'embody social values that are to some degree in crisis' (1998: 25). This model becomes apparent in chapter three, however it is particularly useful when analysing Reagan, as he himself stands as an image of popular culture and as an emblem of American national identity, as Bob Schieffer and Gary Gates conclude:

Reagan's movie career became the beacon that led him to everything else that followed, and when he ventured into a political career, a part of him remained firmly anchored to his Hollywood past. It provided him with a secure frame of reference in the insecure world he now found himself in, and it was the prime source of anecdotes that he was so prone to relate (1990: 167).

One can suggest that Reagan's presidential ideologies and ideals hark back to a 'golden age' of America he evokes so richly through his philosophies and policies. As Jeffords states, 'Reagan's speeches, negotiations and policies were often shaped by Hollywood' (Jeffords, 1994: 4). Lou Cannon further builds upon this, expressing:

Hollywood has been the center of Reagan's life from the time he was twenty-six years old until he turned fifty. Even when he was gone from Hollywood, Hollywood was never gone from him. He watched movies whenever he could, and the movies were the raw material from which he drew scenes and substance. He converted movie material into his own needs (2000: 338).

In other words, the films in which he starred and those which he watched decades prior, informed his admittedly straight forward 'revolution' presidential campaign, ideologies and policies. Disregarding that the America he had been elected to lead, required different sociological and political messages than those canaled by films he loosely based his policies on. Notwithstanding, his conservative policies, those 'Reaganomics', state rights and family values gained Reagan the status of 'the great communicator' (Nunberg, 2004). For Hoberman, the genius of both Reagan and of the movie-brat impresarios like Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, whose box office dominance coincided with the rising of Reagan's political star, was their new-found ability to offer a counter narrative to the perceived national downfall of the 1970s. As film critic Nick Pinkerton further elaborates within his *Sight & Sound* article 'The other side of 80s America',

The United States, moments of wartime propaganda aside, has never had an 'official' film culture dictated from upstairs along the lines of, say, socialist realism, popular cinema like any popular product is susceptible to the vicissitudes of [the] economy, trickle-down from the headline news, and trends grounded in perceived or anticipated changes in public taste, and so certain periods exhibits certain tendencies, and certain films typify those tendencies (2018).

Thus, the pervasive creative immersion on offer from Hollywood, prompted society and Congress to look to the canal of cinema to strike back. Albeit, the industry's initial move towards blockbusters commenced in the mid-1970s, the eighties was the first full decennium, in which the top box office films consistently earned increasingly sizeable returns. 'In 1979, the average production cost of a film was \$5 million. It rose to \$9 million in 1980 and to \$23 million by [the] decades end (MPAA "1996")' (2007: 3). Through hybridised genres alongside:

Attractions, such as distracting star performances or other spectacles, might be thrown in at any time. The industry's promotional discourses actively seek to play up such multiple appeals and distractions, to encourage 'diverse positions of viewing' and maximise potential audiences. This is an important characteristic of the contemporary Hollywood blockbuster, but it is far from new to the industry (King, 2000: 3).

Movies like *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *Return of the Jedi* (1983) and *Back to the Future* (1985) represent the success of this formula, and appealed to moviegoers of all demographics, with each making hundreds of millions of dollars at the box office as Prince notes, 'the critical tendency to equate eighties filmmaking with blockbusters is understandable because in that decade the industry did realize that motion picture were capable of generating tremendous amount of revenue' (2007: 1).

Geoff King argues in his book, *Spectacular narratives: Hollywood in the age of the blockbuster*, for the importance of narrative structure within Hollywood titles, proclaiming:

One of the oldest and most familiar American narrative frameworks, the myth of the frontier offers a series of thematic oppositions and reconciliations that continue to

be drawn upon, implicitly or explicitly, by a range of films, whatever the status of their 'surface' plots (2000: 2).

Lucas' space westerns much like a large proportion of the decade's hybrid action cinema, can be seen to adhere to this narrative structure. Manufacturing the 'Morning in America' reality, tracks the journey from Lucas's *Star Wars* trilogy (1977-83) spectacles, to Reagan's proposed 'Strategic Defence Initiative' or as it was immediately dubbed 'Star Wars', which much like the hypermasculinity of the decade, acted as a hyperbolic reassurance policy to counteract the nation's perceived weakness from its loss a decade earlier, alongside the growing tensions of the Cold war. Alongside evocative fictional victories, and collective longing for perceived simplistic times, within their intergalactic fantasies, Hollywood much like Reagan can be seen to have succeeded in stirring up nostalgia for an age that never existed.

The size and bluster of the hypermasculine stars and hyperbolic action texts are in one sense defining characteristics of the Reagan eighties, just as the political sphere took a mood swing hard-right and society absorbed its ideologies, masculine bodies too absorbed the hypermasculinity copiously on offer, in an attempt to rid the perceived masculine weakness of the sixties and seventies. 'Hard body' films such as *Predator* (1987), *Top Gun* (1986) and *Commando* (1988) are prime examples of action cinema which reassured and restored society throughout the decade. However, what they also stand as, are prime examples of the pervasive creative immersion on offer from Hollywood, perhaps especially more so for masculine audiences. As the film's narratives, which are roughly based on contemporary combat events such as the Iran controversy, which are then hence delivered in the 'frontier' style conceptualised by King earlier, the films then act as second opportunities for America to overcome conflicts, defeats and therefore act as masculine oriented fantasies. This array of action movies aid Stella Bruzzi's concept that 'the action movie has become Hollywood's main arena for exhibiting masculine physicality' (2013: 111). Hyper-muscular white actors like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Chuck Norris and Sylvester Stallone countered anxieties over shifting gender roles. Hollywood titles did so by using the actors in a socially performative manner, and by placing these stars in what Laura Mulvey's theorises as the 'male gaze'. Firstly, established and explored in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), Mulvey proposes the sexual inequality, to which she remarks as the asymmetry of social and political power between men and women, is a controlling social force in cinematic

representations and that the male gaze, which she defines as the aesthetic pleasure gained by the male viewer, is a social construct derived from the ideologies and discourses of patriarchy. Although Mulvey's theory is conceptually related to a diversity of meanings and behaviours, perhaps most useful for this thesis is to consider how it is related to the behaviours of voyeurism, scopophilia, and narcissism. The masculine spectator's scopophilia towards the exhibited physical dominance and gritty patriarchal toughness, simultaneously allows for a narcissistic reflection and reshaping of self to be like the hypermasculine fictional stars on screen. As actor Bill Youmans remarks:

In America, the popular conception of manhood has always come primarily from movies. The male protagonists of the silver screen, from John Wayne to Sean Connery to Harrison Ford... have defined our ideal of what a man should be. In movies, men's cleaned-up, choreographed, heroic representations of gunfire and fistfights have presented for us romanticized, highly unrealistic notions of what violence is all about (Black, 2018).

Susan Jeffords' *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (1989) argues on the one hand, that this version of the masculine body is central to popular culture and national identity. While on the other, articulates the polarization of the masculine body, during the years of the Reagan and later George H. W. Bush's presidency. Her argument in essence is that:

Whereas the Reagan years offered the image of a 'hard body' to contrast directly to the 'soft body' of the Carter years, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw a reevaluation of that hard body, not for a return to the soft body but for a rearticulation of masculine strength and power through internal, personal and family orientated values. Both of these predominant models... are overlapping components of the Reagan Revolution, comprising on the one hand a strong militaristic foreign-policy position and on the other hand a domestic regime of an economy and a set of values dependent on the centrality of fatherhood (1994: 13).

As Jeffords refers to the 'soft body', and argues not for a return, but a reimagination of strength through mind and body, her 'new man' theory aligns and further strengthens the presence of hypomascularity within the decade. Whilst coming in line with emotions and connecting mind and body strength are key attributes to hypomascularity, the

paternalised manhood cited by Jeffords, as aforementioned surfaced as a key trope to masculinity and cinema of the late 1980s continuing into the 90s. Peberdy remarks upon Jeffords' narrative of the Reagan years that it is ultimately one of contrasts:

From the sensitivity of the seventies, to the macho eighties and a return to sensitivity and soft men at the start of the nineties; from the 'hardened, muscle-bound, domineering man of the eighties [to] the considerate, loving, and self-sacrificing man of the nineties (2011: 101).

Key films that exhibit the transition between cinemas of the decade and hard bodied masculinities to gentle warrior fatherhood, which much like the action genre, too, act as a prevailing link between politics and film and how cinema and society of the long 1980s communicated and reinforced ideals of traditional family values which were part and parcel of the Reagan and later Bush administrations. Jill Nelmes remarks that 'many films in the 1980s and 1990s have the role of fatherhood and the family as a central discourse. The family has been central to Western society and American national identity' (2003: 270-271), However as explored by the narratives of *Die Hard* (1988) and *Lethal Weapon* (1987), the 1980s brought cultural change to the patriarchal nuclear family ideals promoted by the Reagan administration. Danny Glover's family, in *Lethal Weapon* represents security, stability with Glover representing paternal authority. Whereas Mel Gibson's character represents a lack of stability, after the loss of his marriage and wife. As Fred Pfiel suggests, 'the 1990s signalled a shift in masculine subjectivity towards a more sensitive, domesticated male (2011: 101)'. The shift from a genre perspective, is noticeable through the increased hybridising of action cinema with genres such as drama, comedy, romance and adventure as exhibited through texts such as *Cliffhanger* (1993), *Tango & Cash* (1989) and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989). Whilst, from a stardom perspective, the late 1980s breaching into the early 90s, marked a migration for action stardom transgressing into lighter family oriented narratives. Key films which illustrate the shift are; *Lorenzo's Oil* (1992) starring Nick Nolte, *Regarding Henry* (1991) starring Harrison Ford and *Junior* (1994) starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. *Kindergarten Cop* (1990), *The Last Action Hero* (1993) and *Jingle All the Way* (1996) are titles which present a domesticated toned-down version of the hypermasculine star of the decade, whose acting for America between the early 1980s and 90s engaged in, defined and to some degree promoted major issues of cultural and social concern to America during the decades. Schwarzenegger's action cinema of the 80s and hybrid cinema of the 90s which

reinforced ideals of traditional family values and a form of paternalistic and domesticated manhood, succinctly aligned his movies with the American ideological pendulum.

Behind the facade of 80s conglomerate cinema, low-budget independent upstarts stepped towards making genre movies that exposed the underbelly of Reagan's America. Times and moods were changing in America. Nothing lasts forever, especially not the idea of an action cinema so succinctly attached to the American ideological pendulum, which started swinging in the opposite direction after the decade's overindulgence of masculine bombast, which began to wane. This consequently strengthens Kimmel's earlier referred to remark, that 'American men were more confused in the 1980s than ever before'. The flagrant machismo used to camouflage cultural decay and evolution, can be seen to have furthered the confusion felt by manhood in America post the anxieties of the 1960-70s, ultimately bringing to the boil a myriad of masculine tensions in the Reagan era, alluding to the formation of multiple masculinities. As Pinkerton goes on to argue:

In so many of the films featured, everyday or 'mainstream' American life is represented as something to be escaped at all costs. These are movies that belong to their time, but it's a time in which their characters are often ill at ease. Throughout the period, narratives of members of the professional caste in crisis appeared with regularity, as films returned to the sense of lost identity (2018).

Morning in America

The stardom chapter of this study considers three films for their depiction of hypomascularity within the unique context of 1980s America. Each of the films' opening sequences, arguably presents a sub-textual Hollywood microcosm of the socio-political landscape, showcasing contemporary manhood and societal decay all within Reagan's America.

Amid the era's 'Morning in America' reckoning, there were some filmmakers who kept the flame burning to make personal, often overlooked films that revealed the other side of Reaganism's patriotic bluster and hollow optimism (Pinkerton, 2018).

Whilst Pinkerton's article primarily concerns itself and makes a case for American independent cinema of the decade, the sub-textual messages about societal decay,

yuppie culture and negative connotations of Vietnam can arguably still be seen through selected patriotic blockbusters. The first two minutes of *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984), it could be argued, are a pastiche of Hal Riney's political advertisement *Prouder, Stronger, Better*, commonly referred to as *Morning in America* (1984). Martin Brest's 'direct cinema' style opening, unobtrusively showcases deprivation, black culture, soul and lower-class Americana in 1980s Detroit. The scene opens alongside Glenn Frey's R&B/Soul up-tempo top of the pop hit *The Heat Is On* (1984), with its drumbeat, synthesizer, guitar and repeated saxophone riff aiding in enunciating the lyrical message and paired visuals of humid, unpolished and un-Reaganised Americana. Brest's scenes are unparallel in Hollywood glamour, style and attitude, in contrast to that of the rest of the film. Quite the opposite, is Hal Riney's Hollywoodised political advertisement, which visually and orally offers a white-washed resonating cadence to upper class society. Staging wealth, self-entitled communities and false economy, aimed to suggest an improvement to the U.S. economic/social scene due to Reagan's 4 years in office between 1980-84. Whilst both are different mediums, it seems appropriate to mention and compare the opening sequence for its pastichè style and angst for the Reagan administration that is sub-textually weaved both contextually and visually throughout Brest's film. The foreignness of Brest's opening, distinguishes *Beverly Hills Cop* from the production line of action/comedies of the decade, with a poignant socio-political subtextual and contextual critiquing.

As in *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Lethal Weapon* unobtrusively showcases socio-political decay, from the offset Richard Donner hardballs themes of masculinity, yuppie culture and the woes associated with it. Opening with panoramic adverbial shots of L.A., the scenes that follow present the contemporary 'drug bomb' crisis, suicide, attempted suicide and post-Reagan domesticated masculinity. *Die Hard* similarly follows suit, as within the opening sequences, John McTiernan addresses contemporary manhood perceptible to weakness through divorce, strength and replaces the stereotypical hard body with wit. *Die Hard* promotes a distinction between perversity: perversity is being linked to 'bad' men whereas 'good' men are stabilizing figures in a husband and protector role. As aforementioned, the fatherhood masculinity featured can be seen to assume its greatest significance in Hollywood titles of the early 1990s.

To paraphrase JFK's "We choose to go to the Moon" Speech of 1962, America needed a decade of strength, knowledge and progress, whilst it could be interpreted through the positive implications of Reagan's presidency, such as his ability to restore

pride and confidence throughout America, following the failures of the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the economic instabilities triggered by a handful of disaster filled presidencies prior. In spite of this, Reagan's presidency brought further confusion and instabilities to the already confused state of manhood, penultimately leading the 80s being yet another decade of change, challenge, hope and fear for manhood and American society in what could be looked upon as a forty-year span from 1960-2000 of great instability and change within America.

Chapter Two:

Placing and Validating Hypomascularity on the Masculinity Spectrum

This chapter seeks to build upon the prior knowledge of hypomascularity, and consider, engage and reevaluate existing masculinity theories, observations and trends. This chapter draws from journalists, authors, novelists and poets, alongside established gender theorists such as Steve Neale, Laura Mulvey, Fred Pfeil and Susan Jeffords. The plethora of research sources utilised, allows for a greater analysis of 1980s models, periodic phrases and theories of masculinities, which this chapter considers and critiques in an attempt to forge ground for hypomascularity on the existing theoretical spectrum of masculinity studies. However, the readings and material selection for this chapter, are by no means a definitive study into the works of these theorists. Rather, this chapter presents a range of important viewpoints concerning masculinity studies, highlighting limitations and potential gaps in scholarship where hypomascularity would be a more appropriate form and term.

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed varying masculine identities, exhibited to the mainstream through various forms and across the breadth of American cinema. It is therefore no surprise that theory surrounding masculinity surfaced, with research opening up the debate to the understanding of masculinity and, indeed, gender in film. Steve Neale's article *Masculinity as Spectacle* (1983) is particularly important because he argues that the representation of manhood is in no way straightforward or opaque. Cohan and Hark describe Neale's article in their book *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in the Hollywood Cinema* as a 'pioneering attempt to put Mulvey's arguments in the context of those films that obviously represent a spectacular form of masculinity' (1993:2). Mulvey further explores how gender roles and patriarchy are culturally reinforced in and by the cinematic aesthetics such as textual, contextual and visual representation of Hollywood cinema. Nelmes notes 'the importance of Mulvey's conclusion and the implications of these findings initially resulted in little further questioning of the role of the male in film' (2003: 264).

The shift in masculinity, which assumed its greatest significance and noticeability post the Vietnam War, both physically and in the increased sensibility of manhood, did not go unnoticed or undefined. Charles Gaines remarks,

Men's movement is probably as good a term as any to describe the various loosely connected but determined efforts by a growing number of American males to redefine for themselves and society what it means to be a man. Those efforts seem to have begun in the early Seventies with small self-starting consciousness-raising groups for men who were trying to respond to the havoc wreaked in their lives by feminism; and indeed much of the men's movement still derives from a touching "me too" response to the women's movement (Gaines, 1991).

Barbara Ehrenreich's *A Feminists' View of The New Man* (1984) article for the *New York Times* references and coins this alternate form of masculinity as the 'New Man'. Ehrenreich describes manhood as one that is 'conscious of possessing a sensibility' and further remarks brought change 'to our common expectations of what constitutes manhood' (1984). However, the new man or hypomasculine model of masculinity was not overtly showcased through mainstream cinema and society, Ehrenreich notes that if society 'had not all been so transfixed by the changes in women in the last 15 or 20 years, far more attention would have been paid to the new man by this time' (1984). At the cusp of the decade, Robert Bly's mythopoetic readings of American manhood alternatively describes what Ehrenreich claims to be a new man as the 'wild man'. Similar to that of Ehrenreich's work, Bly argues the context during and before the 1980s triggered the change within manhood, causing them to access their feminine and sensitive side, attributes which he argues are innate within men, and that it merely took events such as the Vietnam war, women's movements and the over intoxication of hypermasculinity for American manhood to get in touch with their inner 'wild man'. In the cusp of the long 80s, Susan Jeffords' *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* references the 'new man' of the decade, theorising and interpreting it into her own definition 'soft body' masculinity, which stands in opposition to her 'hard body' masculinity which she argues dominated the decade. Jeffords 'soft body' shares the sensitive manhood that embodies the 'new man' and 'wild man', however unlike Ehrenreich and Bly, Jeffords references how the masculine body transforms from the 'hardened, muscle-bound, domineering man of the eighties into the considerate, loving, and self-sacrificing man'. Although these theories, observation and commentaries of the decades masculine landscape, confirm the presence and sensitive qualities of hypomascularity. Despite being coined and defined under differentiating terms they still very much present masculinity as two binary oppositions. Presenting masculinities to be a hard body or soft body, wild man or new man, limiting

and disregarding that masculinities can share qualities of strength and sensitivity and can fluidly transition between varying masculine form and identities.

Donna Peberdy's *Masculinity and Film Performance: Male Angst in Contemporary American Cinema* explores hypomascularity within film theory, primarily concentrating on its presence within cinema of the 1990s. The most relevant part of her discussion to this thesis can be found in the chapter 'From Wimps to Wild Men', in which Peberdy explores the spectrum of masculinity and explores the foundations of hypomascularity. As a term that is relatively uncommon in film discussion compared to its counterpart, hypermasculinity, Peberdy's work proved crucial in understanding the hypomascular male in both society and film theory. Peberdy introduces her chapter 'wild man versus the wimp' with Elizabeth Gilbert's work, in which she highlights the alignment of masculinity and nation as part of the wilderness versus civilization debate, or, the wild man versus the new 'wimp' man. Gilbert explores the idea of the 'last American man', a conceptual form of masculinity in which the 'the wildness of America' is 'strong, natural and untainted by the feminising effects of mass culture' (2011: 98). Whilst initially this returns to the derogatory approach that men are strong and women are weak, an arguably black and white stance which this thesis is attempting to avoid and dispute, it does explore the essential link between man and society to which this thesis is based. Whilst elements of the wild man are clearly evident in male characters of the decade, from hyperbolic violence to feats of physical strength, the weariness of war, of political and social unrest, and the changing roles of men and women have softened the edges of these wild men, thus creating the inherently more troubled and considerate male. From this perspective, this thesis very much aligns to Gilbert's belief that society is intrinsic to that of masculinity, though, like Peberdy, it acknowledges that masculinities exist by having a dichotomous relationship, rather on the basis of 'versus'.

Peberdy's work observes the trend in culture and scholarship of polarising masculinities, hard and soft, hyper and hypo, and placing them at opposite ends of the masculinity spectrum. Peberdy's perspective rather rationalises, that the two exist on a sliding scale, and argues rather it is 'the performative relationship between masculine opposites - in this case, between the Wild Man and the Wimp, between hyper-masculinity and hypo-masculinity' (2011: 95). The foundation of Peberdy's work is the understanding and reading of Robert Bly's wild man. She notes, 'Bly admires the stoicism of the fifties male, bemoans the feminine 'soft male' of the 1970s and calls for men to uncover the

'deep' masculinity inherent in all men that has been hidden as a result of social and cultural changes of the past few decades, particularly feminism' (2011: 101). Whilst this thesis concentrates on the progressive nature of Bly's wild man theory, his work, as alluded to by Peberdy, is at times contradictory. This is perhaps most noticeable through Peberdy's focus on his fear of 'feminisation', alongside his contradictory statements and alignment with 'masculinist manifestos and anti-feminist diatribes' (2011: 99). However these comments of lost manhood are then paired with an understanding and reading that femininity is innate and necessary to the creation of the wild man. Whilst this thesis does not dispute Peberdy's claims that Bly's model is 'sensationalist and contradictory' (2011: 103), it has simultaneously depended upon some of his more progressive statements on masculinity and femininity. However, this in no way, disregarding his often sexist politics, but rather builds upon his positive ideas in which femininity and sensitivity is crucial and innate to masculinity. Bly is both stuck in the past, trapped by traditional arguably outdated notions of manhood, whilst too eager for mans evolution into a feminised world in which there is a harmonious balance in which the new man exists.

This thesis aligns with Peberdy's understanding that masculinities do not historically shift from decade to decade, as proposed by theory from Susan Jeffords and Fred Pfeil. Rather, as acknowledged and explored earlier within this thesis and throughout Peberdy's work, masculinities exist by having a dichotomous relationship. Whilst acknowledging masculinities do change due to socio-political factors, such as the Reagan administration, Vietnam and feminism, masculinities are not as black and white as presented by Jeffords', who's work proposes the history of masculinity follows 'the sensitivity of the seventies, to the macho eighties and a return to sensitivity and soft men at the start of the nineties' (2011: 101). Pfeil similarly suggests the same, regarding the shift in masculinity in the 90s, he proposes the early years of the decade to be the 'Years of Living sensitively'. Interestingly Pfeil uses Arnold Schwarzenegger's performance in *Kindergarten Cop* to margin the sensitive male, against the likes of masculinities presented in *Lethal Weapon* and *Die Hard* to which he describes as 'rampagers' (Pfeil, 1995). However, as analysed prior, the masculine form in the listed films by Pfeil present a divergence and dexterity of masculinities, showcasing attributes of both hyper and hypo masculinity. Peberdy has a similar understanding that masculinity can take on both modes of hard and soft, hyper and hypo, however she believes one is usually more dominant at any particular moment. Hard and soft are 'each simultaneously defined in relation to the other' (2011: 103). Further affirming that both models of masculinity need each other in

order to exist and form the basis of comparison. Peberdy, alike Pfeil and this thesis, similarly uses Arnold Schwarzenegger's adoption of both hard and soft masculinity within *Kindergarten Cop*, where she argues he is both a 'physical and emotional protector' (2011: 103), linking back to this thesis' proposition that hypomascularity is the ideal man, exemplified by Schwarzenegger's compromise between soft and hard. As Peberdy further explores, Pfeil describes the 'New Man' as an 'expression of the repressed body of masculinity' (2011:101) due to feminism. However, characters such as Roger Murtaugh, Martin Riggs and Axel Foley suggests that men with so-called feminised attributes are equally as strong and impressive to that of the struggling and nostalgic 'Retributive Man', clinging to hypermasculine qualities of the wild man. The likes of *The Fugitive* (1993), *Air Force One* (1997), *Lethal Weapon 3* (1992) and *Bad Boys* (1995) are prime cinematic examples of this from the time which Jeffords and Pfeil base their theory. Whilst the ratio of hypermasculinity and hypomascularity are noticeably off balance, within action cinema of the 1980s, to assume that all are either 'hard' or 'soft' presents a narrow and untelling spectrum of the masculinities represented within more intelligent hybridised action cinema, not only within the 80s but throughout history. Chris Holmlund, rather combines these approaches, in her essay 'Masculinity as Multiple Masquerades' (1993) remarking:

Playing a role on screen, is a masquerade; she argues that it is an act of gender pretence, a form of dressing up and putting on a show, and that heterosexuality is also a masquerade, a charade, in which there are often homoerotic overtones. Therefore masculinity, and this gender, is a multiple charade of which the audience is aware yet not aware and much of the complexity of gender identity is understood by the audience at a subconscious level (2003: 267).

Nelmes similarly comes to this conclusion stating that, 'if gender is a social construction then constructions of gender in film are not absolute and therefore are far more complex' (200: 264). Differentially, Neale's *Masculinity as Spectacle* essay focuses on Freudian and Lacanian theory, rather than cultural factors which Nelmes notes this can be 'a rather limited method of study: racial and cultural differences, for instance, are ignored' (2003: 266). Therefore, seeing crossovers in masculinities running throughout film history renders Jeffords, Pfeil and Neale's models idle for their lack of consideration that masculinities can cross and converge.

Whilst Peberdy's work laid a solid foundation in understanding the basis of hypomascularity, it is Scher's definition which encapsulates the core attributes and position of the term, that this thesis aligns with. The enhanced inner feelings Scher refers to do not equate to that of 'wimpiness' as observed by Peberdy's definition. The masculinities examined and referenced to, throughout this thesis, are in no way presented through their masculine bodies as wimps. Rather they adhere to, perform and embody a dexterity of defining elements of hypermasculine and hypomascularity qualities further aligning their masculinity with Scher's definition of hypomascularity. Whilst hypermasculine actors and the characters they portray put a certain degree of pressure on men to align themselves with a wild, sometimes toxic, masculinity, Scher understands that the new man instead craves a harmony of strength and so called weakness; this in no way makes the new man a wimp, but an example of a healthy masculinity in which there is an acceptance of both masculine and feminine traits. This form of masculinity is arguably a reassurance to men that the Axel Foleys of society are equally as successful as their macho counterparts and understand that their strengths and weaknesses do not have to adhere to traditional notions of such to be valid; they are not wholly defined by a singular trait of weak or strong. Whilst this does link to Peberdy's understanding of the fluidity of masculinity, it goes further in its defence of the hypomascularity male, redefining the very prefix of hypo. Scher's work is progressive in its repositioning of 'below normal', instead bringing hypo to a stable balance that does not continuously strive for power and strength, but rather understands its limits and capabilities.

Ultimately, this chapter builds upon Peberdy's research, further exploring her understanding that masculinity is fluid and dependant on both hard and soft attributes. Whilst, terminologically at least, hypomascularity is the binary opposition of hyper, in its very purest understanding, this thesis would argue that the weakness proposed by Peberdy, is utilised to the characters strength. Whilst there is a binary opposition, it does not mean that masculinities are bound to either one, as linking with Peberdy's understanding that masculinity is fluid and flexible. Therefore, the hypomascularity presented by this thesis, is a harmonious form of masculinity, one that is able to be strong and sensitive and not the direct 'weak' opposition to that of hypermasculinity.

Chapter Three:

Personating Hypomascularity and the Contemporary Masculinity Sphere

The cinema of action is a cinema of striking back - of restoration and reassurance (O'Brien, 2012: 1).

The stars and characters in which this chapter explores, both intentionally and unintentionally restore, reassure and forge contemporary societal and masculine ideologies within their action films of the decade. Striking back in a necessary manner, to what Stephen Prince regards as, a decade of great instability and disarray (Prince, 2007). Following the social, political and moral upheaval the decade prior. The political sphere looked towards the creativity of Hollywood, one assured way to restoration of manhood was through star vehicle performances, pairing the commonly adopted genres of comedy and action with a star-studded performance, topped with physicality and weaponry. Action cinema of the 1980s, suddenly spoke to an increased audience awareness, Jürgen Müller acutely expounds;

The 80s were the decade for the fusion genres... action comedies like *Beverly Hills Cop* were extremely successful at the box office. The combination of action with comedy made particular sense in light of marketing trends, which predicted that male action film aficionados would take their female companion along with them (2002: 308).

The stars considered within this chapter hybridise action with comedy and drama, producing humour, sensitivity and action in equal measure. The dexterity of qualities embodied by the characters and stars considered within this chapter, align with Peberdy's observation, that masculinities are fluid and slide between hypermasculine qualities and lighter tones of masculinities such as comedy and emotion. Aligning with thesis' definition and reading of hypomascularity, a form of masculinity which is a duality of strength and sensitivity. One that is no less physically capable than hypermasculinity, however unlike hypermasculinity, the form uses the perceived masculine weaknesses of sensitivity, non-hyper muscular bodies and innate anima as a strength.

The hybridising of action and comedy, comes not only as a Hollywood marketing technique, but also as a sign that the action genre, alike society was shifting and evolving post 1970s, as Nick de Semlyen puts it:

Of all the comedians working at the time, it is Woody Allen who best sums up the vibe of the decade: neurotic, introspective, and muted. Funny movies were in scantly supply... Slowly, though, things were changing. The storm that had rocked the nation throughout the '70s was passing... The future, all of a sudden, seemed bright. America was ready to laugh again (2019: XIV-XV).

Audiences were presented with recognisable stars alongside some fresh faces too for restoration and reassurance. Whilst these major stars are important for many reasons, including of course their talent, signified by awards and recognition, it is of greater significance for this work to theorise and interpret the stars' representation of masculinities within the unique context of the 1980s. Paul McDonald's book *The Star System* (2011), establishes early on the differentiating worth of stars, 'In a commercial cinema such as Hollywood, stars are important to the processes of production (making films) but also distribution (selling and marketing films)' (2011: 5). Consequently, the stars' films are arguably inflicted directly or indirectly by issues of concern to America throughout the decade. Another source of influence is Robert Eberwein's *Acting for America: Movie Stars of the 1980s* (2010), which offers a collection of essays, each individually explore the decade's significance; historically, politically, socially and culturally. In Eberwein's opening remarks he notes,

So many of the stars' films are inflicted directly or indirectly by issues of concern to the country in the 1980s. Those include the aftermath of the Vietnam War; the advancements of African Americans; grass-roots social activism; increased attention to youth; the empowerment of women; conflicts between conservative and liberal outlooks; and aspects of masculinity. Some stars can be considered in relation to more than one of these...certainly part of their appeal follows from the way their star images draw attention to and stimulate consideration of these concerns (2010: 18).

Across cinema history it is noticeable that variants of masculinities populated Hollywood stardom. Stars such as Eddie Murphy, Harrison Ford and Tom Cruise, perhaps

best illustrate this paradigm throughout the 80s, as they assumed stardom amongst the hypermasculine sea of stars, who dominated the decade. However, this model, which one could argue offers a comedic, lighter version of masculinity, or to a certain extent hypomascularity, appears throughout cinema history with stars by the likes of Charlie Chaplin, Errol Flynn, John Candy, Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder are but to name a few.

This chapter could have opened with the names Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, or many others. Many of these names in fact are often considered in the same breath as the phraseology of 'action cinema'. However, contrary to this generalisation, there are a number of non-hyper muscular stars present within action cinema of the 1980s, further aligning with Barbara Creed discussion surrounding the notion of masculinity as play and performance, where her theory suggests that the hyper muscular hero is a 'simulacra of an exaggerated masculinity, the original lost to sight' (1987: 65). Formed through their fictional characters tackling of issues that are visually, contextually and sub textually comparative to that of societal actuality within contemporary society. The trio of stars this chapter aims to explore for their: masculine qualities, place within the action genre, and stardom, is ultimately based upon their "acting for America" throughout the decade.

The stardom status of Eddie Murphy, Mel Gibson and Bruce Willis was arguably birthed at the start line of their career in 1980. Each star in their own right pertaining to defining characteristics and qualities which elevated their Hollywood careers. From research of watching and scholarly digest, the stars considered within this chapter, appear to have little exploration into their fictional and non-fictional masculinities importance within the decade. Presenting a gap in the field of scholarship to debate, discuss and research the three stars hypomascularity import within the action genre. In light of considering Scher, Ehrenreich and Peberdy's observations on hypomascularity, the stars and films in which they lead, are considered for their utilisation of hypomascularity rather than hypermasculinity. Thus, presenting how the films and stars explored, form a cultural barometer, indicative of the tectonic shifts in gender and genre. Conceivably caused by the prior decade's pro-feminism movement, Vietnam and overindulgence of hypermasculinity which led to the instability and questioning of masculinity. As Prince observes, 'The films demonstrate a culture struggling to come to grips' (2007: 193), hence Hollywood's back and forth between the variation of hyper, hypo, soft and crisis states of masculinity.

In discussing star-versus-character, and the forms and functions embodied when being a star, Orrin E. Klapp's trio of relationship theories, as prior explored, will serve to analyse the following case studies and consider how each star adheres to the relationship model. Each concurrently aiding to address and forge what Klapp regards a 'new man' or to what this research proposes hypomascularity, whilst too critiquing and valorising how Klapp's theory has limitations, such as his argument that stars can only pertain to one relationship per film.

Richard Dyer's highly influential book *Stars* (1998), sees that stardom is constructed across various categories of texts, appearance and performance. The social variables such as age, gender, race and nationality are semiotic terms of importance to the following and public assignment of stardom, and the stars which this chapter focuses on. The success of the stars upon which this chapter centres can be mirrored through the financial success of their films and recurring appearances within similar action/ comedy films. Dyer's fruitful book opens with a distinction of stars and stardom, regarding the stars to pertain to two ideals, 'phenomenon of production' which is them being part of the economic control of the film industry. Whilst also regarding them to be a 'phenomenon of consumption' which is defined as the stars meaning and representation to audiences. Within the following star specific sections of this study, Dyer's theory is crucial to further exploring the financial success associated to the chosen stars, context of their symbolism and representation to audiences of hybridised action cinema.

This chapter also observes the contemporary landscape of the action genre, gender and masculinity within Hollywood. Considering the connotations of toxic masculinity, its relationship with hypermasculinity and the action genre. Observing the transitions in gender, advances in genre, and how hybridity offer a greater representation and spectrum of gender.

By exploring an eclectic collection of film history, this chapter will cross between career histories, considering how the stars and characters they embody advocated and birthed the culturally, historically and aesthetically significant form of masculinity in a decade filled with complex issues and ramifications.

Eddie Murphy

A book on stars of the 1980s is tailor-made for Eddie Murphy. No other star experienced so dramatic a rise and fall in a single decade (Gabbard, 2010: 121).

To cement Gabbard's emphasis on Murphy's significance in the 1980s, not only as an African American within the Hollywood ecosystem. Axel Foley, Reggie Hammond, Prince Akeem and Billy Ray Valentine, each of these characters are portrayed and tailor-made for Eddie Murphy. Memorable to audiences, through his slapstick acting, hip style and innovative attitude, assembling the shrewdest, hippest, fastest-talking underdog of Hollywood and yet most significantly, as Hadley Freeman posits:

Eddie Murphy deserves so much more respect than he is accorded, first, because he was once the most exciting person to watch on screen in the world... And second, because he made America believe, for the first and maybe only time in history, that race can be transcended (2016: 249).

For this then, perhaps Murphy is the most important star of eighties Hollywood. Murphy's masculinity, race, persona and place within the action genre, is distinctively incomparable to anyone or anything else within eighties Hollywood cinema. It is through four equally empowering and communicative forms of medias that Murphy became ubiquitous throughout the decade; stand up, music, TV which was primarily *SNL*, and most significantly, film. Murphy, unlike the other stars this chapter will consider, became recognisable from his stand-up comedy sketches on *Saturday Night Live* (SNL), the longest-running, highest-rated show on late-night television (History.com, 2009). The show undeniably birthed Murphy into stardom and his career in Hollywood. It is through Murphy's amalgam in appearance, class and perhaps most brazen contemporary comedic mouth of the decade, that he fit the shows bill of wry socio-politically tuned sketches, with himself often co-penning the scenes, whilst too being the face of the racial, class, and pop cultural comedic sketches. He was then, for better a phrase, an 'SNL Star' prior to a Hollywood star. *SNL*'s popularity has undoubtedly had an effect on a majority of Murphy's work through the 80s and later, yet perhaps most mentionable, for a duality of reasons, is *Beverly Hills Cop*. The film's positive audience reception led to the film ranking 4th in the overall box office results of 1984, grossing \$234 Million (IMDb, n.d.), Murphy's popularity led to Paramount making a trilogy of *Beverly Hills Cop* films. Given the current spate of Hollywood reboots and sequels, to which Hannah Ewens remarks 'the rehashing of old stories goes on and on, the stronger the appeal to our late 80s-90s nostalgia the better'

(2016), it is to no surprise then that there is rumour of a soon to be 4th instalment (Brew, 2017).

Throughout Murphy's Hollywood career, he goes on to characterise a milieu of black African American cultural representations, within predominantly white Reagan American culture of the decade. Showcased through such titles such as; *Trading Places* (1983), *Coming to America* (1988) and *The Distinguished Gentleman* (1992). However, whilst each of these films transcends race and cultural ideologies, Murphy's masculinity and its distinctiveness within the action genre and the eighties, is best chronologically tracked through his following action films: *48 hrs.* (1982) and *Beverly Hills Cop*.

Mostly recently, in an article surrounding Murphy's resurgence, Charles Bramesco remarks that, 'Eddie Murphy's career has strafed some rather low valleys, but he's never far from another upswing... he can turn the old talent on whenever he feels like it' (2019). Unlike the other stars explored within this chapter, Murphy's career, post his delirious success of the 80s and early 90s, diminished. As Bramesco further insinuates, 'A good Eddie Murphy performance is like Halley's Comet — dependable if infrequent, and dazzling when it does happen' (2019). Murphy's returning for the *Coming to America* (1988) sequel and recent chain of collaborations with Netflix, place Murphy amid comeback.

Walter Hill's *48 hrs.* (1982) was not just Eddie Murphy's first action film, but also his first Hollywood film, co-starring alongside the well-established Hollywood actor Nick Nolte. The film teams a mean-talking, hypermasculine white cop with a hip young black convict who has been freed on a 48-hours pass, to aid solving an investigation. During which time the unlikely, back and forth, bitter insults, and a few punches begin to develop a friendship. Murphy's acting ability, brazen foul-mouthed comedy and confidence dominates each scene, having said this then, the film's success financially and audience receptivity is undoubtedly tied to Murphy and only him. Murphy's stardom is further affirmed and critically serenaded through Roger Ebert's opening remarks of his contemporary review of *48 hrs.*, denouncing 'Sometimes an actor becomes a star in just one scene... And in "48 Hrs." it happens to Eddie Murphy' (Ebert, 1982). The success of *48 hrs.* can be margined against Dyer's 'phenomenon of production' concept (1998). Placing Murphy as the star vehicle to the film's success, which, given Murphy's popularity on *SNL* and the following associated to the show, considering Murphy as the economic gauge to Hill's film is

patent. Dyer's theory can be seen through the contrasting of financial gross of Hill's previous titles, which too were hybridised action films much like *48 hrs.* Firstly, *The Warrior* (1979), produced a gross of \$22 million (IMDb, n.d.), whilst *The Long Riders* (1980) produced \$23 million (IMDb, n.d.). Admittedly in comparison to *48 hrs.*, which grossed \$78 million (IMDb, n.d.), Hill's two films of 1979 and 1980, could be considered as flops compared to the immense earnings of Murphy's first outing.

Murphy's Reggie Hammond stands in polar opposite of masculinity, race, occupation and class to Nolte's Jack Cates. However, through these terms of difference, Murphy's race, gender and ideologies are transcended. Whilst the film does not tackle racism, like many other films of the decade, racism can be seen throughout, and despite this, and as demonstrated throughout the narrative, Murphy advantageously uses his ethnicity and African American culture to his advantage. Whilst this study does not set out to explore race in detail, to not include the significance of Murphy's advocating of black masculinity, and his importance as a black African American within the context, would be remiss of his stardom foundations and weight. O'Brien has argued that such:

Ironic humour has been deployed throughout the action film in similarly ambiguous ways... We have already seen an example of this in *48 hrs.* Where racial bigotry is defused by the application of the buddy principle - diminishing the intensity, as Durgrant might say. The same process is at work across many Eddie Murphy films, including *Beverly Hills Cop* where Axel Foley's narrative and linguistic confrontation of white privilege is by no means an assertion of radical politics (2012: 65).

During the bar scene, which Ebert claims marks Murphy's Hollywood star birthing (1982), Murphy thinks the bartender, of a redneck country joint, may have some information. The bar is jam packed with urban cowboys and Murphy, impersonating a police officer, walks into the bar, where he gets offered a "black Russian". He then takes command, intimidating everybody, beating rednecks in his way, and eventually getting his information. In a scene prior to Murphy's showdown, we see Reggie attempt to make a deal with Jack, to which if he helps aid the investigation by gaining information from the bar, he can go get some "pussy". This request, explicitly exhibits Reggie's hypermasculinity and heterosexuality. Reggie's proposed deal is met with Jack smugly towering over him, as he goes on to say "What for? Any man who talks about women like you can't get it up?". Interestingly implying that because of Reggie's fast mouthed 'jive',

paired with his foul mouth, style and body type, which Nolte's character already comments on earlier in the film, Reggie wouldn't be able to have sex with a woman. From these two scenes, Murphy's distinctive blend of hyper and hypomascularity paired with his racial dominance, first made an outing within his Hollywood career. A distinctive role which he would go on to imitate and recreate for numerous titles within the decade.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, we see Murphy portray a position of power, arguably within the bounds of a white spectrum given the supporting cast, writers, producers and director being wholesomely white, a tough black detective in Martin Brest's *Beverly Hills Cop*. The film centres on Axel Foley's personal and occupational inquest into his friend's murder. The investigation extradites Axel to the 'Reaganised' yuppie hub of Beverly Hills. As in *48 hrs.*, Axel's race, sense of dress, body type and ideologies protrude from that of his co-starring detectives, Rosewood (Judge Reinhold) and Taggart (John Ashton) whose formal dress code, makes them stand out more so than Axel as undercover cops. However, what their dress sense and contributing hypermasculine factors such as height and build do assert, is their position of power. Despite their occupational, physical and aesthetic power over Axel, in nearly every action scene of the film, Axel outsmarts, out-shoots and physically outdoes both Rosewood and Taggart. Nick de Semlyen cites:

Rather than the buffed-up, hardboiled guy he had become in recent drafts, they turned Axel into a scruffy wiseass, always flying by the seat of his pants. Though a law-enforcement officer, Foley was to be an underdog perpetually snapping at the heels of his affluent enemies. And despite the fact the script had been written with white stars in mind, Murphy's skin colour only sharpened the him-against-them dynamic (2019: 142).

On the surface, Axel could be viewed as a continuation of Reggie, and *Beverly Hills Cop* as Paramount's attempt to spin off the success of *48 hrs.* Which, when applying Richard Dyer's concept of 'phenomenon of production', Murphy could be viewed in what Dyer best surmises as, 'a form of capital possessed by the studios. Robert A. Brady sees this as part of the monopolistic character of the Hollywood industry' (Dyer, 1998). Despite being part of Paramount's monopolistic deal with Murphy, his performance in Brest's film offers a version of Murphy within American society which is culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant; even more so than his role with *48 hrs.* In an article entitled

'*Beverly Hills Cop*' at 30: *The Best and Worst of Eddie Murphy*, Matthew Chernov celebrates the longevity of Murphy's career;

"Beverly Hills Cop" is a non-stop, super-charged star vehicle that features Murphy at the top of his game. A deft mix of comedy and action, the film topped "Ghostbusters" and "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" at the box office to become the No. 1 movie of 1984 (2014).

Murphy's gender, hypermasculinity and hypomasculinity is foremost within his hybrid action films of which he starred throughout the decade. Through a catalogue of attributes including physical acting, dialogue, persona and style, Murphy singularly forms a cultural barometer indicative of variable masculinities and, showcasing through his roles of Reggie Hammond and Axel Foley, a duality of masculinities. Whilst each character portrayed can be seen to be hypermasculine, through their fictional occupations, physical acting and wielding of a gun, correspondingly, each of his characters can equally be seen to portray hypomasculine capacities, exhibiting non-masculine behaviour and traits, namely emotions, feminine attributes, homosexuality, asexuality and occasionally weak nature. Following on from Ebert's *48 hrs.* review, he goes on to describes Murphy as 'human, vulnerable, and touching' (1982), capacitating him as more than another hypermasculine actor of the action genre.

As Eddie Murphy has countless admitted within his numerous interviews of the decade he often pastiched the performances of Richard Pryor. In an interview with Bill Zehme for *Rolling Stone* in 1989, *Eddie Murphy: Call Him Money*, Murphy talks, music, film, race and fame, going on to say that 'there's so much Richard in me' (Zehme, 1989). Murphy has in fact worked alongside Pryor, on his (only) directorial outing *Harlem Nights* in 1989. Just as Murphy can be seen as a sprouting from Pryor, actors such as Chris Rock, Martin Lawrence and Will Smith, be it on stage or screen, can be seen as sprouts of Murphy's transcending stardom.

Bruce Willis

A key star to emerge from the decade is Bruce Willis who quickly, upon surfacing, became a renowned and recognised face of the action genre line up of stars; starring in 7 Hollywood products in the 80s alone, whilst continually appearing in ABC's hit TV show

Moonlighting (1985-89). Willis' talent can be tracked through his numerous award nominations within the decade, but best perhaps through his winning of a Golden Globe for best comedic actor in 1987 and a Primetime Emmy for best actor in the same year. Willis's fictional character, John McClane from *Die Hard*, can be seen as one of the founding members, to the rejuvenation and reinvention of the action genre. Following the prior decade's wave of gritty thrillers such as *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* (1974), *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976) and *Dirty Harry* (1971).

Willis found most critical success within the action genre. Much like the other stars explored within this chapter, Willis' masculinity, persona and place within the action genre is distinctive and necessary amongst the unique context of the decade. However before becoming a national action hero, Willis began working in TV, most notably in *Moonlighting*. The show blends and bends comedy, drama and mystery to form a synopsis of a former model and smart-cum-stupid detective who together manage a private detective agency. Willis stars alongside Hollywood actress Cybill Shepherd, who gained her stardom the decade prior, with such titles as *The Last Picture Show* (1971) and *Taxi Driver* (1976). With the show winning a multitude of awards and spanning over 66 episodes within five seasons, the nation fell for youthful witty Willis. The duo's back and forth of; witty, spunky, rambling conversations, fights and falling in love, arguably led to the shows unique quality within the decade, as further argued by columnist and screenwriter Darragh McManus, who in his retrospective review remarks; 'With its snappy repartee, its playful riffs on private eye clichés and its couple who love to hate to love each other, *Moonlighting* harks back to Hollywood's golden age, the era of film noir and screwball comedies. And yet, ironically, it was to prove hugely influential on the future of TV.' (2019)

Given Willis's success within the realms of TV, his career gravitated him towards Hollywood, where he made a duo of films with director Blake Edwards; firstly, romantic comedy *Blind Date* (1987), then followed by the hybrid western/murder mystery *Sunset* (1988). Considering Willis's success as an action star, both these films seem like 'blanks' in his action filled filmography in retrospect, especially considering that *Die Hard* came out the same year as the latter of Edwards' films. Despite neither of these films residing within the action genre, what they do offer to this study, is an essential preview into what James Morrison regards as Willis's 'postmodern masculinity and stardom' (2010: 236). Morrison's concept raises the point that *Sunset* questions traditional masculinity with Willis being a 'transitional figure' (2010: 236). The 'transitional figure' which Morrison details, could be

read as what Susan Jeffords regards as 'The Big Switch' (the transition from the post-Vietnam 'remasculinization' films, to a gentler, sensitive form of manhood, who could still be an action hero) (2010: 238), or to what this research proposes as hypomascularity.

Willis' wise guy attitude and hypomascularity can be seen to define his persona as he became immersed in the John McClane character for John McTiernan's *Die Hard*. The film follows New York cop *McClane*, as he visits his estranged wife Holly Gennaro portrayed by Bonnie Bedelia. Joining her in LA for a work Christmas party, the film takes place in the film's fictional 'Nakatomi Plaza'. However, the festivities are short lived, as the plaza is sieged by a transnational group of terrorists who take over the exclusive high-rise, and everyone in it. The only hostage uncounted for is *McClane* who swiftly swings into action with witty remarks, and saves both the hostages and his marriage.

Die Hard, perhaps more so than other films explored within this study, disavows the archetype of remasculinisation which is exhibited within other films of the 80s action genre. Yvonne Tasker's analysis of *Die Hard* 'suggests the particular representation of the male body in the 1980s reflects an anxiety about the roles that men and women have in their everyday lives, both at home and at work, and their concerns regarding shifts in society and gender roles' (2003: 267). Being released in the latter half of the decade, McClane's masculinity and ideologies align more so with hypomascularity or the 'kinder, gentler' manhood which Jeffords refers to in her essay *The Big Switch: Hollywood Masculinity in the Nineties* (2012). Willis's hybridising of postmodern masculinity, rendered alongside the spectacular narrative archetype, presents a duality of masculinities, or more aptly, hypomascularity, as throughout the film Willis mixes sensitivity and weakness, alongside nostalgic western hypermasculine cowboy mannerisms. The film's release later in the decade, allowed for self-reflexivity and mockery of prior hyperbolic action heroes. The first instance of this, is upon the initial radio contact between Hans Gruber, portrayed by Alan Rickman, and McClane; "You know my name, but who are you? Just another American who saw too many movies as a child? Another orphan of a bankrupt culture who thinks he's John Wayne? Rambo? Marshal Dillon?". McClane however denounces he prefers a different idol, "I was always kinda partial to Roy Rogers actually. I really like those sequined shirts." As demonstrated by the quote, the film presents an intense self-reflexivity regarding its comedy action status and awareness of being a cultural object. McClane's choice of idol, not only displays his wit, attitude and individualism, but also the extent that he comments on Roy Roger's style of dress, but too exhibits that he has no

ambition to pastiche the hypermasculine gunslingers who captivated the genre throughout the decades prior.

Conversely, the film mentions such actors as John Wayne and Marshal Dillon, stars who were predominantly located within the Western genre, a genre that throughout decades has evolved alongside cultural needs and Hollywood's development to form the contemporary action genre, Kimmel notes the western genre to be the 'apotheosis of masculinist fantasy' (2011: 111). It is proposed by film critic Scott Tobias, that 'Bruce Willis plays McClane as the modern American cowboy' (2018). McClane, who throughout the film is nicknamed "Mr. Cowboy" by Gruber, explicitly exhibits fundamental elements of the cowboy figure; bravery, physical strength and a separation from modern civilization, in McClane's case his separation from his wife. Yet, due to his occupation and love for Holly, he stands as a protective barrier, despite his waning authority in his wife's transnational space. Kimmel's *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (2011) offers a comprehensive study on American masculinity and argues the frontier western myth to be complicated concept that offers shifting definitions, yet is a key ideological text for the ideals of rugged masculinity and American individualism from that of Frederick Jackson Turner's originating frontier thesis of 1893, to the new frontier introduced by John F. Kennedy in 1960. The shifting frontier is something that has captivated American culture, and manhood throughout history, despite its acclaimed collapse in the wake of the Vietnam war, the masculine frontier is still very much present within American society, Peberdy notes:

The masculine frontier has come to stand for nature over culture, implying nostalgia for any moment where traditional definitions of masculinity have been threatened or usurped by the capitalist forces of modern society (2011:98).

The cultural significance of the frontier myth is undeniable, when considering the shifting frontier's perceivable effects on masculinity. In a scene following a shootout, a visibly exhausted and bloodied McClane delivers a message via a walkie-talkie to police officer Al Powell portrayed by Reginald VelJohnson. Within this sequence, McClane's marriage becomes a point of discussion which reveals his internal conflict, in what can be interpreted his final message to Holly, confessing he should have been more supportive of her career, "She's heard me say I love you a hundred times but she has never heard me say I'm sorry" (1988). Willis's nuanced characterisation of McClane, showcases him 'as an imperfect individual who is vulnerable to both physical and emotional pain' (Abele, 2002:

449). McClane's message not only provides a moment of reflection, but too reveals vulnerability hinting that he may not survive. The level of emotional vulnerability presented by Willis's character, is virtually non-existent in characters depicted by Schwarzenegger, Stallone and many other stars who dominated the toxic masculinity typical of 80s action. A similar vulnerability and weakness is displayed in the film's opening sequence, McTiernan interestingly opts to present McClane's weakness and fears firstly, opposed to establishing his hypermasculinity through an action sequence. The scene places McClane on a plane, where through his body language, his fear of flying is made clear. When his co-passenger asks him the inevitable, he replies in true wise guy McClane fashion, "what gives you that idea?" (1988). After exhibiting weakness, the film makes a conscious effort to counterbalance, showcasing McClane's hyper masculine occupation through his holstered pistol attached to his waist. Despite this, the duality of masculinity on show from the onset, paired alongside the 'everyman' persona and physique of Willis, allows for an inherently more relatable protagonist to audiences. By showcasing hypermasculine abilities, through McClane's 'everyman' body, the film alongside demonstrating McClane's sensitivity, illustrates the fluidity of masculinity and ability to transition between strength and sensitivity.

Despite McClane displaying attributes of nostalgic western hypermasculinity throughout the film, *Die Hard* belies the fact that the 'vast prairie is the domain of male liberation' (Kimmel, 2006: 111), alongside exhibiting attributes which are contrary to the film's western connections, which ultimately allow Willis to embody a postmodern masculinity. The film's setting between the walls of the fictional 'Nakatomi Plaza', which is paradoxical to Kimmel's western prairie concept, denies the metaphoric space in 1980s culture for archaic hypermasculinity found in fully fledged westerns and as featured in other action films of the decade. *Die Hard* uses the postmodern stardom of Willis, presenting McClane within a contemporary environment of 'cultural feminization, and domestic emasculation' (Kimmel, 2006: 111). Illustrated by his amalgam of emotions, encapsulated within cowboy western generic sentiments, the film transgresses Jeffords' 'kinder, gentler manhood' (2012: 196-208) ideological message on the state of manhood in the late-twentieth century, without presenting Willis as wimpish.

Die Hard's hybridity of genres and masculinities, distinguishes it from an era dominated by hypermuscular action portrayals. The film's longevity of success can be tracked through a duality of modes culturally and financially \$140,767,956 (IMDb, n.d.).

Perhaps most notable though, is that *Die Hard* serves as a benchmark, for many comedy action movies that followed in the 1990s and later, particularly *Under Siege* (1992), *Speed* (1994) and *Con Air* (1997). Crucially, the worth of Willis and his immersive, transitional figure, who much like Eddie Murphy, through his hybridising masculinities and acting ability, forged the 'disparate' action heroes.

Mel Gibson

Emerging at the forefront of American culture, caught in the transition of 1970s disarray and the politically conservative 1980s, Mel Gibson first emerged onto the silver screen. The New York native, Australian born actor, primarily began his career within the Australian new wave, starring in such titles as the *Mad Max* trilogy (1979-85), *Tim* (1979) and *Attack Force Z* (1981), before eventually transporting his stardom to Hollywood in titles such as *Gallipoli* (1981), *The River* (1984) and *Mrs. Soffel* (1984). Michael DeAngelis argues that Gibson pertains to a unique quality of 'outsider/rebel' status, which he further elucidates; 'the outsider image that helped propel ... Mel Gibson to Hollywood Stardom at the start of the decade is tied to a perception of "otherness" that curiously rendered him accessible to a wide range of audiences across national, sexual, and gender boundaries' (2010: 77). Gibson's versatility in persona, nationality and ability is reflected through his ability to avoid categorical definition, starring in a broad field of genre texts, from sci-fi to action, adventure, drama and romance further illustrating his outsider status and ability to rebel against sticking to one genre.

Gibson's first and perhaps most influential character, before Martin Riggs, was the titular character from George Miller's *Mad Max* (1979). Gibson's first major role, took place in his country of origin Australia where the narrative sets the outback as the near dystopian future. The film follows Gibson as he portrays a highway patrolman, who, bitter and distraught at his wife and child's grisly deaths, sets out into the barren wastelands against the monstrous manifestations of masculinity, the breeding grounds to criminal scavenger-formed biker gangs that he seeks revenge on. From the onset of Gibson's hybrid action outings, it can be seen through his characterisation, that he presents a duality of masculinities. DeAngelis identifies this as another influencing factor to the creation of Gibson's stardom, post departure from his cultural comfort zone, stating that 'Gibson's initial popularity in America coincided with a cultural moment when the concept of "ambiguity" in the definition of star personas- including a version of masculinity described

as strong yet inherently vulnerable- signaled a form of character depth' (2010: 79). Gibson's hypermasculine body style, paired with the hypomasculine ideologies which he displays, led to continuous success both critically and financially. As further illustrated by the cumulative gross of Gibson's two most success films between 1979 and 1990, *Mad Max* \$100,000,000, and *Lethal Weapon 2* (1989) \$120,207,127, the two films listed belong within extremely popular franchises that Gibson had fore fronted throughout the decade. Given Gibson's success embodying characters of the action genre throughout the decade, post 1980s his career can be seen to primarily orbit hybridised action films, as reflected through his filmography.

In *Lethal Weapon*, following the death of his wife, LAPD detective Martin Riggs becomes reckless, suicidal and renowned throughout the film as "crazy". His newly assigned partner Roger Murtaugh portrayed by Danny Glover, who established himself on stage throughout the decade, plays the dichotomy to Riggs, a veteran upper-middle class detective. As they encounter increasingly dangerous situations, their friendship grows, and originally apparent differences dissolve, leading to them busting a gang of drug smugglers. In a clear demonstration of the film's enormous popularity, dually amongst audiences and critics, Ebert remarks, "'Lethal Weapon' is another one of those Bruised Forearm Movies, like 'Raiders of the Lost Ark,' a movie where you and your date grab each other's arm every four minutes and you walk out black and blue and grinning from ear to ear' (1987). Richard Donner's hybridised action comedy wholeheartedly embodies the definition of a buddy cop film, yet as Noel Murray observes: 'the Lethal Weapon series subverted the buddy-cop blockbuster, then defined it', going on to say the film can be seen 'as a relic of Reagan-era decadence' (2016). This then further insinuates the film's importance lies both within its intended Hollywood entertainment sphere and socio-politically within the decade.

Ariel Schudson suggests that Donner's *Lethal Weapon*, is 'traditionally considered to be one of the more intelligent and fun action flicks, this film shines in the sense that it may be one of the few films I can think of that deals with male depression in a critical manner, all the while showcasing brilliant gunplay' (2012). The film's tackling of contemporary masculine issues, paired with hypermasculine doses of action, demonstrates the multifaceted worth this example of a hybridised action texts hold. Within the film's opening 10 minutes, Screenplay writer Shane Black's deftly written script, paints an essential backdrop to the lives of Riggs and Murtaugh, upon which the film builds. The adverbial sequence which introduced the character of Martin Riggs establishes him

through a hyper masculine lens, highlighted through an action sequence, the scene places Riggs undercover attempting to bust a drugs gang, which happens to be running their operations from a Christmas tree sale. This subtlety, establishes Donner and Black's, fictional Christmas setting within the film. The intertextual and sub textual implications of this, is perhaps best decoded within the scene that follows the establishing action scene. After Riggs' cover is blown, he is forced to outdraw, outwit and defeat the four gang members. Doing so through hyperbolic fumbles and by shooting his way through the threat, he overcomes the situation.

The scene which follows, titled 'See you later', directly urged and influenced this study into hypomascularity. The contextual, intertextual and star ability displayed within the scene, cumulatively defines what this thesis proposes, is hypomascularity. The counterbalance of opening scenes, further demonstrates, the fluidity of masculinity and how it is able to slide between hard and sensitive forms. The sequence places Riggs in his RV home, where he is alone watching cartoons, the scene's *mise-en-scène* illustrates Riggs' loneliness and inner battle between his depression and ability to maintain himself as a masculine figure. As prior mentioned the narrative's fictional Christmas setting, is again established within this scene, foregrounded this time through the Christmas *Bugs Bunny* cartoon. Through highlighting the time of year, a gateway for emotional response is created, with Riggs' loneliness and depression becoming easier to transcend to mass audiences. The *mise-en-scène* simply aids, in transcending the complex intertextual and contextual readings and addressing on offer within the scene, through a Hollywood lens. The hypermasculine character of the scene prior, is no more. Between staring down the barrel of his gun and holding a framed photograph of his dead wife, the scene builds to a crescendo of Gibson's empathetic ability, loading and placing a gun in his mouth. Before bursting into tears, bashing his head with the gun in the frustration of not being able to maintain his hypermasculine figure, soulfully crying into the picture of his dead wife declaring he "misses you". In an interview with *Total Film*, Richard Donner described filming the scene and the transcending and resonating emotional performance Gibson gave, 'The camera was shaking because I'm crying, the operator's crying. And I start to get worried about Mel. He hit himself with the gun! And this was after the take was over' (2010). For the decade, nevertheless 1987 itself, this scene stood out from the action genre, the hybridised action genre and perhaps even more so from buddy cop films alike, due to its profound emotional weight. Yet, as O'Brien suggested, 'though action movies seem to project hypermasculine triumphalism and redemption through violence, they thus

represent a profoundly anxious attitude. This is a cinema of trauma and post-traumatic stress, a cinema of threat and unease' (2012: 1). Unlike the other character and films analysed within this chapter, Riggs' background places him in Vietnam, which allows *Lethal Weapon* to perhaps stand out amongst the other texts explored, as it considers and navigated trauma and PTSD felt and showcased by masculinity at the time. However, as showcased throughout the film, the trauma and tectonic shifts in masculine identity, are triggered by two divergent forms of trauma. In *Trauma and cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations* Ann Kaplan summarises Sigmund Freud definition of trauma:

Although dissociation is the more obvious model in his writings, Freud oscillated between an internal and an external approach. This oscillation has implications for our understanding of trauma and socio-historical forces of modernity. Across the range of his work, Freud alternates between seeing trauma as the result of an external event, such as a train accident, war, or family abuse, leading to dissociation; and treating trauma as caused by an internal assault on the ego... from internalised loss of a loved one (Kaplan and Wang, 2004: 6)

The duality of trauma models described and defined by Freud, are arguably present within Riggs' persona, with the film establishing his involvement and witnessing of Vietnam, which falls under Freud's 'external' cause of trauma. Building upon this, Riggs is too suffering from Freud's proposed 'internal' trauma model, as made clear by the epitomic suicide scene prior discussed.

One could argue, *Lethal Weapon*, captures Gibson at his prime with his masculinity appealing to a plethora of avenues; he appealed as a sexual object to both heterosexuality and homosexuality, working class demographics through his own upbringing and authenticity of characterisation of such working-class backgrounds to which he largely played and additionally due to his hybridised nationalities. Richard Dyer emphasizes the 'social variables' (1998: 1) Gibson exhibits, are semiotic terms of importance to the following and public assignment of stardom. Though his career began in Australia and stardom soon followed, nearly a decade on, Gibson's masculinity, stardom and success can be seen, to have stood the toll of the Reagan-era decadence. Indicating that Gibson pertains the same postmodern stardom and masculinity as prior explored and established that Bruce Willis and Eddie Murphy pertain. A masculinity and stardom which is in tune to the key of the contemporary 1980s society. Though Gibson's ideological beliefs

surrounding homosexuality, politics and religion surfaced as the decade came to a close, Gibson's Hollywood career and popularity didn't diminish, as illustrated through his continued success with titles such as *Bird on a wire* (1990), *Braveheart* (1995) and the latter of Donner's *Lethal Weapon* saga: 2 (1989), 3 (1992) and 4 (1998) which were each more financially successful than the last.

Further Examples of Hypomascularity

Although this research is inherently concerned with the long 1980s, there are arguably examples of hypomascularity which predate the eighties, demonstrating how the form is hyper-linear throughout cinema and society. The following examples showcase the presence of hypomascularity throughout the genre's transition and evolution.

An earlier portrayal of hypomascularity can perhaps be seen within John Ford's revered *The Searchers* (1956). The narrative follows Ethan Edwards (John Wayne), a soldier from the Civil War who returns to members of his family killed and his niece abducted, sparking a quest that is fuelled by a duality of emotion and bigoted hatred. Roger Ebert notes John Wayne's portrayal of Edwards' to be 'one of the most compelling characters Ford and Wayne ever created... and one of John Wayne's best performances' (Ebert, 2001). Wayne's acting range and his characters duality of strength and emotion can be seen as an extension to the 'kindly' masculine identities he plays in such titles as *Red River* (1948) and *Hondo* (1953). In both of these examples, Wayne's masculinity is more proportionally spread, as he engages with love interests, paternal qualities and emotionally navigates dealing with death. These three core notions consolidate his masculinity as he expresses emotion and strength. *The Searchers* builds upon the characters of these two films, combining the three notions into one narrative and one character, of which the film's promotional material marketed Edwards' character as 'a man hard and relentless, tender and passionate' (1956). A scene which best showcases this form of masculinity is entitled 'Don't ever ask me more!'. The tonal shift and visual display of emotion from Edwards is noticeable from the onset of the scene, and builds throughout as he appears quieter and more emotionally stricken than in prior scenes where he display hypermasculine qualities as he rides horseback shooting comanche members. As the scene unfolds, Brad sneaks in for a closer look at the native Americans Edwards believes to be the captors of the missing girls, on which the film's narrative is centred. As Brad returns with news that he sees a girl wearing a blue dress just like that of one of the

missing girls, as Brad and Martin plan to use their hypermasculine cowboy skills to attack and conform a hero rescue, Edwards burst out in emotional anguish explaining it can't be one of the girls they seek, as he found her and had to bury her with his hands. When prompted on what state her body had been in, Edwards delivers the scene defining line of 'Don't ever ask me more!'. It is at this point where two of the masculine characters, appear unable to balance their emotions and masculine anger, however the Edwards of the scenes before this is no more, rather than his hypermasculine confidence, bigoted attitude and fighting abilities, he delivers an emotional display and caring attitude. Edwards stops Martin from riding off into the native American camp with Brad, where he meets his expected rage fuelled death. It is perhaps at this point that Ebert's claims about Edwards' complexity of character and Wayne's exemplary performance can be seen. In a deep focus study on the psychological western within *Sight & Sound*, Graham Fuller uses Wayne as an example of the evolvment in masculine character and western genre narrative, remarking:

The shift in sensibility that darkened and reoriented the Hollywood western when, tentatively at first, it entered its 'psychological' phase in the 1940s can be illustrated by contrasting two images of John Wayne – from *Stagecoach* (1939) and *The Searchers* (1956) – which are separated by 17 years and a cataclysmic era in American life (2016).

Whilst Wayne's character's in both films act in toxically masculine ways namely through their racist and xenophobic attitudes, the shift in genre and attitudes socially, politically and culturally in the years between the two films can be seen to have increased Wayne's character's sensibility in *The Searchers*. The psychological western phase was brought about in the aftermath of World War II, adopting elements from film noir to present a different kind of western hero. The films and the characters who led them lent themselves more to psychological depth and moral complexity and the shift reinvigorated the genre and better enabled it to grapple the socio-political concerns, allowing it to adapt to the shifts in industry. Therefore, *The Searchers* stands out not only for its representation of masculinity and performance, but also for classification as a psychological western.

Another instance of hypomascularity can be witnessed within Richard Donner's *Superman* (1978). The fourth cinematic interpretation of the beloved comic book character is embodied by Christopher Reeve, whose portrayal of the character is unlike that of the

past incarnations which represented 'truth, justice and the American way' through a masculinity that was straight, white, rigid and hegemonic. Whilst these versions of Superman and masculinity may have previously worked, in times of socio-political decay and low patriarchal moral, when the country required an all-American hero. Donner's Superman serves as an early example of blockbuster cinema and the success of the 'hero revival' model commonly adopted in through the long eighties in promotion of America's collective search for identity, something promoted through the conservative presidency as argued by Klapp. Donner's Superman may serve as an early example of this Hollywood trend, but Reeve's portrayal of Superman leans towards a masculinity that is predominantly hypo than hyper in its exhibition of white, conservative masculinity. Superman adheres to Conover and Feldman's statement that 'In the late 1970s to early 1980s, supporting strict social control was one of the major components of a conservative identity (1981, 639–640)', however his sensibility and in tune masculinity allow him to stand in opposition to the hard bodies of which similarly embodied the hero revival film and its conservative nature. Despite Donner's film being made in similar circumstances, in a time where American morale and trust in government was at an all-time low following Watergate and Vietnam, this particular version of Superman and the masculinity it portrays captures the character in a new perspective. The character and the masculinity Reeve presented had shifted, much like the cultural attitude of the decade. Unlike the past characters portrayals whose remarkable abilities, untouchable strength and ability to win every battle through strength and violence, the Superman presented by Donner was accountable, responsible and recognised violence and strength were not the only solutions. Unlike the Superhero films before and arguably after Donner's, which concentrated on the character's god like power, Donner chose to focus on human qualities of emotional conflict and morals. Donner's Superman realistically reflected the cultural needs of a contemporary superhero, balancing his abilities and using them mindfully. Parker Danowski remarks:

Reeves was not a fan of comic books, nor of Superman, but perhaps this gave him an advantage in his performance. His portrayal of Superman stands out because he chose to approach the iconic character not as a square-jawed, two-fisted do-gooder or as a self-important god, but as a sensitive individual who, when it came to using his extraordinary abilities, worked hard to exercise restraint (2017).

This illustrates the change in masculine image that the late 1970s had brought about, with the Superman created by Donner aligning more so with Scher's definition of hypomascularity rather than the character's usual embodiment of hypermasculine virility. Showcased through Reeve's sensibility and vulnerability, alongside the characters 'Man of Steel' comic book abilities, the all-American hero communicated the social acceptance of expressing both hyper and hypomascularity qualities.

Martin Brest's *Midnight Run* stands as another noteworthy example of hypomascularity; starring Robert De Niro alongside Charles Grodin, the film follows suit to the buddy cop model, contrasting two masculinities presenting a wide masculine range. De Niro's Jack Walsh however presents a dexterity of hypermasculine attributes alongside developing an increased sensibility as the film's narrative progresses. Alan Sepinwall remarks, 'at a time when few believed he could be the star of a mainstream comedy, De Niro is completely comfortable in both the skin of Jack Walsh and the jokey tone of the movie' (2018); the film's hybridity with comedy allows it to transgress a message that masculinities most important quality isn't toughness, but flesh-and-blood humanity, a quality which action cinema of the decade get wrong. Sepinwall also notes;

Jack feels fully lived-in, which makes the punchlines feel richer, grounds some of the more ridiculous action set pieces (see: the helicopter chase) and makes the story feel just real enough for its outcome to matter as something more than a screenwriting exercise... the scene where a mortified Jack goes to visit his ex-wife Gail (Wendy Phillips) to borrow money wouldn't feel quite so sad, particularly when their argument's interrupted by the arrival of Denise (Danielle DuClos), the daughter Jack had to abandon (2018).

This scene in particular, when Jack is at a loss at the sight of his daughter, is much like the 'see you later' scene within *Lethal Weapon*; startlingly raw, sincere and weighted for a film of the action genre. Most importantly, the sensibility of this scene informs the hypomascularity displayed throughout the narrative. The themes of fatherhood and divorce place Jack in the same paradigm as John McClane, an 'everyman', increasing the relatability between spectator and hero. Allowing the film to showcase masculinity can be a duality of strength and sensitivity.

Another notable character, notable actor and notable series of films which exhibits and communicates hypomasculine qualities is the *Indiana Jones* trilogy. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* are cultural artefacts that hint to the temper of times with Jones embodying the American heroism trend of the 1980s. Although narratively located in the 1930s to emit conservative nostalgia for a stable masculinity, the fictional character Indiana Jones represented the political and cultural sentiments of the Reagan era. Despite the film's being in line with the traditional sentiments of the Reagan era, Harrison Ford's unique blend of machismo is a 'dexterity of strength, sensitivity' (Geraghty, 2010: 170) and comedy, dissimilar to the hypermasculinity so closely associated to the Reagan era. The three titles, created across the 1980s, offer a wide range of ideas and readings to what it means to be a man. The films complicate and exhibit classical masculinity, best perhaps seen through Sean Connery's father figure's hyper/toxic masculinity through the likes of Julian Glover's portrayal of the antagonist in the first instalment and soft masculinity through the likes of Denholm Elliott's character. The films additionally present a wide range of ideas and readings to the role of femininity. Within each film, a female character accompanies Jones on adventures, fighting and defending themselves, role reversing and saving Jones from death. Jones' female counterparts also showcase classic femme fatale characteristics such as seduction, counteracting their strength by presenting them as weak, often being submitted to hostage scenario paving the way for Jones' impressive display of heroism. However, of the female characters explored, the characters can be read more as sidekicks than love interest, simultaneously serving the male gaze whilst gaining admiration for their own perseverance and wit. A similarity between the hero characters of Clark Kent and Dr. Jones, is that they figuratively and literally portrays a duality of characters, each with a different masculine tone and form. They similarly share occupations which oppose their hero alter egos, when in their none hero bodies the characters present sensibility through their professions; Clark being a writer and Jones a lecturer, two roles which are typically viewed as 'nerdy', polarising their hero alter ego. As Adam Knee remarks:

While the actor's image early in the 1980s was in many ways that of a relatively conventional masculine action hero... it significantly began to modulate by mid-decade in such a way that strongly distinguished it from those of such ascendant hard-body... Ford's moderation from such machismo extremes is quite possibly

one source of his popularity and is certainly central to his distinctiveness (2010:160-161).

As Knee points out, Ford's characterisation of Han Solo within the *Star Wars* films, where a persona of wit, charm and physical ability are mixed with an opposing air of selfishness, and arguably cowardice, encapsulating him with elements of the anti-hero, aligning him as a non-hypermasculine action hero. However by Solo aligning more so as the anti-hero, this in no way detracts from his hypermasculine fighting abilities and activities, nor does it detract from his hypomasculine wit, charm and ability to express emotion. This version of masculine performance can also be extended to include Ford's portrayal of Rick Deckard from *Blade Runner* (1982), where under duress, his pursuit and killings of outlawed replicants causes him continual anguish, showcasing paradoxical components to his stardom:

Ford gives a hard-boiled voiceover, in keeping with the noir referentiality of the film's style, and addresses others in gruff manner, but this belies the emotions that hinder his work and that he increasingly feels for the replicants. It is again in a romantic relationship with a woman (albeit a nonhuman one) that the characters emotional vulnerability most strongly comes to the surface (2010: 165).

This is similarly the case with Ford's characterisation of John Book in *Witness* (1985). In a discussion of Ford's acting in *Witness*, Christine Geraghty highlights the significance of modulation to Harrison Ford's 'usual seamless mode of performance', further noting 'I would emphasize, however, that this modulation of approach and emotion is also part of the broader figuration of Ford's dexterity of strength and sensitivity' (2010: 170). In both of these predominantly hypermasculine roles, Ford's character appears more emotionally and physically vulnerable than the hypermasculine bodies of the action genre. Ford appears shirtless often as an image of male desirability within a number of hybrid action titles of the decade, however, much like his performance within the genre, it is that of a non-conventionalised archetype of hypermuscular gaze. Instead, he offers a torso that for the 1980s, while fit, is not hypermuscular. Therefore, he stands as an image of masculinity arguably linked more with physical attractiveness, relatability and vulnerability rather than hypermasculine power and aggressiveness. An attribute all of the aforementioned films share is that they exhibit Ford's character working for authority, but

remaining an outsider; like Solo working for the rebels, Indiana Jones working for the U.S. government or Book, like Deckard working as a detective, Knee further states:

While Ford continues to play characters who in various ways serve institutions of law and order, his is not an unyielding, hard-bodied American authority. Rather, Ford endeavors to temper the macho dimensions of his star image as it evolves, linking up connotations not only of law, but also of humanity and sensitivity; strength and resilience; intelligence, skill, nuance, and deftness; rugged virile masculine sexual attractiveness; and husbandly and fatherly concern for his loved ones (2010: 161).

The fatherly and husbandly concern Knee references links with the earlier discussion of a softer, more paternal masculinity that was adopted and showcased by Hollywood towards the end of the decade, a trend which perhaps caught on most significantly after the success and exhibition of such masculinity through the likes of Harrison Ford. The model and trend of masculinity can be later seen attempted and forced upon hypermasculine stars, namely Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone, as through lighter titles as *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot* (1992) and *Kindergarten Cop*, the stars and associated studios attempted to capture the same audience receptivity and financial success of less hyperbolic exhibitions of masculinity. These examples of comedic effect hypomasculine males, 'dressing up' and parodying hypomasculinity arguably undermines the feminism of hypomasculinity. Another notable hypomasculine and fatherly figure can be witnessed through Danny Glover, who best exhibits this in the afore explored *Lethal Weapon* series. Glover's softer paternal masculinity is throughout each of the four films, contrasted and comically played upon in comparison to his companion Mel Gibson. However, his duality to display compassion for his family alongside his ability to wield power through his authority role and masculine figure, present him to align more closely with hypomasculinity than that of hyper. This is further demonstrated, as it is through Harrison Ford, by Glover's lack of hypermuscular body. Jill Nelmes comments on the transition in genre, stardom and associated tonal shift in masculinity by regarding:

Like gender, stardom is not fixed but unstable and shifting. Changes in the qualities of the male hero are evident from the 1980s to the 1990s; the male body in the 1980s was a spectacle of muscle, beauty, toughness and bravery, a body that could carry out extreme physical feats. In comparison the body of the early 1990s

man is less a spectacle of male machismo associated to violence, but rather gentler, more questioning, allowed to show self-doubt, and existing in a world where love and family are important (2003: 268).

The traits, attributes and physical presence of masculinity within the 1980s action genre, acts superficially as a sign of masculine power, but on closer examination an anxiety about masculine identity is revealed. An anxiety which is subtextually explored, critiqued and parodied by characters, stars and films of the decade. In light of the previous chapters contextualisation and theoretical understand of hypomascularity, the characters and stars explored within this chapter further cement that masculinities can be fluid and transition between hard and soft attributes. The hypomascularity bodies explored and considered within this chapter, are in no way less capable than the hypermasculine counterparts of the action genre, rather they display a duality of strength both physically and emotionally.

Contemporary Hollywood Masculinities

Actor turned filmmaker Jonah Hill observed the following in an interview concerning themes and variations of masculinities in his directorial debut *Mid90s* (2018):

Traditional masculinity was not to show emotion, not to show sensitivity, not to show vulnerability, because it's 'feminine' or, God forbid, 'gay' to do so. What that does, and what we've seen, is that it leads to a lot of horrible behavior, and a lot of bad actions (Vourlias, 2019).

In film studies as in other disciplines and in cultures at large, masculinity remains a contested topic, tied not only to dominant social values but also to groups and practices and is somehow understood as monolithic and stable, yet it is always fluctuating. Therefore, this section will seek to explore and interrogate the shifting contemporary landscape of masculinity and how it is reflected in both Hollywood and society. This exploration will not only further demonstrate hypomascularity as a well-founded form of masculinity, showcased by its pertinence within contemporary cinema, but also to illustrate why now, amongst the current societal and masculine climate, is the time to explore a masculinity which is strong, sensitive and politically in tune.

Toxic masculinity has become an increasingly prevalent term across film, popular culture and political spheres of current, with Guy Lodge remarking 'If any one term has graduated, through the tumult of 2016, from specialized social-justice parlance to mainstream media ubiquity, it's this one' (2016). Ashley Morgan notes:

For centuries, male violence and acts of aggression were often the way that power was understood and patriarchy upheld. In contemporary times, in more moderate societies, this has become somewhat tempered, yet it still exists in different forms and has now been given the name "toxic masculinity" (2019).

However, as Lodge further notes, 'misuse has inevitably come with popularity – it denotes the social normalization of misogyny and sexual aggression that can poison masculine identity, not an intrinsic male evil' (2016). Whilst the related concept of hegemonic masculinity theorised in the late 1980s by Raewyn Connell, which described the ways that white middle-class men used their power and positions to suppress traditionally socially marginalised groups such as women, gay men and lower class people, has been a focus of research for some time, toxic masculinity is a term that, despite becoming ubiquitous, is used much less precisely. Typically, toxic masculinity is associated with a range of socially and culturally unacceptable expressions of masculinity including those that rely on, amongst other things, sexist, racist, and homophobic stereotypes. Colleen Clemens describes toxic masculinity as:

A narrow and repressive description of manhood, designating manhood as defined by violence, sex, status and aggression. It's the cultural ideal of manliness, where strength is everything while emotions are a weakness; where sex and brutality are yardsticks by which men are measured, while supposedly "feminine" traits—which can range from emotional vulnerability to simply not being hypersexual—are the means by which your status as "man" can be taken away (2017).

The aggression and violence referred to by Clemens also manifests itself through men resorting to systemic abuse, and violence towards women both physically and emotionally to assert dominance. Paul Theroux's similarly describes American manhood of the 1980s in his NYT's article *The Male Myth* noting that, 'it not only insists on difference and connives at superiority, it is also by its very nature destructive - emotionally damaging and socially harmful' (1983). This restrictive code of manhood may be self-destructive, as

manhood is often subscribed to a single vision of masculinity, often abiding by the form showcased within society and mainstream cinema. This has been the case since the rise of feminism and the onset of WWII which eroded the traditional model of masculinity in American films, leading masculinity to repress their feelings to maintain a facade of hypermasculine notions. Moreover, one could argue that given the current interest in Hollywood's culture of toxic masculinity and problematic hypermasculine behaviours, it has never been more important to critically engage with the decade that perhaps did most to establish a number of the approaches to men and masculinity that directly inform the contemporary moment.

Though directors, actors and studios can be seen to be making positive strides towards changing the norm, the hyper/toxic masculine man still dominates the box office. The hypermasculine domination of the box office is best noticeable through the likes of *The Fate of the Furious* (2017) which grossed \$1.2 billion (IMDb, n.d.), is just one of thirteen *Fast and Furious* films which continually generate high box office earnings. Similarly hybrid titles such as, *Rampage* (2018) earned \$428 million (IMDb, n.d.), whilst another installment in the *Bourne* series *Jason Bourne* (2016) was popularly received grossing \$415 Million (IMDb, n.d.). The muscular build donned by the likes of Jason Statham, Dwayne Johnson and Gerard Butler for example, seem to go hand in hand with the intensified hypermasculine nature of some of the characters they portray. Perhaps most damaging is that these ideals have an impact on how the viewer perception of masculinity and their own bodies. As aforementioned, whilst this is undoubtedly a detrimental psychological effect on manhood which can be witnessed throughout cinema history, in the same breath, it can be beneficial. It allows for the aforementioned positive strides, by directors, actors and studios to curate content which challenges, questions and redefines the toxic hypermasculinity so commonly donned in cinema. Stars such as Jake Gyllenhaal or Brad Pitt in their own personal capacity, communicate and exhibit a more sustainable version of masculinity. The dexterity of Gyllenhaal's masculinity is showcased across the spectrum of his performance in the likes of *Nocturnal Animals* (2016), *Wildlife* (2018) and *Southpaw* (2015). Most recently Brad Pitt remarked on his latest film, *Ad Astra* (2019) that it, 'to some extent dealt with the modern concept of masculinity', further commenting 'We've both grown up in an era where we were asked to be strong...and there is a value in that, but [also a] barrier because you're hiding some of those things you feel ashamed of. We all hide and carry individual pain and wounds' (Pitt quoted in Keslassy, 2019). Another instance of filmmakers actively seeking to change the norm is

perhaps witnessed in another pseudo attempt at replicating the buddy cop formula, *Stuber* (2019) which pays homage to the hybrid action comedies that aided in defining the buddy cop genre such as *Midnight Run*, *48 Hrs.* and *Lethal Weapon*. However much like the titles it pays homage to, *Stuber* is notable for its exploration of masculinities alongside parodying genre tropes of shootouts, car chases and opposing leading masculinities. In an interview for *Stuber*, stars Kumail Nanjiani and Dave Bautista remark how they embraced the chance to make an action movie that dismantles toxic masculinity and encourages men to process and embrace their feelings. “It felt like that was the challenge,” added Nanjiani. “If we could take a buddy cop action comedy that’s sort of a throwback to this ‘80s kind of movie and really talk about these things” (Yamato, 2019), Scott Mendelson expands ‘It’s no spoiler to say that the movie is very much about different definitions of “masculinity”... The plot and the punchlines are all rooted in the idea that so-called toxic masculinity doesn’t just present a clear and present danger to women but causes real harm to men too’ (Mendelson, 2019). Comparatively the exploration and illuminating of toxic hypermasculine behaviour isn’t a new concept nor is it bound by genre, animated titles such as: *The Lego Movie 2* (2019), *Ralph Breaks the Internet* (2018) and *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018) each centre around dynamic male characters learning and understanding notions of toxic masculinity, and communicate hypomasculine ideals, illustrating to demographics of all ages that toxic masculinity does not work within society.

The cause and effect of the ‘#MeToo’ movement since its eruption in 2017 has brought structural, cultural and industrial changes to the Hollywood filmmaking pendulum. Besides the movement’s main aim, which is to help survivors of sexual harassment and violence, brought further emphasis to the presence of toxic hyper masculinity across the film sphere. Its presence and availability on social media platforms has also been crucial in opening up the discussion. Challenging and raising awareness to the voluminous amount of damaging forms of masculinity that systematically dominate Hollywood, perhaps most pertinently the action genre. Whilst it would be a generalisation to argue that these masculinities do not present any positive characteristics, it still follows that toxic/hypermasculine behaviours such as violence, power and sexual aggression, are as they have been for decades of cinema history, and are still very much encouraged by Hollywood. However, due to the expounding conversations and accessibility surrounding feminism, enabled by social media, the ‘#MeToo’ movement further raises the awareness and prevalence of toxic masculinity, the status of femininity and masculinity is in a constant state of flux, and could be perhaps best witnessed through the sphere of pop culture,

particularly if not exclusively cinema. Vulnerability, sensitivity, or anything deemed particularly 'feminine' which was far from typically displayed, is seeping into Hollywood masculinities, abandoning the outdated conservative model.

The contemporary shift in gender perception can also be seen through Hollywood genres. Given Hollywood's current obsession with remakes and nostalgia for titles from the '80s and '90s, the opportunity to recast beloved characters with diverse multicultural casts has arisen. *The Heat* (2013), *Ghostbusters* (2016), *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017) and perhaps most recently *Men in Black: International* (2019) are to name a few titles, in the recent surge of female-driven blockbusters which replace, challenge and present gender in current forms. Regarding *The Heat* Gabe Toro comments:

It's impossible to ignore that this film... exists in a world where usually men rub elbows and toss insults and women patiently wait at home... Surprisingly, "The Heat" announces its intentions quickly, as the first sound we hear is the wah-wah of "Fight The Power (Parts 1 & 2)" by the Isley Brothers, suggesting that while the female leads in this actioner are forced to test themselves against male peers, it's the film itself that feels like a reactive statement... a political gesture echoed each time Bullock and McCarthy's characters cut their masculine opposition to size with either a one-liner or even brute force (Toro, 2013).

Throughout Toro's review, he articulates the similarities in character, style and tone found 1980s hybrid action titles or as they are perhaps otherwise known 'Buddy cop' films, such as *Midnight Run* and *48 hrs...* Further attempts at the buddy cop model and nostalgia for the 1980s can be observed by the televised reboot of *Lethal Weapon* (2016). Based on the film franchise, the series includes characters directly and indirectly inspired by characters from the films. The continuous attempts by cinema and television to replicate the success of the buddy cop model illustrates the nostalgia and impressionability of the model's unique representation of characters, narratives and genders. Within contemporary culture and cinema, representing, showing and even talking about many areas of masculinity, sexuality and the male body are still to come along way. Therefore, the discussion, debate and research surrounding the genre and gender requires continuous updates.

Conclusion

In setting out to explore 1980s hybrid action cinema texts, the main objective of this thesis was to examine how the masculine identities of the texts, stars and characters aligned with that of hypomascularity, as opposed to the genre's common alignment with hypermasculinity. It was crucial to provide a thorough contextualisation of these texts, taking into consideration the socio-political instabilities of the previous decades and the monumental social and political events, alongside various movements which unfolded before and within the 1980s itself. By decoding stars, characters and authors, alongside the unique contextual setting, one is able to understand the formation of and necessity for hypomascularity, as it arose and developed within both the cinema and the society of 1980s' America. Donna Peberdy's research has aided in defining the history of hypomascularity through its varying classifications, and when combined with Murray Scher's definition of hypomascularity one could argue that the differentiating factor between Peberdy's research and this thesis is that rather than the 'weakness' of hypomascularity proposed by Peberdy, this position can be read as a redeemable quality as portrayed by a number of male leads from the action genre.

Throughout this thesis it has been contended that the action genre has been the grounds in which American masculinity has been significantly showcased, reaffirmed and promoted throughout film history. Masculinity has been observed through the evolution and origins of genre from the Western to swashbucklers and from spy thrillers to war films, before assuming its greatest significance and overall classification as the action genre and following the immense popularity from audience reception, financial grosses and shift in industry, to the copious amount of action films released in the 1980s. Through each carnation of the genre Hollywood's navigation and reaffirmation of American masculinity can be witnessed, best observed through figures such as Murphy, Willis and Gibson, each embodying characters whose patriarchal alignment and form of masculinity necessitated to that of American culture of the time. This has been explored at length within Harvey O'Brien's text, *Action Movies: The Cinema of Striking Back* (2012), Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark's *Screening the Male: Exploring masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (1993) and by Emma Hamilton's *Masculinities in American Western Films: A Hyper-Linear History* (2016). O'Brien observes that 'the action movie is very effective in dissecting the psychic crises affecting the image of society, nationality and ideology assumed to be 'dominant' at

the time of their production' (2012: 5). This thesis also followed this fruitful line of thinking, in that socio-political matters of 1980s America and the formative events which occurred decades before, simultaneously benefitted and detrimentally affected manhood; as such one sees the creation of divergent theories and contemporary divisions within society.

The intrinsic link between masculinity and society can be best summarised by Michael Kimmel's own belief that 'we cannot understand manhood without understanding American history. But I believe we also cannot fully understand American history without understanding masculinity' (2006: 2). By exploring unique elements to the political landscape of 1980s America, the country's policies and leadership from Ronald Reagan can all ultimately be seen to have affected masculinity. In considering Reagan's influence, as a former silver screen star, and as the President of the United States, his ideological impositions can be seen to have had significant implications on American manhood. As presented within this thesis, Reagan's own conservative and outdated manhood, which he drew from cinema and the masculine landscape he had encountered decades earlier, informed his policies and attitudes. These detrimental and decaying attitudes of masculinity were soon communicated through the mainstream cinema, and a 'remasculation' of manhood was soon communicated and translated into the notion of the hypermasculine; as demonstrated throughout this thesis and through cinema history itself, the action genre was the channel by which the cinema of the decade communicated this change. For this reason, the degree to which the spheres of pop culture and cinema, becoming one and the same thing, with the Venn diagram becoming a single circle under the reign of Ronald Reagan, led Kimmel to argue that 'by some evidence American men were more confused in the 1980s than ever before' (2006: 192).

To balance and theorise hypomascularity, this thesis has considered the defining elements of hypermasculinity as they align with Zaitchik and Mosher's remarks that:

The hypermasculine male is characterized by the idealization of stereotypically masculine traits, such as virility and physicality, while concurrently rejecting traits seen as feminine and thus perceived as antithetical and even inferior to machismo, such as compassion or emotional expression (1993: 54).

As witnessed within texts explored throughout this work, the hypermasculine model of masculinity had inundated Hollywood cinema of the 1980s. The films and the genres

which they reflect, address what the American male archetype 'needed' to be, revealing, challenging, or, more problematically, reifying brands of masculinity that grew from the social, cultural and political zeitgeist. As such, the form of masculinity and the films explored within this thesis form a cultural barometer indicative of the shifting gender roles of the longer decade. From this research it is noticeable that the academic discussion and debate surrounding hypomascularity is lacking amongst the great deal of hypermasculinity theory released in the past fifty years. The exploration into the term's definition and its placing on the masculinity spectrum, is referenced within Peberdy's research, wherein she considers the evolution of the term from wild man, new man and soft man before arriving at hypomascularity. Despite Peberdy's thorough exploration and definition of the term, its place and consideration within cinematic gender theory is still largely under researched and discussed. Murray Scher's definition of hypomascularity, from the field of psychology offers an alternative reading to that of Peberdy. Conversely, Scher's definition proposes that,

Hypomasculine types are no more or less socially competent, intelligent, strong or attractive than their hypermasculine counterparts... some of those men have inner feelings that may be diametrically opposed to their efforts at maintaining the tough facade they believe they "should" embody (1987: 323).

The works and readings of hypomascularity by Scher alongside the previous labels and definitions which describe hypomascularity from the likes of Robert Bly, Barbara Ehrenreich and Peberdy enable one to compile the research, discussions and debates surrounding the form of manhood and consider the most fitting form. The examples of hypomascularity explored within this thesis adhere to Peberdy's understanding that masculinities are fluid and dependant on both hard and soft attributes; these masculinities also align with Ehrenreich's understanding that the context of the 1980s and various political and social movements, especially within women's rights and gender equality, played an influential factor to the formation of hypomascularity as a valid form of manhood. The definition adopted by this thesis also borrows from Bly's conception of the 'wild man', concentrating on the pro-feminist and progressive perspective of his argument wherein he notes that by following the socio-political events decades earlier and within the eighties, manhood needed to get in touch with its feminine side to become more wholesome. By combining these perspectives, past and present discussions of elements which constitute to hypo, the new man and the wild man, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, one is

able to construct a more solid and defined understanding of what is meant by 'hypomascularity'. The research, discussion and debate engaged with throughout the three chapters of this thesis as well as the scenes, plots and overall masculine identities studied, showcase how these hypomascularity males are socially competent, intelligent, strong and attractive alongside being capable of possessing sensibility. A model that from research can be witnessed throughout film history stars, characters and films of the action genre.

By considering the bodies, ideologies and stardom of Eddie Murphy, Bruce Willis and Mel Gibson for their celebrated hypomascularity attributes and representations. By analysing selected films and characters which the stars embodied within the eighties, the characters they portrayed stand out amongst the bombast of hypermasculine action cinema which inundated the visual media of the decade. The close-analysis and consideration of their hybrid performances and amalgam of characteristics allows for a further understanding as to why these characters stand out amongst typical action cinema leads. The uniqueness to the stars' embodiment of these characters was best analysed and measured using Richard Dyer's concepts of stardom and Orrin E. Klapp's trio of relationship theories. To further cement this thesis' interpretation and exploration of hypomascularity, this chapter considers the longevity of hypomascularity, looking at examples of the form throughout film history. By exploring examples from previous incarnations of the action genre, namely the Western, this chapter turns attention to the increased sensitivity adopted by masculine identities post WWII and in light of societal and political fluxes; further cementing Bly, Ehrenreich and Peberdy's understandings that contextual moments trigger changes in manhood and reinforcing American historian E. Anthony Rotundo's remark wherein he suggested that 'manhood is not a social edict determined on high and enforced by law. As a human invention, manhood is learned, used, reinforced, and reshaped by individuals in the course of life' (1994: 7). Whilst this thesis is not necessarily proposing that masculine identity is completely dictated by society, masculinity, society and cinema cannot help but evolve alongside the changing social and political landscapes, thus linking back to journalist and author Elizabeth Gilbert's hypothesis which explores masculinity's relationship with nation as part of the wilderness versus civilization discussion. Although Gilbert's reading of what she calls the 'last American man' returns to presenting masculinities as binary and reads men as strong and women as weak, her understanding and work on the relationship between man and nation presents an intrinsic link between man and society. A combination of research and

examples throughout the genre's history demonstrate its reflection and consultation on American manhood, suggesting that hypomascularity is hyper-linear.

The exploration and consultation of the continuous evolution of masculinity within and outside of the action genre is also considered, for its cause and effect can be seen within decades' worth of cinema, since the overindulgence of hypermasculinity within the 1980s and the emergence of the blockbuster. By analysing current masculinities and texts of the action genre alongside their conglomerate success, it can be noted that through the voluminous level of films released, alongside their continued financial and spectatorship success, that hypermasculinity still remains a dominant model of masculinity within the action genre compared to intelligent action cinema, and the progressive growth of femininity in action cinema. However, what can be observed within the current socio-political sphere is the progressive but still slow change in manhood's understanding that it is acceptable to show emotions and have increased awareness and education on the shared rights across genders. Contemporary discussions, debates and research surrounding the #Metoo movement and the neo-term 'toxic masculinity' have brought about awareness to the detrimental scape of Hollywood cinema, American masculinity and society. Whilst hypomascularity identities can be seen across the plethora of Hollywood cinema and the action genre of current, the fluctuating realms of gender, culture, politics and cinema, require constant progression and warrant further interdisciplinary research.

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